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The “Demo-conomics” in African Youth Politics

**Youth Bulge and Unemployment Meet Political
Attitude and Participation**

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Executive summary

Despite extensive research into the security, social, and economic implications of a youth bulge, the influence of this demographic phenomenon on political attitudes and participation remains underexplored, especially in the African context. This working paper aims to fill this gap by investigating the effects of the youth bulge on the political attitudes and participation of African youth, with an emphasis on the moderating role of youth unemployment.

With more than 70 per cent of the continent's population under 30 years of age, Africa is currently the youngest continent – and it will continue to be many years into the future. In addition to age, this study posits that it matters whether young people live in a country that does or does not have a youth bulge. A youth bulge is posited to heighten the risk of social and economic deprivation within the cohort, primarily due to elevated unemployment rates. Further, a large youth cohort amplifies peer influence among its members and is linked to an increased risk of developing extremist and anti-democratic attitudes, posing significant challenges to democratic governance.

The analyses show that a high youth bulge ratio is associated with strong support for democracy (i.e. support for democratic norms and values), as well as a decreased likelihood of young people endorsing military rule. Further, it is associated with both an increased likelihood of youth participation in demonstrations or protests and young people resorting to violence or the use of force for political causes. By contrast, a high youth bulge ratio decreases the likelihood of a young person voting in elections. While high national youth unemployment rates significantly diminish pro-democracy attitudes among youth, reducing their support for democratic governance and increasing approval for military rule, the individual level reveals that unemployed individuals within the youth bulge are less likely to engage in both voting and protest activities.

Four key policy measures are proposed for consideration by African states and development partners. First, the negative influence of youth unemployment on political attitudes and participation highlights the link between economic growth – especially *job creation* – and democratic consolidation. Creating jobs for the youth not only expands the economy but also promises a “democratic dividend”. Therefore, job creation should be a core outcome deliverable in Africa-European Union (EU) economic development cooperation. Second, *targeted civic education* designed to enhance knowledge and understanding of democratic governance for different youth sub-populations – in-school/out-of-school, rural/urban, male/female, employed/unemployed – and third, *affirmative action policies* designed to improve youth representation in governance must be prioritized by both African states and international development partners, including the EU. Lastly, a more strategic focus should be placed on accelerating the demographic transition of African countries. Moving from high fertility rates and low median ages to more mature population structures, with national median ages between 26 and 40 years, is key to sustainable economic growth and political stability. Programmes that promote this transition, such as for *reproductive health education, family planning, women's education, and the empowerment of women*, should, therefore, be prioritized in both local social initiatives and international development partnerships.

The study utilized individual-level data from Afrobarometer survey Rounds 2–8, complemented by country-level data from the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) Population Bureau, and the V-Dem liberal democracy index, in random-intercept multilevel binary logistic modelling to examine the above relationships.

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The Problem and It's Relevance for Research and Policy

Although many characteristics define Africa's population, the continent's youth bulge (a disproportionately large share of young people aged between 15–29 years in the adult population 15 years+) is arguably the most defining characteristic of the continent's demographic landscape. With more than 70 per cent of the continent's population under 30 years of age,¹ Africa is now the youngest continent – and it will continue to be many years into the future. The median age (i.e. the age at which half of the population is younger) of the continent in 2023 stood at 19.0 years, with that of sub-Saharan Africa being 18.08 years. In countries such as the Central African Republic (14.32 years), Niger (15.25 years), Chad (15.40 years), Somalia (15.45 years), Mali (15.47 years), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (15.77 years), and Burundi (15.90 years), the median age is much lower than the continental average.² But does Africa's youth bulge hold any political ramifications for the young Africans who constitute this bulge?

In this study, I investigate the relationship between Africa's youth bulge and the political attitudes and participation of the continent's youth. I ask whether the youth bulge in an African country influences young people's attitudes towards military rule and their support for democracy, understood in terms of the commitment to democratic norms, values, and culture, such as the allegiance to human rights, civil liberties, the rule of law, elections, equality and social inclusion, deliberations, and political participation. I also examine the influence of Africa's youth bulge on young people's voting and protest behaviours, the use of force or violence for political causes, and the potential moderating role of socioeconomic factors such as youth unemployment at both the contextual and individual levels in these relationships. Past studies on the youth bulge in Africa and elsewhere have been mainly focused on the security implications of a youth bulge³ and its threat to the consolidation of liberal democracy.⁴ Other studies have focused on the structural socioeconomic implications of a youth bulge, particularly the nexus between a youth bulge and unemployment.^{5,6} Surprisingly little, however, is currently known about the political implications of the youth bulge on the individual members of the cohort, especially regarding their political attitudes and participation behaviours.

¹ United Nations, “Young People's Potential, the Key to Africa's Sustainable Development” (United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, n.d.), <https://www.un.org/ohrls/news/young-people%E2%80%99s-potential-key-africa%E2%80%99s-sustainable-development>.

² United Nations, “Data Portal, Custom Data Acquired via Website” (Population Division Data Portal, 2024), <https://population.un.org/dataportal/home?df=a4ff833a-0b0f-4d62-a868-cd61f8e2671a>.

³ Richard Cincotta and Hannes Weber, “Youthful Age Structures and the Risks of Revolutionary and Separatist Conflicts,” in *Global Political Demography: The Politics of Population Change*, ed. Achim Goerres and Pieter Vanhuysse (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 57–92.

⁴ Hannes Weber, “Demography and Democracy: The Impact of Youth Cohort Size on Democratic Stability in the World,” *Democratization* 20, no. 2 (2013): 335.

⁵ Noah. Q. Bricker and Mark. C. Foley, “The Effect of Youth Demographics on Violence: The Importance of the Labor Market,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 7, (2013): 179.

⁶ Sanders Korenman and David Neumark, “Cohort Crowding and Youth Labor Markets: A Cross-National Analysis,” in *Youth Employment and Joblessness in Advanced Countries*, ed. David Blanchflower and Richard Freeman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 57.

Africa, as the youngest continent, presents a unique and compelling context for a longitudinal study on the influence of its youth bulge on the political attitudes and participation of young people. This study is significant for both theoretical and policy development in several ways. Firstly, it deepens our understanding of how demographic dynamics influence political engagement, particularly in regions characterized by large youth populations. Such insights can refine broader political theories related to representation, civic involvement, and the relationship between cohort size and cohort political behaviour. Secondly, from a policy standpoint, addressing youth unemployment within a youth bulge is vital for fostering political stability and social cohesion. Understanding how unemployment and youth bulges interact to influence political attitudes and participation can help policymakers design targeted socioeconomic and political interventions that promote youth participation and ensure that their voices are heard in governance. This, I argue, is a cardinal ingredient for sustainable development in Africa.

The study employs random-intercept multilevel binary logistic Models and interaction plots on individual-level youth data from Afrobarometer survey rounds (R2–R8), and country-level data from the World Bank, the UN Population Bureau, and the V-Dem liberal democracy index to test four hypotheses guiding the study. The analysis reveals that a high youth bulge ratio (YBR) (i.e., a large youth bulge or youth cohort size in the adult population) is associated with strong support for democracy and a lower likelihood of young people endorsing military rule (political attitudes). A high YBR also increases the likelihood of youth participating in demonstrations and, more concerning, using force or violence for political causes. However, a high YBR is associated with a decreased likelihood of young people voting in elections (political participation). Moreover, the interaction between the YBR and the youth unemployment rate makes young people less likely to participate in protests. At the individual level, the interaction between a YBR and employment status renders unemployed young people less likely to vote in elections. The same interaction also makes unemployed youth less likely to participate in demonstrations. Although these findings may be unexpected, they align with prior research and the predictions of resource-based theories of political participation, which suggest that individuals lacking economic resources may feel less empowered to mobilize for political causes.

The above insights have significant implications for democratic politics in Africa, as they underscore the importance of economic growth and stability in countries with large youth cohorts as well as the fostering of active political and civic engagement among young people. In the conclusion of this study, I discuss these implications in detail and propose key policy priorities for African governments and development partners. Specifically, I advocate for targeted programmes aimed at reducing youth unemployment, enhancing economic opportunities, promoting civic engagement and youth representation in governance and – from a more strategic point – altering the population age structure to accelerate economic growth and democratic stability.

The Youth Bulge, Political Attitudes, and Participation: What Do We Know?

A long-standing and highly debated issue in Western political participation literature is the political attitudes and engagement of young people. The traditional, dominant perspective often blames young people for their apathy towards formal or institutionalized political activities, such as voting and involvement with political parties.^{7,8} This view suggests that young people are the least likely to participate in voting, attend electoral campaigns, and engage in political party activities, all of which are fundamental to the democratic political culture. Moreover, they are accused of being less supportive of democracy and of holding strong anti-democratic views,⁹ leading to their portrayal as the “harbingers of an incipient crisis of democracy”.¹⁰ In contrast, a more progressive perspective argues that young people are neither apathetic to politics nor anti-democratic. Instead, they are inclined towards non-institutionalized forms of political engagement, such as participating in protests and demonstrations.^{11,12} Their critical, authority-questioning attitudes and resistance to political conformity are seen as being supportive of democracy rather than oppositional.¹³

The political science literature on African youth largely reflects the trends observed in Western scholarship. Numerous studies have shown that African youth are generally less likely to vote or express partisan affiliations compared to older generations.^{14,15,16} However, they are more inclined to participate in alternative, non-institutionalized forms of political engagement, such as protests and demonstrations, which are often efforts to reform political systems perceived as ineffective and responsible for the ongoing hardships faced by the youth.^{17,18} Relatedly, current explanations for the political attitudes and participation of young people in Western scholarship primarily revolve around a mix of political, social, eco-

⁷ Matt Henn and Nick Foard, “Social Differentiation in Young People’s Political Participation: The Impact of Social and Educational Factors on Youth Political Engagement in Britain,” *Journal of Youth Studies* 17, no. 3 (2014): 360.

⁸ Therese O’Toole, Michael Lister, Dave Marsh, Su Jones, and Alex McDonagh, “Tuning Out or Left Out? Participation and Non-Participation among Young People,” *Contemporary Politics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 45–61.

⁹ Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5.

¹⁰ Rys Farthing, “The Politics of Youthful Antipolitics: Representing the “Issue” of Youth Participation in Politics,” *Journal of Youth Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 181.

¹¹ Sofie Marien, Marc Hooghe, and Ellen Quintelier, “Inequalities in Non-Institutionalised Forms of Political Participation: A Multi-Level Analysis of 25 Countries,” *Political Studies* 58, no. 1 (2010): 187.

¹² Pippa Norris, “Young People and Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?,” Working Paper, presented at Council of Europe Symposium, “Young People and Democratic Institutions: From Disillusionment to Participation,” Strasbourg, France (November 2023).

¹³ Russel J. Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation Is Reshaping American Politics*, Rev. ed (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Andrew Thulani Chauke, “An Exploration of Youth Political Disengagement in the City of Cape Town,” *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 11, no. 6 (2022): 271.

¹⁵ Danielle Resnick and Daniela Casale, “Young Populations in Young Democracies: Generational Voting Behaviour in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Democratization* 21, no. 6 (2014): 1172.

