



# Introduction: Political Demography as an Analytical Window on Our World

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## 1 WHY WE NEED A POLITICAL DEMOGRAPHY LENS

Much has happened to the world's populations in the past three decades since 1990. Migration flows have become large and volatile, making news headlines and firing up political rhetoric on an almost monthly basis. Nearly every society in the rich world has been ageing for decades, yet

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some of the world's poorest countries still have a population make-up revealing massive youth bulges (clearly higher population shares in young age groups). Urbanization has changed the ways in which individuals live and interact on many continents and is likely to accelerate even further in the near future. The majority of the United Nations (UN) member states have policies in place to attempt some form of population control or demographic engineering, traditionally mainly in order to manipulate fertility rates, now increasingly also migration variables. With many key variables of population structure in flux wide across the world, there has rarely been a more urgent time to ask key questions at the interface of demography and political science, population change and politics. What have been the political and policy consequences of these population changes in the world's macro-regions since 1990 until today? And what can we reasonably expect to happen up to 2040?

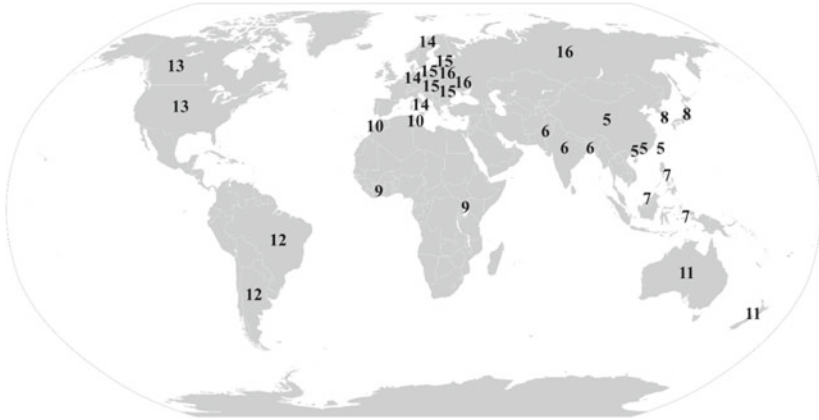
Political demography, or the systematic study of population change and politics, public policies and politics, sees population dynamics (structure and change) as one of the main drivers of politics at the meso- and macro-level. As an approach, it can be defined as the study of the dynamics in the size, composition and distribution of populations and their effects on political and policy processes.<sup>1</sup> As such, rare exceptions notwithstanding (Goldstone et al., 2012; Teitelbaum, 2015; Vanhuysse & Goerres, 2012; Weiner & Teitelbaum, 2001), political demography is still a surprisingly marginal discipline, both within demography and within political science with no major research networks, loose or institutionalized, or standard works of reference. And yet, 'the human tide' of ever-shifting and changing population trends has been a key shaper of the political and sociological outlines of the world we inhabit today (Dorling & Gietel-Basten, 2018; Morland, 2019). Indeed, however widespread it still may be, the very idea of analysing populations and politics *separately* seems futile. As Robbins and Smith (2017: 212) put it, "[t]here is a close relationship between observations of births, deaths, and fertility and normative urges to govern these same things: population research is political research".

<sup>1</sup> In the words of Myron Weiner, one of its earliest advocates, political demography is "the study of the size, composition, and distribution of population in relation to both government and politics. It is concerned with the political consequences of population change, especially the effects of population change on the demands made upon governments, on the performance of governments, on the distribution of political power within states, and on the distribution of national power among states" (cited in Teitelbaum, 2015: S88).

This book posits that it is both timely and fruitful to adopt a political demography lens as an analytical window on our fast-changing world. We try to do so by bringing together a truly global group of scholars from area studies, demography, economics, geography, political science and sociology, to trace and think through political and policy processes of demographic trends in the macro-region of their expertise, under the editorial guidance of two died-in-the-wool political scientists. Our aims are, first and foremost, descriptive: to track, synthesize and summarize the key demographic developments across these large macro-regions between 1990 and 2040. Then, in a second instance, we aim to theorize, sometimes speculate, about the domestic and intra-regional political and policy repercussions of these developments.