¹⁶ Toks Oyedemi and Desline Mahlatji, “The ‘Born-Free’ Non-Voting Youth: A Study of Voter Apathy Among a Selected Cohort of South African Youth,” *Politikon* 43, no. 3 (2016): 311.

¹⁷ Dabesaki Mac-Ikemenjima, “Violence and Youth Voter Turnout in Sub-Saharan Africa,” in *Youths in Challenging Situations*, ed. C. Tsekeris and L. Stylianoudi (Routledge, 2019), 217–26.

¹⁸ Tafadzwa Maganga, “Youth Demonstrations and Their Impact on Political Change and Development in Africa,” *Conflict Trends* 2020, no. 2 (2020): 28.

conomic, and cultural factors. At the individual level, factors such as socioeconomic status and civic skills,¹⁹ social capital, civic and political knowledge,²⁰ cultural shifts, and changing values^{21,22} are often highlighted. Additionally, life cycle and generational influences,^{23,24,25} as well as cohort effects,^{26,27} play a crucial role in shaping young people's political attitudes and behaviours. Here again, the research on African countries suggests that many of the current explanatory factors found in the established democracies of the West are applicable in the African context.²⁸

At the contextual level, variations in political attitudes and degree of participation across countries have been linked to political factors such as democratic maturity and the quality of democracy,²⁹ as well as socioeconomic conditions such as economic development and education.³⁰ Recent studies on democratic societies show, however, that demographic factors such as the size of a country's youth cohort may also hold explanations about the political attitudes and participation of the youth. The findings reveal that, as the youth cohort size of a country increases, young people are more likely to support democracy³¹ and participate in demonstrations and protests,³² but they may be less inclined to vote in national elections.³³ Moreover, the impact of these relationships is significantly moderated by socioeconomic conditions such as youth unemployment rates, and political factors such as the quality of democracy of a country. The present study builds on these recent findings and examines their applicability within the African context. Below, I theorize how a youth bulge may directly – and in interaction with youth unemployment – influence political attitudes and participation of the youth, and then develop four hypotheses for testing in the African context.

¹⁹ Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

²¹ Ronald Inglehart, *Silent Revolution – Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016 [1977]).

²² Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²³ Richard H. Kimberlee, "Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?," *Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 85.

²⁴ Ellen Quintelier, "Differences in Political Participation between Young and Old People," *Contemporary Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 165.

²⁵ Julia Weiss, "What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes," *Frontiers in Political Science* 2 (2020): 1.

²⁶ Maria T. Grasso, "Period and Cohort Analysis in a Comparative Context: Political Generations and Political Participation Repertoires in Western Europe," *Electoral Studies* 33 (2014): 63.

²⁷ Maria T. Grasso, Maria Teresa, Stephen Farrall, Emily Gray, Colin Hay, and Will Jennings, "Socialization and Generational Political Trajectories: An Age, Period and Cohort Analysis of Political Participation in Britain," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 29, no. 2 (2019): 199.

²⁸ Danielle Resnick & Daniela Casale (2014) Young populations in young democracies: generational voting behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, *Democratization*, 21:6, 1172-1194.

²⁹ Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Dissatisfied Democrats Democratic Maturation in Old and New Democracies," in *The Civic Culture Transformed From Allegiant to Assertive Citizens*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Christian Welzel (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 116.

³⁰ Martin S. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959): 69.

³¹ Godfred Bonnah Nkansah and Attila Bartha, "Anti-Democratic Youth? The Influence of Youth Cohort Size and Quality of Democracy on Young People's Support for Democracy," *Contemporary Politics* 29, no. 5 (2023): 553.

³² Godfred Bonnah Nkansah, "Youth Cohort Size, Structural Socioeconomic Conditions, and Youth Protest Behaviour in Democratic Societies (1995–2014)," *SAGE Open* 12, no. 2 (2022).

³³ Godfred Bonnah Nkansah and Zsófia Papp, "Does Cohort Size Matter? Assessing the Effect of Youth Cohort Size and Peer Influence on Young People's Electoral Participation," *Journal of Youth Studies* 26 (2022): 859.

Theoretical Arguments: Youth Bulge, Youth Political Attitudes, and Participation

A youth bulge in a population is thought to have complex effects on a country's social, political, and economic systems.³⁴ One optimistic perspective views the youth bulge as a potential catalyst for economic growth, driven by the promise of a demographic dividend. For instance, the influx of large youth cohorts into the labour market is seen as a factor that could spark economic progress. The impressive economic achievements of the Southeast Asian “Tiger States” and some Latin American countries during periods of substantial youth cohorts exemplify this positive outlook.^{35,36,37} However, a more prevalent counterargument, though not consistently supported by evidence, suggests that a youth bulge is a reliable predictor of political instability, armed conflicts, and the erosion of liberal democracy. Countries with a significant youth bulge are thus considered at higher risk for revolutions, civil unrest, and various forms of political instability.^{38,39,40,41} Moreover, with few exceptions, nations experiencing a youth bulge tend to be among the most socioeconomically disadvantaged, frequently appearing in the World Bank's low-income category and forming what has been described as the “zone of acute instability and underdevelopment”.⁴²

Youth Bulge Leading to Amplified Peer Socialization

The political socialization and labour economics literature suggest at least two main mechanisms by which a youth bulge can influence young people's attitudes and behaviours: peer influence and socioeconomic deprivation.

On the one hand, a youth bulge creates a substantial pool of socializing agents who exert strong peer influence on each other in ways that may affect their political socialization and participation, either positively or negatively.^{43,44} Evidence suggests that young people in communities saturated with peers interact more frequently and exert more intragenerational social influence on each other compared to those in adult-dominated communities.⁴⁵ Peers are an integral and undeniable part of a young person's life, playing a crucial role in shaping their political identities, ideologies, interests, values, and behaviours as part of the

³⁴ Kira Renee Kurz, Lucas Kohl, Julius Friedrich Lünser, Noelle Mazza, Adrian Zeno Pagenstecher, Beata Reichenbacher, Jonathan Stuiber, and Carla Witzemann, “Political Demography – blinder Fleck der deutschen Politikwissenschaft? Eine einführende Literaturübersicht,” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 14 (2024).

³⁵ James N. Gribble and Jason Bremner, “Achieving a Demographic Dividend,” *Population Bulletin* 1 (2012).

³⁶ Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi, “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in Africa through Lessons from East Asia's Experience,” *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 18, no. 2 (2021): 1.

³⁷ Kaitlyn Patierno, Elizabeth Leahy Madsen, and Smita Gaith, “The Demographic Dividend: Positive Prospects, Unclear Path,” in *A Research Agenda for Political Demography*, ed. Jennifer D. Sciubba (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2021), 199.

³⁸ Richard Cincotta, “The Age-Structural Theory of State Behaviour,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017).

³⁹ Richard Cincotta and John A. Doces, “The Age-Structural Maturity Thesis: The Youth Bulge's Influence on the Advent and Stability of Liberal Democracy,” in *Political Demography: How Population Changes Are Reshaping International Security and National Politics*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Eric P. Kaufmann, and Monica Duffy Toft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98–116.

⁴⁰ Christian G. Mesquida and Neil I. Wiener, “Male Age Composition and Severity of Conflicts,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 18, no. 2 (1999): 181–89.

⁴¹ Omer Yair and Dan Miodownik, “Youth Bulge and Civil War: Why a Country's Share of Young Adults Explains Only Non-Ethnic Wars,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33, no. 1 (2016): 25.

⁴² Richard Cincotta, “Population Age Structure and the Vulnerability of States to Coups d'État,” *Statistics, Politics and Policy* 14, no. 3 (2023): 331.

⁴³ Nkansah and Papp, “Does Cohort Size Matter?,” 859.

⁴⁴ Weber, “Demography and Democracy,” 335.

⁴⁵ Daniel Hart, Robert Atkins, Patrick Markey, and James Youniss, “Youth Bulges in Communities: The Effects of Age Structure on Adolescent Civic Knowledge and Civic Participation,” *Psychological Science* 15, no. 9 (2004): 591.

broader process of seeking social acceptance.^{46,47} Peers have, for instance, been found to play a positive role in motivating political interest, sharing political information, and mobilizing their colleagues for civic and political participation.^{48,49} A youth bulge in this regard can amplify the positive effects of peer influence through the presence of a large number of peer socializing agents within a youth-saturated community.

On the other hand, young people are also evidenced to be less politically knowledgeable and more distrusting of political systems.^{50,51} They are also known to be highly idealistic, naively accepting of ideological explanations, and very prone not only to peer influence, but much more so to peer approval.⁵² Additionally, during the transitional period from youth to adulthood, young people undergo various sociobiological experiences, which from time to time cause them to temporarily distance themselves from traditional family and cultural values, and show an increased tendency to challenge the status quo and established authority, which sometimes leads – especially young males – to the support of extremist, aggressive, or anti-democratic tendencies.⁵³ Since young people are often more aligned with the values, interests (including political values and interests), and views of their close friends and peers than with those of their parents or even grandparents,^{54,55} it is reasonable to expect that the above attitudinal and behavioural tendencies, which are generally inimical to the political socialization of the youth, can be exacerbated or amplified in the context of a large youth cohort. This is owing to the higher propensity, frequency, and intensity of peer interactions within a burgeoning cohort of less politically and civically knowledgeable and idealistic socializing agents. This can have negative implications for their political attitudes and participation. Hannes Weber shows, for instance, that a youth bulge associates positively with the increased risk of anti-democratic and extremist tendencies among young males.⁵⁶

Moreover, young people's relatively limited social and economic responsibilities (i.e. fewer familial and career obligations) reduce the opportunity cost of engaging in activities that challenge existing power structures and norms. Put differently, young, unmarried, unemployed, or underemployed people may, for instance, find it less costly and risky – in terms of time, money, and professional and social commitments – to join mass demonstrations or protests, compared to older people with families, well-paid careers, and recognized social or public positions. Coupled with the relative ease of mobilizing young people in youth-saturated communities, the experience of participating in collective actions becomes particularly appealing to young people, especially in the context of a youth bulge.^{57,58}

⁴⁶ Daniel Bergan, Dustin Carnahan, Nazita Lajevardi, Mel Medeiros, Sarah Reckhow, and Kjerstin Thorson, "Promoting the Youth Vote: The Role of Informational Cues and Social Pressure," *Political Behaviour* 44 (2021), 2027.

⁴⁷ Ellen Quintelier, "Engaging Adolescents in Politics: The Longitudinal Effect of Political Socialization Agents," *Youth & Society* 47, no. 1 (2015): 51.

⁴⁸ Casey A. Klofstad, "Civic Talk: Peers, Politics, and the Future of Democracy" (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ Bergan et al., "Promoting the Youth Vote.", 2027.

⁵⁰ Quintelier, "Differences in Political Participation between Young and Old People.", 165.

⁵¹ Weiss, "What Is Youth Political Participation?", 1.

⁵² Cincotta and Doces, "The Age-Structural Maturity Thesis.", 98.

⁵³ Hannes Weber, "Age Structure and Political Violence: A Re-Assessment of the 'Youth Bulge' Hypothesis," *International Interactions* 45, no. 1 (2019): 80.

⁵⁴ Hilary Pilkington and Gary Pollock, "'Politics Are Bollocks': Youth, Politics and Activism in Contemporary Europe," *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (2015): 1.

⁵⁵ Eugénie Dostie-Goulet, "Social Networks and the Development of Political Interest," *Journal of Youth Studies* 12, no. 4 (2009): 405.

⁵⁶ Weber, "Demography and Democracy.", 335.

⁵⁷ Daniil Romanov and Andrey Korotayev, "Non-Violent, but Still Dangerous: Testing the Link Between Youth Bulges and the Intensity of Nonviolent Protests," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2019).

⁵⁸ Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006): 607.

Youth Bulge Leading to Unemployment

The existence of a youth bulge is evidenced to result in socioeconomic deprivation within the bulge due to limited employment and income-earning opportunities. In his famed hypothesis, Richard Easterlin argues that, for a given cohort within the population, the social and economic fortunes of the members of the cohort decrease as the cohort size increases.^{59,60} In an overcrowded labour market, young people with similar skill sets not only compete against each other, but also face challenges in substituting for older workers, who often have more experience, and also experience reduced wages for those who are employed.^{61,62} As a result, youth bulges pose significant challenges for low-income countries, which struggle to meet the rising demand for social and economic services for these large youth populations. Under conditions of deprivation, discontent among the youth is likely to arise, potentially influencing their political attitudes and participation behaviours in important ways. Proponents of the grievance theory of political participation suggest, for instance, that socioeconomic deprivations can motivate citizens (including young people) to increase their degree of participation in political activities, such as protests, as a means of communicating their grievances to the political system.^{63,64}

In the alternative scenario, the predictions of resource-based theories of political participation suggest that, under conditions of unemployment, jobless youth will disengage from politics due to their limited resource capacity to participate. This is because resources such as money, time, and civic skills fundamentally motivate political participation.^{65,66} Deprived of reliable or adequate sources of income due principally to limited labour market opportunities, it is reasonable to expect that members of a youth bulge will prioritize addressing their socioeconomic challenges over political participation.

Hypotheses

Although both arguments and counterarguments regarding the influence of the youth bulge on political attitudes and participation are plausible, this study posits that Africa's uniquely large youth cohort – coupled with high instances of democratic deconsolidation and political instability, as well as significant socioeconomic deprivation, particularly unemployment – renders it more likely that the youth bulge will adversely affect the political attitudes and participation of the continent's young people. I therefore hypothesize the following scenarios:

For political attitudes:

H1: The larger the youth bulge in an African country, the lower the likelihood that the youth will support democracy and reject military rule.

⁵⁹ Richard A. Easterlin, *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁶⁰ Diane J. Macunovich and Richard A. Easterlin, "Easterlin Hypothesis," in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics: Volume 1 – 8*, ed. Steven N. Durlauf and Lawrence E. Blume (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1490–94.

⁶¹ Korenman and Neumark, "Cohort Crowding and Youth Labor Markets." ,57.

⁶² Giorgio Brunello, "The Effects of Cohort Size on European Earnings," *Journal of Population Economics* 23, no. 1 (2010): 273.

⁶³ Ted Gurr, "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence," *World Politics* 20, no. 2 (1968): 245.

⁶⁴ Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁶⁵ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 1.

⁶⁶ Anna Kern, Sofie Marien, and Marc Hooghe, "Economic Crisis and Levels of Political Participation in Europe (2002–2010): The Role of Resources and Grievances," *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (2015): 465.

For political participation:

H2: The larger the youth bulge in an African country, the lower the likelihood that the youth will participate in institutionalized politics, such as voting in elections.

H3: The larger the youth bulge in an African country, the higher the likelihood that the youth will participate in non-institutionalized politics, such as joining demonstrations/protests, and use force or violence for political causes.

For the moderating effect of unemployment:

H4: The impact of the youth bulge on the political attitudes and participation of young people in Africa hypothesized in H1-H3 is stronger in countries with high rates of youth unemployment.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study employed a large-N research design, incorporating data from all 39 African states across seven rounds (R2–R8) of Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2004, 2005, 2008, 2011–2013, 2016, 2019, and 2022. The dataset comprises 194 country surveys pooled across these seven rounds (R2 = 16, R3 = 17, R4 = 20, R5 = 35, R6 = 36, R7 = 33, R8 = 37).⁶⁷ Round 1 of the survey was excluded from the sample due to inconsistencies in the questions, responses, and coding compared to the later rounds of the survey. These discrepancies were expected, given that it was the first round of the survey, and it would typically undergo significant modifications in subsequent rounds. Botswana and Eswatini were similarly dropped from Rounds 3 and 7, respectively, due to country code identification challenges in the original dataset, which created inconsistencies in the merged dataset for all rounds of the survey. A complete list of the countries included can be found in the study’s online appendix.⁶⁸

Data Collection

The Afrobarometer survey provided pooled individual-level data on young people’s political values, attitudes, and participation, along with information on their sociodemographic and socioeconomic status. The choice of the Afrobarometer survey was deemed appropriate for the chosen research design because it is nationally representative, covers 72 per cent of countries in Africa (39 out of 54 territories), provides pooled time-series data spanning nearly 20 years (2004–2022 for Rounds 2–8), and includes both democratic and non-democratic countries. These data characteristics make it well-suited for testing the study’s hypothetical causal relationships. In contrast to cross-sectional data, pooled data is evidenced to help establish cause-and-effect relationships.⁶⁹ Its strength of observing the individuals, groups, or systems over a long period makes it easier to determine causal changes, or whether changes in one variable precede and potentially cause changes in another.⁷⁰ The pooled data from the Afrobarometer survey and the complementary country-level data, therefore, provided a suitable dataset for causal investigations.

The Afrobarometer data was combined with country-level data from the World Bank,⁷¹ the UN Population Bureau,⁷² and the V-Dem liberal democracy index.⁷³ The World Bank and the UN Population Bureau datasets are noted for their robustness in providing longitudinal data on countries across multiple indicators and have been widely used in similar studies in

⁶⁷ Afrobarometer, “Merged Data,” accessed Aug 20, 2024, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/data/merged-data/>.

⁶⁸ The online appendix can be found here: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14237487>.

⁶⁹ Scott Menard, *Longitudinal Research* (Sage Publications, 2002).

⁷⁰ Judith D. Singer and John B. Willet, *Applied Longitudinal Data Analysis: Modeling Change and Event Occurrence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷¹ World Bank Group, “DataBank| World Development Indicators,” 2024, accessed Nov 21, 2024, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#>.

⁷² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “World Population Prospects 2024,” 2024, accessed Nov 21, 2024, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.

⁷³ Varieties of Democracy, “The V-Dem Dataset,” 2023, accessed Nov 21, 2024, <https://v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/>.

the past.^{74,75} The V-Dem liberal democracy index, on the other hand, is argued to be the most robust in the world.⁷⁶ The World Bank contributed contextual variables such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, purchasing power parity, ILO-Modelled youth unemployment rates, and Worldwide Governance Indicators such as control of corruption and government effectiveness. The UN Population Bureau supplied data on the YBR in each country, while the V-Dem liberal democracy index provided data on the quality of democracy across the sampled countries.

Variable Operationalization: Political Attitudes and Participation

Five dependent variables were selected as proxies for the three concepts of political expression examined in the study:

- *Political attitudes*: Measured by support for democracy and rejection of military rule.
- *Institutionalized political behaviours/participation*: Measured by voting in national elections.
- *Non-institutionalized political behaviours/participation*: Measured by attending demonstrations or protest marches and the use of violence or force for a political cause.

The Afrobarometer survey included questions that elicited categorical responses for each of these dependent variables. All responses were recoded into binary categories for analysis. The number 1 was assigned to the target category of each dependent variable, indicating the likelihood of a youth engaging in the attitude/behaviour, while 0 was assigned to the reference category, indicating the likelihood of not engaging in the attitude/behaviour. Table 1 details the operationalization of these dependent variables and their proportions of categories in the sample.

⁷⁴ Urdal, "A Clash of Generations?", 607.

⁷⁵ Cincotta, "Population Age Structure and the Vulnerability of States to Coups d'État.", 331.

⁷⁶ Vanessa Boese, "How (Not) to Measure Democracy," *International Area Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (2019): 95.

Table 1: Dependent Variable Operationalization and Distribution in the Sample

<i>Political expression</i>	<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Original category of responses</i>	<i>Recoding approach</i>	<i>New categories</i>	<i>Proportions with sample (%)</i>
Political attitudes	Support for democracy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Doesn't matter 2. Sometimes non-democratic is preferable 3. Democracy preferable 	We pitched responses that categorically preferred democracy against those that expressed a preference for non-democratic systems and excluded the undecided	Non-democracy preferred=0 Democracy preferable=1	0=16.42% 1=83.58%
	Military rule	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strongly disapprove 2. Disapprove 3. Neither approve nor disapprove 4. Approve 5. Strongly approve 	We excluded the ambivalent group (neither approve nor disapprove) and pitched strongly disapprove/disapprove vs approve/strongly approve	Disapprove/strongly disapprove of military rule=0 Approve/strongly approve of military rule =1	0=79.76% 1=20.24%
Political Participation: Institutionalized politics	Voting in national elections	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You voted in the elections 2. You decided not to vote 3. You could not find the polling station 4. You were prevented from voting 5. You did not have time to vote 6. Did not vote for some other reason 7. You were not registered 	We pitched those who voted in the election vs those who did not vote, regardless of the reason	No (all other categories)=0 Yes (voted)=1	0=51.79% 1=48.21%
Political Participation: Non-institutionalized politics	Attend demonstrations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No, would never do this 2. No, but would do if had the chance 3. Yes, once or twice 4. Yes, several times 5. Yes, often 	We pitched the No groups vs the Yes groups	No=0 Yes=1	0=86.53% 1=13.47%
	Used force or violence for a political cause	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No, would never do this 2. No, but would do if had the chance 3. Yes, once or twice 4. Yes, several times 5. Yes, often 	We pitched the No groups vs the Yes groups	No=0 Yes=1	0=96.56% 1=3.44%

Variable Operationalization: The Youth Bulge and Youth Unemployment

This study focused on two primary explanatory variables: the youth bulge and youth unemployment. The youth bulge was measured using the youth bulge ratio (YBR), i.e. (total number of 15-29 years old/total adult population of a country [15 years and above]) x100 %.

This measure of the youth bulge has been widely used in previous studies and is argued to be able to better capture the nuances within this age cohort compared to other measures with lower cut-off points, such as 15–24.^{77,78,79} For each country and survey round, the YBR was calculated and assigned to respondents. In cases where the survey round spanned multiple years, the average YBR for those years was calculated and applied to respondents in the relevant countries. For instance, the YBR for Round 5 (2011–2013) was estimated as the average across the three years. This method was consistently applied to all country-level variables in the study. The mean YBR across countries was 47.93, with a standard deviation of 4.98. Mauritius had the lowest YBR at 26.94, while Zimbabwe had the highest at 57.68. However, Mauritius reported the lowest mean YBR across all the rounds (28.26 years), while Uganda had the highest mean YBR across all the rounds (54.55 years). Figure 1 shows the mean YBR across all rounds for all 39 countries.

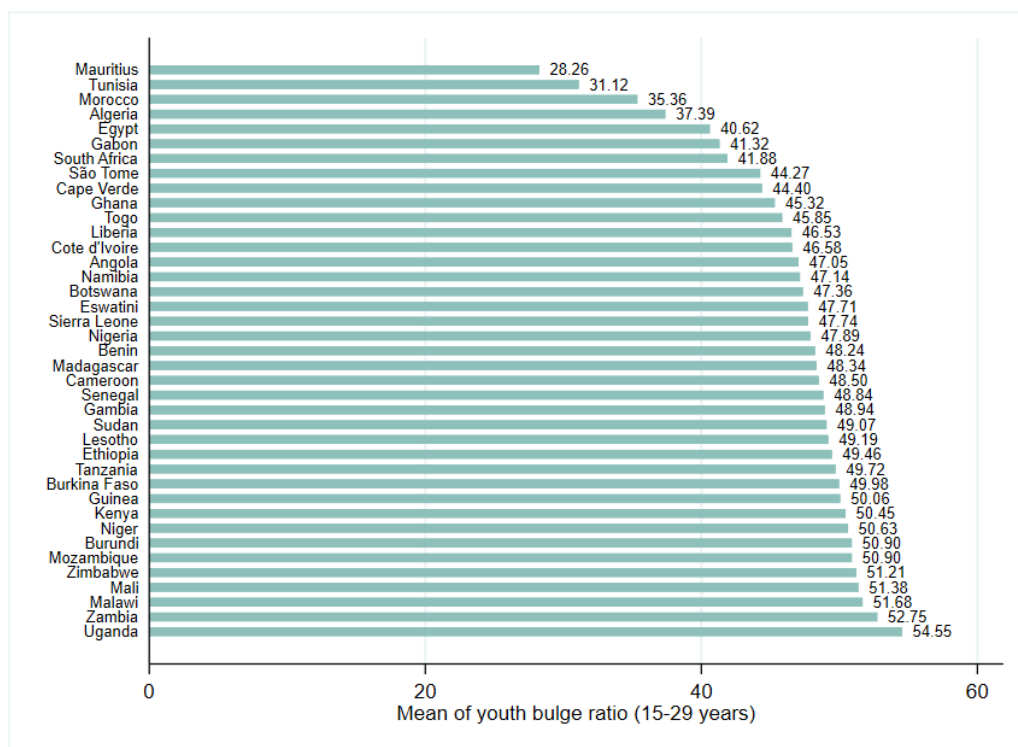


Figure 1: Mean of the Youth Bulge Ratio across Countries.

Youth unemployment was defined as the percentage of the total labour force aged 15–24 that is unemployed, based on ILO Modelled estimates. The study opted for this measure as

⁷⁷ Andrey Korotayev, Daniil Romanov, Julia Zinkina, and Maxim Slav, “Urban Youth and Terrorism: A Quantitative Analysis (Are Youth Bulges Relevant Anymore?),” *Political Studies Review* 22 (2022).

⁷⁸ Nkansah and Bartha, “Anti-Democratic Youth?,” 553.

⁷⁹ Weber, “Age Structure and Political Violence.,” 80.

a better-suited proxy for socioeconomic deprivation among young people, based on the ILO's evaluation of the unemployment rate as "probably the best-known labour market measure", which is useful for estimating the underutilization of labour supply, and it is seen as "an indicator of the efficiency and effectiveness of an economy to absorb its labour force and the performance of the labour market".⁸⁰ Alternative ILO indicators include underemployment, which relates to labour under-utilization for persons in time-related employment who are willing, available, and able to work for more hours, but work below a nationally designated threshold. However, due to conceptual and operational variabilities across countries on what constitutes, for instance, part-time work in terms of hourly threshold – and the fact that it also measures some forms of labour engagement⁸¹ – the study found it to be a less suitable indicator of joblessness among the youth population. Hence, despite the limitations of youth unemployment rates, the study, nevertheless, found it to be a better-suited estimate for young people's struggles in the labour market, particularly within the context of a youth bulge.

The mean youth unemployment rate across all survey rounds was 14.44 per cent, with a standard deviation of 13.72. Unemployment rates varied significantly, ranging from as low as 0.75 per cent in Niger to as high as 65.34 per cent in Eswatini. In terms of mean youth unemployment rates across all rounds of the survey, Niger and Eswatini reported the lowest and highest rates of 1.14 per cent and 54.01 per cent, respectively. The unexpectedly low youth unemployment rates for countries with large youth bulges – especially in the case of Niger, but also for Liberia, Burundi, and Mali – are noted. At first glance, this is counterintuitive, yet it may not be too surprising, given the dominant employment typologies in these countries. Such low-income countries are known for their extensive subsistence farming and small-scale pastoralism, the early socialization of the youth into such systems of subsistence, and the predominance of informal sector self-employment among the youth. For instance, a recent World Bank Project Appraisal Document on Niger observed that nearly the entire working-age population (i.e. 15–64 years) is employed, often out of necessity, with the official unemployment rate being as low as 0.5 percent. This small percentage mainly represents educated urban youth who are actively seeking formal employment. The report notes further that the vast majority of individuals who are employed in Niger are self-employed, primarily in agriculture or in non-agricultural micro-enterprises and off-farm activities.⁸² This study argues that the contexts of the other countries with low youth unemployment rates are similar to the case of Niger.

To ensure, however, that the wide disparity in youth unemployment rates, or the large standard deviation, does not affect the analysis in significant ways, the unemployment variable was log-transformed to reduce variation. The analysis, therefore, utilized the log-transformed version of the variable, which negates the effect of potential skewness and kurtosis in the distribution, stabilizing the variance and normalizing the distribution of the actual variable in the process. Figure 2 displays the distribution of the variable across countries.

⁸⁰ International Labour Organization, "Labour Force Statistics: Unemployment Rate," ILOSTAT, 2024, accessed Nov 21, 2024, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/description-labour-force-statistics/>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² World Bank, *Project Appraisal Document: Niger – Youth Employment and Productive Inclusion Project*, (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2018), 8.

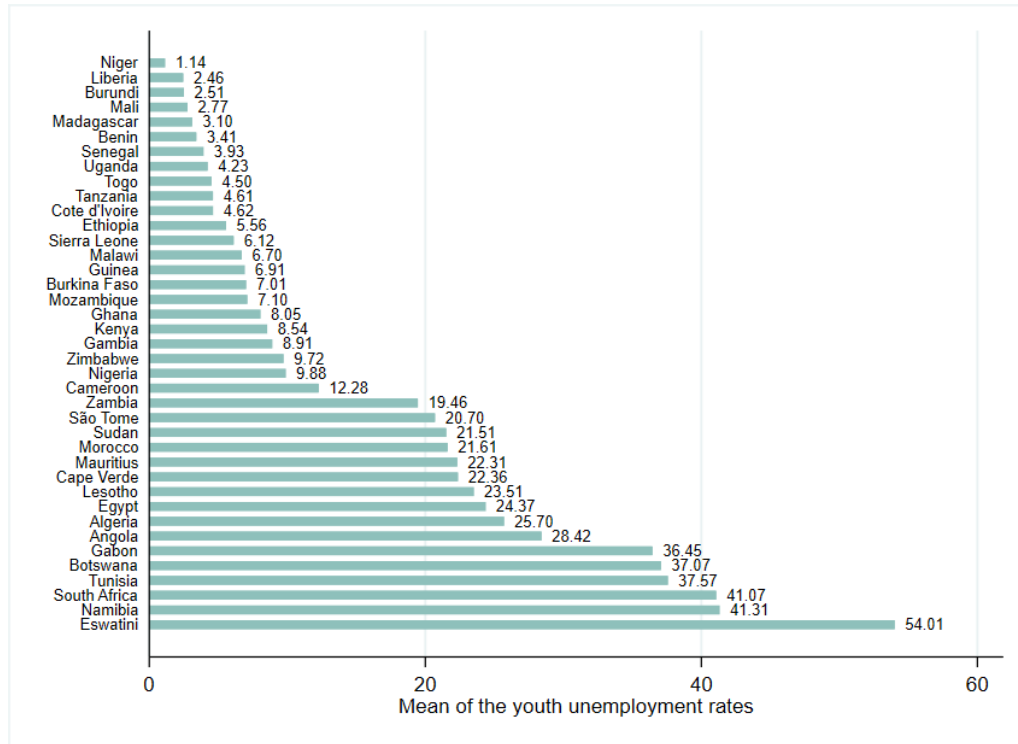


Figure 2: Mean of the youth unemployment rate across countries

In line with the hypothesis regarding the interaction between the YBR and youth unemployment rates affecting youth political attitudes and participation (H4), the study presents the visual relationship between these two variables in Figure 3. The graph indicates that the relationship is complex and generally inversely related. For instance, while some countries with a YBR above 50 per cent also experience high youth unemployment rates, they tend to report relatively lower youth unemployment rates compared to countries with a YBR between 30 per cent and 40 per cent. Overall, the visual relationship suggests that there is no positive linearity between the two explanatory variables – as proposed by the theoretical arguments in the study – which is an observation that may have significant implications for H4 across the various dependent variables.

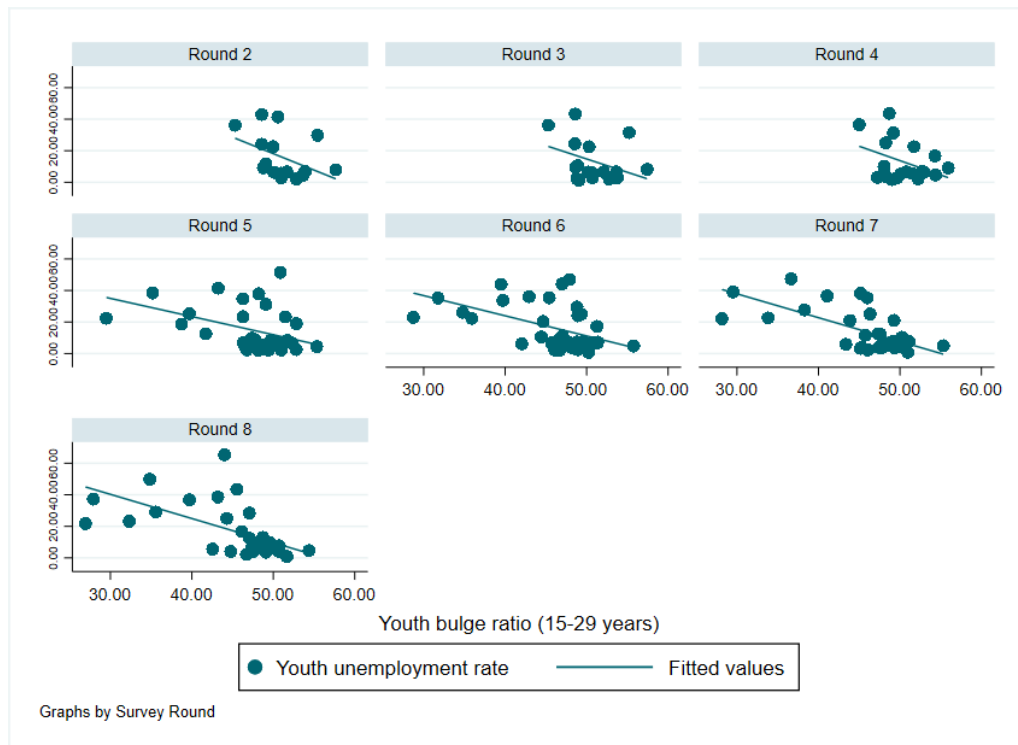


Figure 3: Two-Way Scatter Plot of the Youth Unemployment Rate and the Youth Bulge Ratio (15–29 years).

Control Variables

The study controlled for several key variables that strongly predict political attitudes and participation at both individual and country levels. For instance, previous research has established that sociodemographic factors such as age, education, and gender significantly influence political attitudes and participation.^{83,84} Additionally, religion^{85,86} and spatial factors such as the rural-urban divide^{87,88} have been shown to play important roles. The study also accounted for employment status, civic engagement (e.g. membership in community groups), and interest in politics, which are critical components of the Civic Voluntarism Model of political participation.^{89,90,91} These factors were included in the analysis by using variables that measured respondents' employment status, involvement in community development organizations, and engagement in political discussions, respectively. Additionally, considering the ongoing debate about whether satisfaction with democracy affects

⁸³ Michael Bratton, Robert Mattes, and Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸⁴ Magdalena Kitanova, "Youth Political Participation in the EU: Evidence from a Cross-national Analysis," *Journal of Youth Studies* 23, no. 7 (2020): 819–36.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Kotler-Berkowitz, "Religion and Voting Behaviour in Great Britain: A Reassessment," *British Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (2001): 523.

⁸⁶ Waiphot Kulachai, Unisa Lerdtomornsakul, and Patipol Homyamyen, "Factors Influencing Voting Decision: A Comprehensive Literature Review," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 9 (2023): 469.

⁸⁷ James G. Gimpel, Nathan Lovin, Bryant Moy, and Andrew Reeves, "The Urban–Rural Gulf in American Political Behaviour," *Political Behaviour* 42, no. 4 (2020): 1343.

⁸⁸ Dante J. Scala and Kenneth M. Johnson, "Political Polarization along the Rural-Urban Continuum? The Geography of the Presidential Vote, 2000–2016," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 672, no. 1 (2017): 162.

⁸⁹ Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (1995): 27.

⁹⁰ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 1.

⁹¹ Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, 1.

support for democracy,^{92,93,94} satisfaction with democracy was included as a control variable to assess its impact on the political attitudes and participation of young people in Africa. To ensure clarity and ease of interpretation, all categorical variables were recoded into unambiguous categories, with details provided in the online appendix of the study.

At the country level, the analysis incorporated contextual variables reported in existing studies to significantly influence political attitudes and participation within and across countries, and to interact with the youth bulge. The study controlled for the quality of democracy using the V-Dem liberal democracy index as a proxy for the political context of countries. Corruption, which has recently been found to be useful in understanding the link between youth bulges and the risk of political unrest,^{95,96} was also controlled for using the World Bank's control of corruption indicator. Although economic development, measured by GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (log-transformed to reduce residual variance), was accounted for based on its relevance in the literature,^{97,98,99} this variable was primarily used for robustness checks rather than in the main analysis. This decision was due to its high correlation with youth unemployment rates ($r = 0.74$, $p < 0.05$), which significantly altered the effects of some key variables when GDP was included in the main Models. Further details on the nature and distribution of all country-level variables are provided in the study's online appendix.

A potential limitation of this study is the exclusion of the contextual social variable of education from the analysis. This was primarily due to the high levels of missing values in the proxy variables for education – secondary and tertiary school enrollments – within the World Bank data on African states. Although multiple imputation was considered as a method to address the missing values, the extensive amount of missing data would have compromised the objectivity of the results. The variable was, therefore, altogether excluded from the analysis.

Data Analysis

The study employed a random-intercept multilevel logistic regression with country-clustered standard errors for its analysis, recognizing the binary nature of the five dependent variables and the hierarchical structure of the data, where individuals are nested within countries. Multilevel modelling was chosen as the more appropriate approach due to these data characteristics. Likelihood Ratio Tests confirmed that the Multilevel Model provided a superior fit compared to the standard logistic regression Model. The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) for the five Models – each corresponding to one of the dependent variables and regressed on the same set of independent variables – varied from 0.59 per cent (for the Model predicting using force or violence for a political cause) to 13.66 per cent (for the

⁹² Christopher Claassen and Pedro C. Magalhães, "Effective Government and Evaluations of Democracy," *Comparative Political Studies* 55, no. 5 (2022): 869.

⁹³ Renske Doorenspleet, "Critical Citizens, Democratic Support and Satisfaction in African Democracies," *International Political Science Review* 33, no. 3 (2012): 279.

⁹⁴ Pedro C. Magalhães, "Government Effectiveness and Support for Democracy: Government Effectiveness and Support for Democracy," *European Journal of Political Research* 53, no. 1 (2014): 77.

⁹⁵ Cincotta, "Population Age Structure and the Vulnerability of States to Coups d'État." 331.

⁹⁶ Mohammed Reza Farzanegan and Stefan Witthuhn, "Corruption and Political Stability: Does the Youth Bulge Matter?," *European Journal of Political Economy* 49 (2017): 47.

⁹⁷ Russel J. Dalton and Alix van Sickle, "The Resource, Structural, and Cultural Bases of Protest," in *CDS Working Papers* 23 (UC Irvine, CA: Center for the Study of Democracy, 2005), <https://escholarship.org/content/qt3jx2b911/qt3jx2b911.pdf?t=li5asw>.

⁹⁸ Russel J. Dalton and Christian Welzel, eds., "The Civic Culture Transformed: From Allegiant to Assertive Citizens" (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁹⁹ Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy.", 69.

Model predicting voting in elections). This indicates that most of the variations in the data are attributable to within-country differences. In essence, individual-level factors have a stronger explanatory power over the observed variations in young people's political attitudes and participation than country-level factors. The study's reflections on the results, therefore, consider this limitation in the explanatory power of the primary independent variables.

Additionally, the study highlights noticeable differences in sample sizes regarding the number of individuals and countries across the five Models. These differences arose due to data inconsistencies in some individual-level variables across countries and because certain dependent variables were measured consistently across all survey rounds, while others were not (e.g. attending demonstrations versus using force or violence for a political cause). As a result, some Models included more observations and countries than others. Despite these discrepancies, the sizes of the final samples suggest that these differences do not significantly impact the results. The number of countries in the various Models ranged from 31 to 35, with observations varying between 17,872 and 49,641.

Results of the Analysis

Strong Support for Democracy and Involvement in Institutionalized Forms of Politics

The study's analysis begins with an overview of the descriptive statistics for the five dependent variables in the dataset. Table 1 reveals that among the selected political attitudes, 83.58 per cent of the youth sample express support for democracy, clearly favouring democratic governance over non-democratic alternatives. Furthermore, 79.76 per cent disapprove of military rule. Regarding institutionalized political participation, nearly half of the youth (48.21%) reported voting in the last election. Regarding non-institutionalized political participation, a notably small percentage (13.47%) of the youth had attended a demonstration, and an even smaller proportion (3.44%) had engaged in the use of force or violence for a political cause. Overall, the descriptive statistics within the youth sub-population of African countries (these analyses exclude comparisons with older generations) suggest that most young people in Africa demonstrate strong support for democracy and a strong disapproval of military rule. They are also more involved in institutionalized forms of politics than in non-institutionalized ones.

Direct Effects of Youth Bulge and Unemployment on Political Attitudes and Participation

The logistic regression analysis reveals nuanced direct effects of the key explanatory variable, the YBR and the moderating variable, youth unemployment rate, on the five dependent variables. Overall, the results show that, after controlling for other factors, the YBR has significant positive effects on young Africans' likelihood to support democracy, join demonstrations, and even resort to force or violence for political causes. In contrast, the YBR is negatively associated with their propensity to approve of military rule and to vote in national elections. This suggests that, for political attitudes, the larger the YBR in an African country, the more likely its youth are to support democracy as their preferred political system ($\beta = 0.020$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, a higher YBR corresponds to a lower likelihood of approving of military rule ($\beta = -0.086$, $p < 0.001$). However, despite being statistically significant, the influence of the YBR on the dependent variables is relatively modest, which aligns with the ICC results showing that more than 90 per cent of the variation in the sample can be attributed to individual-level predictors of political attitudes and participation.

Importantly, these findings indicate that the first hypothesis (H1) is not supported by the data. However, support is found for the second hypothesis (H2) and also for the third (H3). The analysis confirms that, as predicted, a higher YBR is associated with a lower likelihood of youth engagement in institutionalized politics, such as voting in elections ($\beta = -0.038$, $p < 0.001$), and a higher likelihood of involvement in non-institutionalized politics, such as demonstrations ($\beta = 0.031$, $p < 0.001$) or using force or violence for political causes ($\beta = -0.113$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the direct effect of the moderating variable – the youth unemployment rate – on the political attitudes and participation of young Africans in the additive Models was nuanced, but not as extensive as the effect of the YBR. For instance, although rising youth unemployment significantly predicted shifts in political attitudes, its

impact on political participation was less pronounced. The analysis shows that young people in African countries with high youth unemployment rates are significantly less likely to prefer democratic rule over non-democratic alternatives ($\beta = -0.282$, $p < 0.001$), and more inclined to approve of military rule.

Given the study's interest in the fourth hypothesis (H4), which predicts that youth unemployment moderates the influence of the YBR on political attitudes and participation, an interaction between the two variables was included in the analysis to examine their combined effects across all five dependent variables. Tables 2 and 3 present the results for the additive and interaction Models, respectively.

Interaction Effect of the Youth Bulge Ratio and Unemployment on Political Attitudes and Participation

Contrary to the theoretical expectations in H4, which predicted that the combination of a youth bulge and high youth unemployment rates across African countries would significantly influence young people's political attitudes and propensity to engage in political participation, the interaction between these two contextual factors had no significant effect on political attitudes or participation, with one notable exception: their joint influence on the likelihood of young Africans participating in demonstrations. The analysis reveals that the interaction of a youth bulge and high youth unemployment decreases the likelihood of young people joining demonstrations ($\beta = -0.041$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, as youth unemployment rates rise, it becomes less likely that young Africans living in the context of a youth bulge will participate in demonstrations or protests.

The standard predicted probability plot for the interaction of these two variables on young people's likelihood of participating in demonstrations is illustrated in Figure 4. The plot shows that a unit increase in the youth unemployment rate across countries decreases the probability of a young person joining a demonstration. The highest probability of participation occurs when the YBR is less than 30 per cent and youth unemployment is low. However, as both the youth unemployment rate and the YBR increase, the probability of participation declines. This finding aligns with the earlier inverse relationship between the two interaction variables shown in Figure 3. Nevertheless, in contexts of extremely high youth unemployment and a large YBR, the relationship appears to shift significantly, as young people begin to show higher probabilities of participating in demonstrations under such conditions. This shift is evident in the plot section where \log_youth unemployment = 4.

To verify the reliability of this prediction, the study addressed recent criticisms of standard margins plots for interaction effects and followed the recommendations of Hainmueller and colleagues in estimating the margins and margins plots using alternative and more robust estimation techniques.¹⁰⁰ Using an alternative semi-parametric Modelling approach, the study estimated the predicted probabilities with the *interflex* kernel option in Stata, which is designed for non-linear marginal effect estimations.¹⁰¹ Consistent with the results from the standard probability plot, the kernel-based analysis also reveals a nuanced but generally declining likelihood of participation in demonstrations as youth unemployment

¹⁰⁰ Jens Hainmueller, Jonathan Mummolo, and Yiqing Xu, "How Much Should We Trust Estimates from Multiplicative Interaction Models? Simple Tools to Improve Empirical Practice," *Political Analysis* 27, no. 2 (2019): 163.

¹⁰¹ See similar approach in Nkansah and Bartha, "Anti-Democratic Youth?" 553.

rates increase across countries. Given the established strengths and advantages of kernel-based non-parametric marginal effect estimation, it is reasonable to conclude that this result more accurately reflects the data compared to the predictions of the standard probability plot. Figure 5 illustrates the even and non-linear effect of the YBR on the probability of participating in demonstrations, across different levels of youth unemployment.

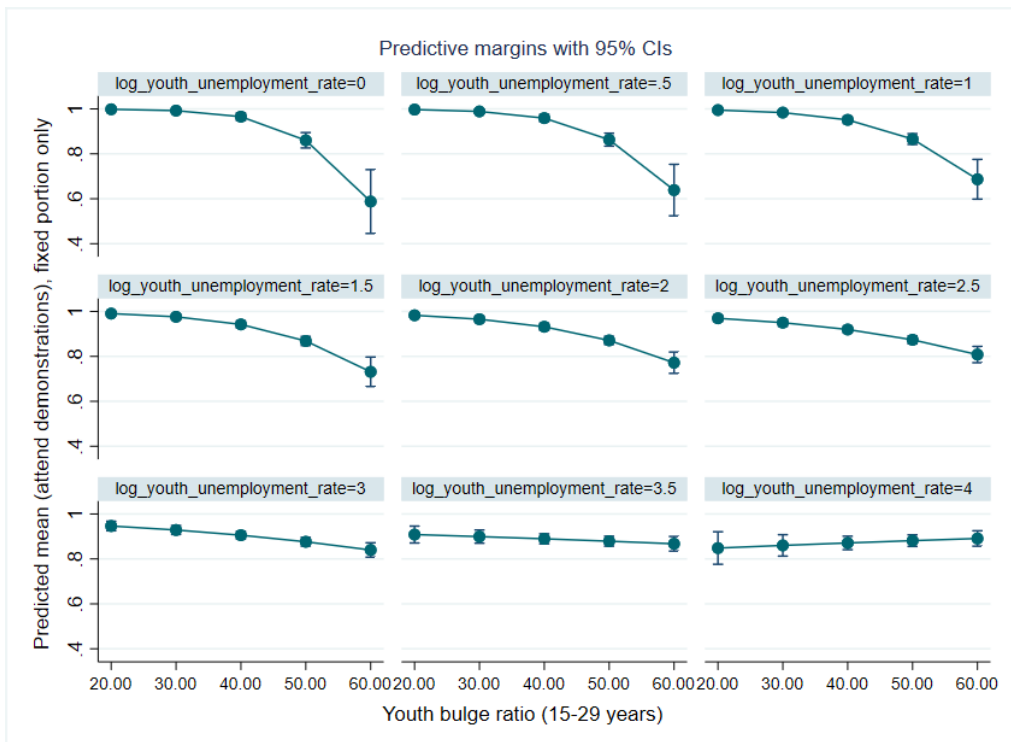


Figure 4: Standard Predicted Probability Plot for the Interaction of the Youth Bulge Ratio and Youth Unemployment Rate on Young Africans' Likelihood of Participating in Demonstrations.

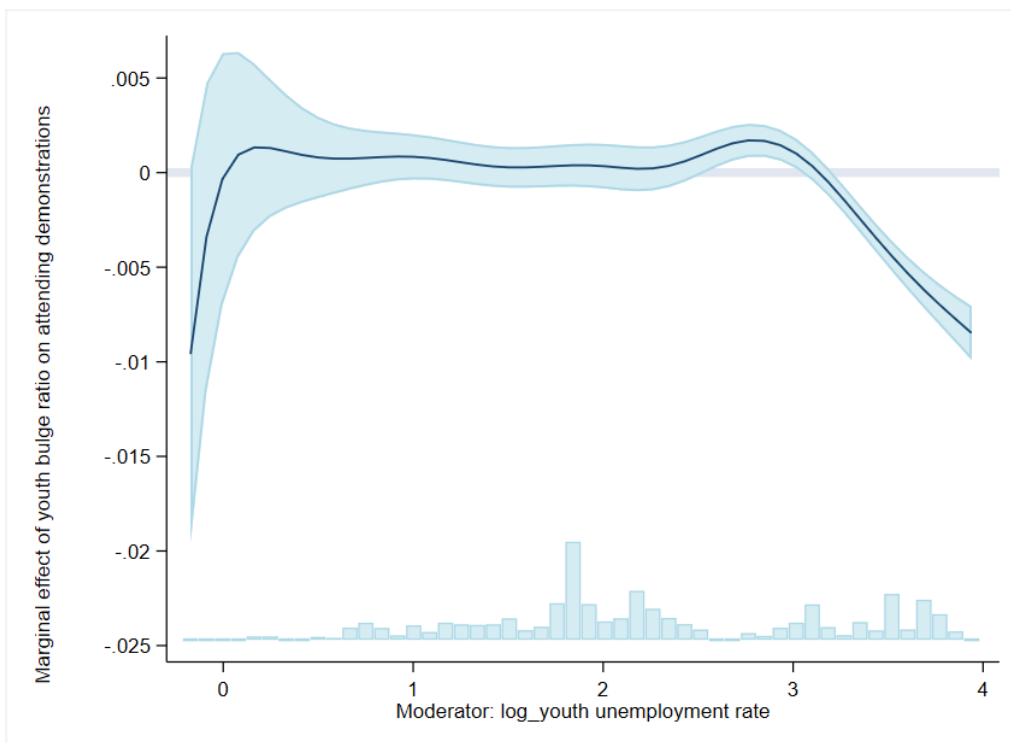


Figure 5: Marginal Effect of the Youth Bulge Ratio on Attending Demonstrations by Youth Unemployment Rate (Kernel Estimation).

Interaction between the Youth Bulge Ratio and Individual Employment Situation and the Effect of Control Variables

In response to the weak effect of the interaction between the YBR and the country-level unemployment rate on various political attitudes and participation, the study explored the interaction between the YBR and individual-level employment conditions. As shown in Table 4, this interaction positively influenced the likelihood of voting and attending demonstrations, though it had no significant effect on the other dependent variables. Figures 6 and 7 show the non-linear marginal effects of the interaction of the two variables on attending demonstrations and voting, respectively. Together, they show that the probability of participation in both activities increases for young people when they are employed. Jobless youth, on the other hand, show a lower probability of engagement in both activities.

The control variables in the analysis revealed important nuances in their effects on the dependent variables (Table 2). Individual-level sociodemographic and socioeconomic predictors had varying degrees of influence across the five outcome variables. The most consistent predictor at the individual level was membership in a community development group, which, as noted in the literature, serves as a critical pathway for acquiring civic skills that foster political participation. This variable was significantly associated with all five outcome variables, making it the only individual-level predictor to do so.

At the country level, both control of corruption and the quality of democracy showed nuanced effects on the dependent variables, further highlighting the complexity of the factors shaping political attitudes and participation. The above results are robust even after controlling for factors such as country-fixed effects and GDP per capita. The online appendix to the study provides the results of the different robustness tests carried out to check the sensitivity of the results of the main Models presented in this study.

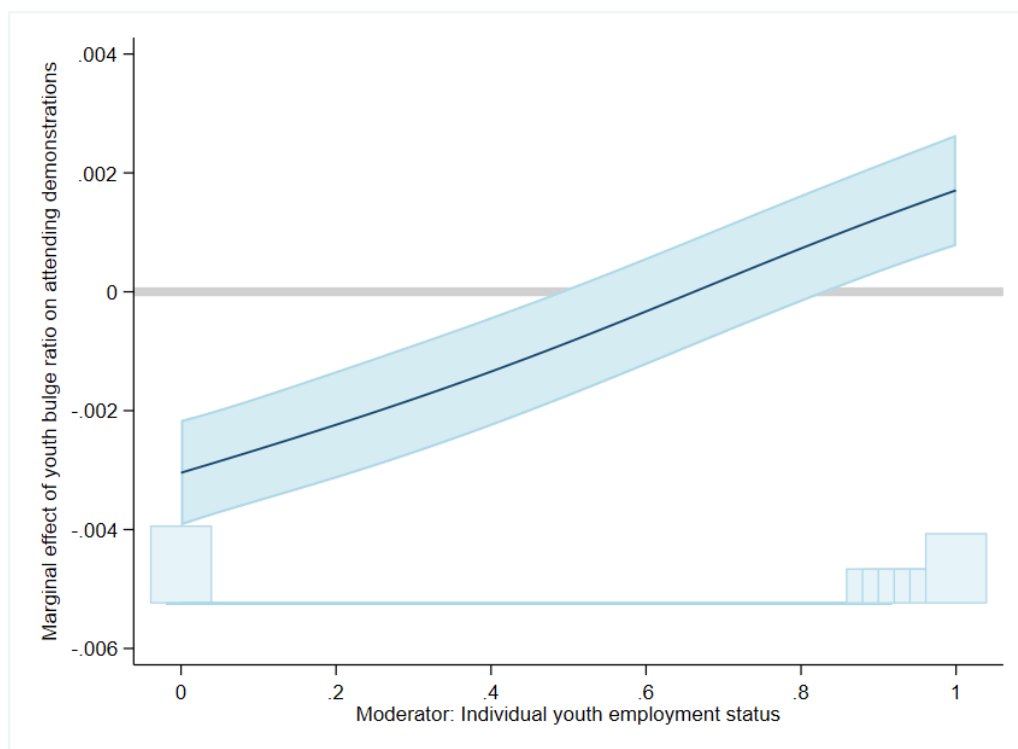


Figure 6: Marginal Effect of the Youth Bulge Ratio on Attending Demonstrations by Individual Youth Employment Status (Kernel Estimation).

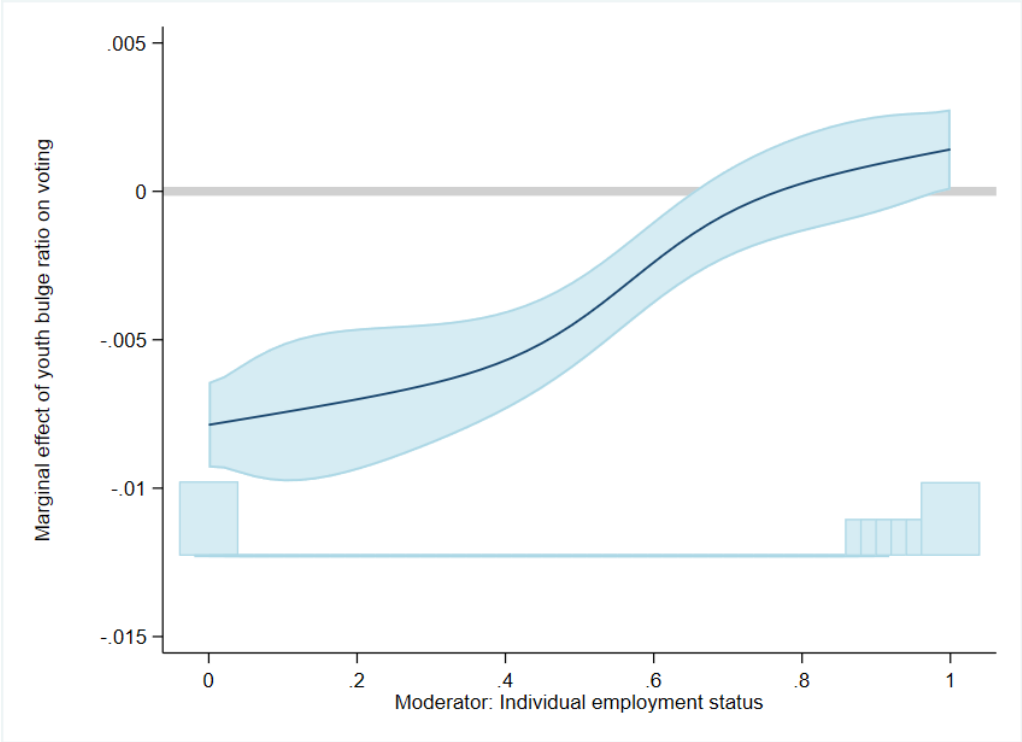


Figure 7: Marginal Effect of the Youth Bulge Ratio on Voting in Elections by Individual Youth Employment Status (Kernel Estimation).

Table 2: Additive Models, Main Explanatory and Moderating Variables in Regression on Five Dependent Variables

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Support for democracy [likelihood to prefer democracy over non-democratic alternatives]</i>	<i>Military rule [likelihood to approve of military rule]</i>	<i>Vote in national elections [likelihood to vote in elections]</i>	<i>Attend demonstrations [likelihood to attend demonstrations]</i>	<i>Used force or violence for a political cause [likelihood to use force for political cause]</i>
<i>Main explanatory variables</i>					
Youth bulge ratio	0.020***(0.006)	-0.086***(0.007)	-0.038***(0.006)	0.031***(0.007)	0.113** (0.037)
Youth unemployment rate	-0.282***(0.044)	0.212***(0.053)	-0.053 (0.047)	0.045 (0.053)	0.120 (0.135)
<i>Individual-level control variables</i>					
Age	0.015***(0.003)	-0.017***(0.004)	0.169*** (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)	0.003 (0.011)
Gender (Female) ¹	-0.119***(0.022)	-0.016 (0.025)	-0.078** (0.024)	-0.277***(0.028)	-0.360*** (0.081)
Residence (Rural) ²	0.042 (0.023)	0.060* (0.027)	0.239*** (0.025)	-0.036 (0.030)	0.095 (0.087)
Education ³					
— Informal	-0.142 (0.100)	-0.137 (0.114)	0.199 (0.138)	0.278 (0.147)	-0.362 (0.343)
— Primary	0.102(0.052)	-0.188*** (0.057)	-0.045 (0.061)	0.116 (0.083)	-0.122 (0.186)
— Secondary	0.385***(0.052)	-0.413*** (0.056)	-0.035 (0.060)	0.371*** (0.080)	-0.315 (0.185)
— Post-secondary without a university certificate	0.570***(0.059)	-0.767*** (0.067)	-0.009 (0.066)	0.660*** (0.086)	-0.482* (0.216)
— Completed university	0.566***(0.080)	-0.925*** (0.097)	-0.182* (0.084)	0.657*** (0.104)	-0.282 (0.295)
Employment (Employed) ⁴	-0.036 (0.024)	-0.016 (0.029)	0.157*** (0.026)	0.018 (0.031)	-0.006 (0.087)
Discuss politics (Yes)	0.067** (0.025)	-0.034 (0.029)	0.301*** (0.030)	0.679*** (0.029)	0.590*** (0.084)
Member of community development association (Yes)	-0.072** (0.028)	0.151*** (0.032)	0.298*** (0.031)	0.753*** (0.032)	0.680*** (0.089)
Religion ⁵					
— Islam	0.193*** (0.049)	-0.080 (0.058)	0.057 (0.055)	0.079 (0.064)	0.150 (0.205)
— Traditional religion	0.180* (0.076)	-0.058 (0.088)	0.165 (0.086)	0.031 (0.107)	0.278 (0.299)
— Christian religion	0.194*** (0.045)	-0.088 (0.053)	0.178*** (0.051)	0.071 (0.058)	0.013 (0.187)
— Agnostics	0.211* (0.088)	-0.412*** (0.108)	0.136 (0.096)	0.174 (0.120)	0.177 (0.383)
— Atheist	0.170 (0.094)	-0.093 (0.106)	-0.055 (0.097)	-0.156 (0.130)	-0.515 (0.541)
— Hindu	0.164* (0.084)	0.010 (0.094)	0.195* (0.089)	-0.082 (0.115)	-0.295 (0.406)
Satisfaction with democracy ⁶					
— Not satisfied	0.309*** (0.081)	-0.061 (0.100)	0.152 (0.090)	0.073 (0.119)	-0.327 (0.287)
— Satisfied	0.776*** (0.082)	-0.037 (0.100)	0.339*** (0.091)	-0.046 (0.119)	-0.450 (0.287)
<i>Country-level variables</i>					
— Control of corruption	0.161*** (0.044)	-0.209*** (0.050)	-0.111* (0.047)	0.176** (0.055)	-0.368 (0.235)
— Quality of democracy (V-Dem score)	1.776*** (0.298)	-2.657*** (0.353)	0.122 (0.315)	0.369 (0.332)	2.821** (0.944)
<i>Model characteristics</i>					
Constant	1.172*** (0.351)	-3.994*** (0.429)	2.266*** (0.380)	4.103*** (0.451)	10.382*** (2.148)
Country level σ^2	0.203*** (0.059)	0.697*** (0.193)	0.363*** (0.097)	0.176*** (0.049)	0.239* (0.118)
No. of observations	49035	47036	36875	49641	17872
No. of countries	35	35	35	35	31
chi ²	842.821	562.902	2715.233	1650.313	178.753
Log-likelihood	-27052.961	-21072.258	-21992.824	-18050.489	-2823.0195
Mean VIF	1.39	1.38	1.38	1.39	1.57

Note: Entries are the logistic regression coefficients and standard errors clustered at the country level (in parentheses) for multilevel binary logistic Models. Models were estimated using individual-level data on young people's political attitudes and participation, drawn from Afrobarometer Rounds 2–8. Reference category: (1) = Male; (2) = Urban; (3) = No education; (4) = Unemployed; (5) No religion; (6) Country is not democratic *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

Table 3: Interaction Models, Main Explanatory and Moderating Variables Regressed on Five Dependent Variables

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Support for democracy [likelihood to prefer democracy over non-democratic alternatives]</i>	<i>Military rule [likelihood to approve of military rule]</i>	<i>Vote in national elections [likelihood to vote in elections]</i>	<i>Attend demonstrations [likelihood to attend demonstrations]</i>	<i>Used force or violence for a political cause [likelihood to use force for political cause]</i>
<i>Main explanatory variables</i>					
Youth bulge ratio	0.007 (0.018)	-0.089*** (0.022)	-0.024 (0.019)	0.156*** (0.025)	0.084 (0.084)
Youth unemployment rate	-0.488 (0.288)	0.162 (0.337)	0.190 (0.313)	2.019*** (0.374)	-0.478 (1.558)
Youth bulge ratio x Youth unemployment rate	0.004 (0.006)	0.001 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.041*** (0.008)	0.012 (0.031)
<i>Individual and country-level control variables included</i>					
<i>Model characteristics</i>					
Constant	0.553 (0.924)	-4.142*** (1.078)	2.981** (0.988)	10.256*** (1.251)	8.937* (4.272)
Country level σ^2	0.201*** (0.058)	0.697*** (0.193)	0.363*** (0.097)	0.194*** (0.055)	0.241* (0.118)
No. of observations	49035	47036	36875	49641	17872
No. of countries	35	35	35	35	31
chi ²	843.786	562.815	2715.561	1671.451	178.695
Log-likelihood	-27052.699	-21072.247	-21992.517	-18036.058	-2822.9445
Mean VIF	1.39	1.38	1.38	1.39	1.57

Table 4: Interaction Models, Youth Bulge Ratio and Individual-Level Employment Status

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Support for democracy [likelihood to prefer democracy over non-democratic alternatives]</i>	<i>Military rule [likelihood to approve of military rule]</i>	<i>Vote in national elections [likelihood to vote in elections]</i>	<i>Attend demonstrations [likelihood to attend demonstrations]</i>	<i>Used force or violence for a political cause [likelihood to use force for political cause]</i>
<i>Main explanatory variables</i>					
Youth bulge ratio x Employed (Yes)	0.008 (0.006)	-0.009 (0.007)	0.026*** (0.006)	0.023** (0.007)	0.003 (0.026)
All control variables are included					
<i>Model characteristics</i>					
Constant	1.056** (0.362)	-3.859*** (0.441)	1.860*** (0.392)	3.721*** (0.466)	10.315*** (2.224)
Country level σ^2	0.203*** (0.059)	0.704*** (0.195)	0.367*** (0.099)	0.171*** (0.048)	0.238* (0.118)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to determine whether Africa’s youth bulge significantly affects the political attitudes and participation of young Africans. Specifically, it examined how the youth bulge in African countries influences political attitudes and participation behaviours: notably, young people’s likelihood of supporting democracy, rejecting military rule, voting in elections, participating in demonstrations, and resorting to the use of violence or force for political causes. The study also examined whether socioeconomic deprivation, particularly youth unemployment, alters the relationship between the youth bulge and these political attitudes and participation behaviours. Drawing on existing theoretical and empirical insights, which largely position the youth bulge as inimical to democratic governance, the study hypothesized that, as the youth bulge in an African country increases, young people would be less inclined to support democracy, but more inclined to approve of military rule. They would also be less inclined to vote in national elections. Conversely, it was expected that they would be more likely to participate in demonstrations and resort to violence for political reasons. These tendencies were similarly expected to be exacerbated by rising unemployment rates in a country.

The results of the analysis reveal that a youth bulge has a modest, yet highly significant and nuanced effect on the political attitudes and participation of young Africans. Notably, the larger the YBR in an African country, the more likely young people are to support democracy and reject military rule as their preferred system of governance. In other words, young people growing up as part of a youth bulge show a strong commitment to democratic values, principles, and norms, as well as a decreased likelihood of endorsing military rule. The results of the regression largely mirror the descriptive findings on the levels of support for democracy and military rule in Table 1, which show that 83.58 per cent and 79.76 per cent of the youth sample in the study support democracy and disapprove of military rule, respectively. Although this may have been unexpected, given the findings of previous studies, which observed a strong linkage between a youth bulge and a higher risk of anti-democratic attitudes among members of the bulge,¹⁰² the results are in line with more recent studies on the relationship between youth bulges and young people’s support for democracy across both established and new democratic societies.¹⁰³ A possible explanation for this result can be that, similar to the findings of earlier research, which demonstrated a positive effect of peer interactions in gathering and sharing political information, galvanizing political interest, and even recruiting peers into political activities,^{104,105} the sizeable pool of peers within a youth bulge serves as a positive social force in this case, reinforcing their democratic beliefs. The collective influence of their peer networks, therefore, amplifies their core commitment to democratic values and norms, supporting the democratic culture overall.¹⁰⁶

The study finds, however, that the strong support for democratic norms and principles within a youth bulge does not necessarily translate into a higher likelihood of political participation, especially electoral participation by African youth. Although the descriptive results of the study show that 48.21 per cent of the youth in the study sample voted in the

¹⁰² Weber, “Demography and Democracy,” 335.

¹⁰³ Nkansah and Bartha, “Anti-Democratic Youth?”, 553.

¹⁰⁴ Klofstad, “Civic Talk.”, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Bergan et al., “Promoting the Youth Vote.”, 2027.

¹⁰⁶ Nkansah and Bartha, “Anti-Democratic Youth?”, 553.

last national elections in their respective countries, the existence of a large youth cohort appears to significantly decrease the likelihood that young people will vote in elections. This potentially suggests a disconnect between the desire for democratic principles and electoral participation. The present finding, nonetheless, confirms the expectations of the study, and earlier research on the link between youth bulges and young people's voting behaviours,¹⁰⁷ and it seems to suggest that a youth bulge has a negative amplification effect on youth electoral participation. This could potentially imply that the patterns of youth disengagement from electoral politics reported across both established and new democracies can be expected to be more pronounced in African countries with youth bulges. An analysis of youth voter turnouts at national elections across African countries with longitudinal data could, however, interrogate this potentiality.

It seems, notwithstanding, that the already well-known factors of youth disengagement from electoral politics, such as young people's mistrust of the political establishment and doubts about their political efficacy – particularly in electoral contexts, where they feel their votes will not lead to meaningful change^{108,109} – may be exacerbated by a youth bulge. Relatedly, Nkansah and Papp argue that the common socioeconomic challenges faced by young people growing up in large cohorts, and the difficulties in transitioning into adulthood, shape peer conversations, both online and offline. These shared experiences, combined with resentment towards the political establishment, can foster voter apathy among young people.¹¹⁰ In fact, this study finds strong reasons to believe that the struggles of growing up in a youth bulge, coupled with individual socioeconomic disadvantages such as unemployment, may indeed contribute to youth voter apathy. For instance, the analysis shows that unemployment at the individual level is linked to a lower likelihood of voting in elections (Table 2). Additionally, the interaction between youth bulges and employment status reveals that unemployed individuals within a youth bulge are even less likely to vote (Table 4).

The above observation is also the case at the contextual level for political attitudes. A rising youth unemployment rate significantly diminishes pro-democracy attitudes among youth, reducing their support for democracy while increasing approval for military rule (Table 2). Although the interaction between youth bulges and youth unemployment rates does not exert a significant effect on pro-democracy attitudes in this instance, the net independent effect of national youth unemployment rates on pro-democracy attitudes among the youth could be a cause for concern for democratic consolidation. A similar effect of unemployment is observable in young people's propensity to participate in protests.

Although a youth bulge is positively associated with young people's likelihood of attending demonstrations – in line with the theoretical expectations of the study (Table 2) – the results reveal, however, that this tendency is influenced by economic conditions. Specifically, at the contextual level, countries with very low youth unemployment rates see a higher likelihood of youth participation in demonstrations, while at the individual level, employed youth are more likely to join demonstrations. In other words, participation in protests increases when young people have jobs and financial stability. Although this result may have been unexpected, it is not altogether surprising in light of earlier research and the predictions of resource-based theories of political participation, such as the Civic Voluntarism Model, which argues that active political participation is motivated by socioeconomic

¹⁰⁷ Nkansah and Papp, "Does Cohort Size Matter?", 859.

¹⁰⁸ Pilkington and Pollock, "Politics Are Bollocks.", 1.

¹⁰⁹ Salomé Sola-Morales and Víctor Hernández-Santaolalla, "Abstención Política y Nuevas Formas de Participación Política de Los Jóvenes: Análisis Comparativo Entre Chile y España," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 72 (2017).

¹¹⁰ Nkansah and Papp, "Does Cohort Size Matter?", 859.

factors such as education, access to gainful employment, and the acquisition of civic skills.^{111,112}

Tables 2 and 3, and Figures 4, 5, and 6 collectively show that those least likely to participate in demonstrations are young people in countries with both a youth bulge and high unemployment rates, especially those who are unemployed themselves, much in line with earlier research on the interaction between youth cohort size and youth unemployment on young people's participation in protests.¹¹³ Collectively, these findings highlight the crucial role that access to resources, such as employment or financial stability, plays in shaping political engagement among the youth. Recent studies also support this view, showing that most of the young participants in the 2011 Arab Spring in the Middle East were employed, with many of the movement's leaders being affluent, young, middle-class citizens.¹¹⁴

An important related finding is the positive association between youth bulges and the likelihood of using force or violence for political purposes. As shown in Table 2, a youth bulge raises the risk of young individuals resorting to violence for political causes. Although only 3 per cent of survey respondents admitted to ever using violence for political causes (Table 1), the fact that a youth bulge significantly increases this risk – controlling for other factors – is concerning but not surprising, given the findings of earlier research linking youth bulges to higher rates of violence and conflict in countries with such demographic profiles.^{115,116,117} Interestingly, this tendency appears to be unaffected by socioeconomic deprivation: neither unemployment at the country or individual level, nor their interaction with the youth bulge, impacted this relationship. This suggests that factors beyond socioeconomic deprivation – but possibly related to opportunity structures and sociobiological mechanisms associated with the youthful phase of life – may be driving this association.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for youth policy in Africa.

First, the study underscores that the economic and social challenges faced by a large youth population are closely linked to democratic issues. Whereas most discussions around increased investments in Africa's socioeconomic and technological development focus on the potential demographic dividend, the findings here demonstrate that such investments can also yield a *democratic dividend*. Policies aimed at improving the socioeconomic conditions of young people not only enhance their quality of life, but also allow for more active participation in democratic governance. Providing youth with crucial economic opportunities facilitates the creation of important leverages such as time, income, and civic skills, which enable them to engage more meaningfully in political processes.^{118,119} For African governments committed to sustaining democratic systems, these findings provide further

¹¹¹ Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, 1.

¹¹² Kern et al., "Economic Crisis and Levels of Political Participation in Europe (2002–2010)." ,465.

¹¹³ Nkansah, "Youth Cohort Size, Structural Socioeconomic Conditions, and Youth Protest Behaviour." , 1.

¹¹⁴ Zafiris Tzannatos, "The Youth Bulge: The Mismeasured, Misunderstood and Mistreated Arab Youth," in *The Routledge Handbook on the Middle East Economy*, ed. Hassan Hakimian, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2021), 302.

¹¹⁵ Cincotta, "Population Age Structure and the Vulnerability of States to Coups d'État." ,331.

¹¹⁶ Cincotta and Weber, "Youthful Age Structures and the Risks of Revolutionary and Separatist Conflicts." , 57.

¹¹⁷ Urdal, "A Clash of Generations?" , 607.

¹¹⁸ Kern, Marien, and Hooghe, "Economic Crisis and Levels of Political Participation in Europe (2002–2010)." 465.

¹¹⁹ Jan Teorell, "Political Participation and Three Theories of Democracy: A Research Inventory and Agenda," *European Journal of Political Research* 45, no. 5 (2006): 787.

motivation to implement effective policies that can achieve these goals swiftly.¹²⁰ Economic assistance programmes to African countries could, therefore, be tied to measurable outcomes in youth employment, since this directly addresses one of the factors hindering youth political participation and the strengthening of democracy on the continent.

Second, prioritizing civic education that highlights the importance of democracy, pro-democracy values, and political participation is crucial. This education should be integrated into mainstream school curricula and extracurricular activities and target all youth sub-populations – including those in-school/out-of-school, migrants/non-migrants, employed/unemployed, disabled/non-disabled, married/unmarried, rural/urban, detained/non-detained, literate/illiterate, sheltered/unsheltered, engaged/idle – and leverage technology effectively. Additionally, African governments must spearhead such initiatives, with support from development partners and civil society organizations. Given that one in five young Africans has an affinity for military rule, and that many are disengaged from political participation (Table 1), promoting democratic values and political participation in environments where young people are readily accessible, such as schools, community youth groups, and even churches and mosques, should be a key policy priority. The approach can stress how young people's participation in, for instance, elections can lead to change and help boost their self-efficacy and preference for democratic governance.

Third, African governments need to implement policy measures that enhance the representation of this large demographic force in political institutions and decision-making bodies, such as parliaments and cabinets,¹²¹ and local government structures. Such affirmative action policies are crucial for ensuring democratic legitimacy and social justice. The lack of substantive political representation for this large demographic group, therefore, raises serious questions about the legitimacy of political leadership in many African states. Since young voters tend to support young candidates, increasing youth representation in politics could enhance overall political engagement, including voting and other forms of political participation, particularly in the context of a youth bulge, where the likelihood of voting is lower, as revealed by the study. Relatedly, funding for civil society organizations can focus on leadership programmes that empower young Africans to take active roles in politics and/or youth-led movements and organizations that integrate young people into decision-making processes.


Fourth, the association between youth bulges and the increased risk of using force or violence for political purposes is consistent with extensive evidence linking young demographics to higher risks of democratic deconsolidation, coups, and political violence. Since youth bulges result primarily from high birth rates, this study supports the view that development cooperation should focus on interventions that accelerate age-structural transitions towards more stable demographic profiles conducive to economic growth and social development. To achieve this, African societies need to transition to median ages between 26 and 45 years. This requires the promotion of policies that support reproductive health education and services, particularly family planning, as well as women's education and autonomy. Such initiatives, alongside other development programmes, can strategically alter the age structures to favour economic and social progress, while also mitigating the risks of democratic deconsolidation through political violence and military coups.¹²²

¹²⁰ Godfred Bonnah Nkansah, "Young People's Demography in Democracy: The Effect of Youth Cohort Size on Youth Political Attitudes and Behaviours in Democratic Societies (1995-2020)" (PhD thesis, Corvinus University of Budapest, 2023), <https://phd.lib.uni-corvinus.hu/1323/>.

¹²¹ Daniel Stockemer and Aksel Sundström, "Age Inequalities in Political Representation: A Review Article," *Government and Opposition* 3 (2023): 1.

¹²² Cincotta, "Population Age Structure and the Vulnerability of States to Coups d'État.", 331.

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