## 2 DEMOGRAPHIC MEGATRENDS: GLOBAL POLITICAL GAME CHANGERS

We define population change for our purposes as: (a) the change in the relative size of the age groups in those societies (mostly due to changes in fertility, longevity; realized as population ageing or rejuvenation), (b) international migration and (c) changes in the absolute size of the population. Political consequences refer, here, to political processes such as voting outcomes, political rhetoric, power balances and various expressions—peaceful or otherwise—of political conflict, public policies (e.g. pensions, education, family policy, population control) and political institutions. We largely leave aside related important questions of military strategy and geopolitical balance (e.g. Goldstone, 2002; Haas 2012; Sciubba, 2012) or of population ethics (e.g. Coole, 2018; Dasgupta, 2019; van Parijs, 1998). In terms of geographic scope, we aim for a truly all-encompassing global scope. We present comparative analyses, written by area experts, of major countries in the following macro-regions: North Africa (Tunisia and Morocco) and sub-Saharan Africa (Côte d’Ivoire and Uganda); Southern America (Argentina and Brazil) and Northern America (Canada and the US), South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh); Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines); East Asia (South Korea and Japan; China, Macao, Hong Kong and Taiwan); Australia and Oceania (New Zealand); and Europe (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus); Continental Western Europe; and East Central Europe. Figure 1 shows a map highlighting which countries are covered in which chapter.



**Fig. 1** Overview of countries covered in the book and their chapter (*Source* Own computation)

In addition, to better frame these macro-regional analyses, we also present overarching synthetic overviews of three hugely salient issues of global political demography today: migration flows (Skeldon, this volume), poverty and religious affiliation (Skirbekk & Navarro, this volume) and youth bulges (Cincotta & Weber, this volume). Extending our analytical time horizon up to 2040, a frequent practice in demography, may rightly be a cause of scepticism to many political scientists or sociologists. After all, predicting the future is a notoriously perilous activity, the graveyard of many an expert's reputation (Tetlock, 2006; Tetlock & Gardner, 2015). Human societies are complex systems in which agentic actors must navigate uncertain landscapes, and which have emergent properties (Jervis, 1997; Room, 2016). As Karl Popper (1957) noted long ago, an important set of major social trends are *by nature* unexpected and *essentially* hard to predict and plan for. These include 'black swan' shocks such as financial, environmental and economic crises that are extremely hard to predict, yet, when they occur, radically perturb the game plans of policymakers and social actors (Taleb, 2001, 2013). However, population developments are at least partially an *exception* to the inherent unpredictability of social and political life. True enough, as Europe has observed since 2015, massive migration streams can arise in the scope of days and weeks, significantly shaping political actions,

discourses and policies. Rare, devastating pandemics such as COVID-19 since late 2019 can have even swifter, and strongly age-asymmetric, effects on population mortality rates. But in other respects, populations better resemble massive, slow-moving elephants. Once a cohort has been born, we know with relative statistical certainty key elements of its future life course, such as its infant mortality, gender balance, expected life span and remaining life span at ages 40, 60 and 80 (but, crucially, *not* its net migration rate). It is this mixture of certainty and unpredictability of population change and its interdependence with politics that fascinated us throughout this book.

So we do know a few things with some confidence, extrapolating into the near future from currently ongoing global population trends. And what we know points to both major turbulences and disparities ahead. Already today, half the world's population is younger than 30, but half the rich world's voting population is over 55. In other words, within global trends there is substantial variation in population changes and political reactions. As Kaufmann and Toft (2012: 5) note, the demographic trends of the twenty-first century will lead, almost inevitably, to “aging great powers with shrinking labour forces alongside youthful and rapidly growing developing nations home to terrorism and turbulence”.

For instance, *youth bulges* are near-certain to arise or even grow in places like Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. And when they do, they are likely, though not predestined, to be accompanied by a higher incidence of crime, violence and unemployment (Cincotta & Weber, this volume; Cincotta & Doces, 2012; Urdal, 2012). By contrast, the labour force is near-certain to shrink significantly as *silver populations* will continue to grow in super-sized economies such as Japan, Brazil, China and every single one of Europe's key economic powerhouses (Bloom et al., 2015; Vanhuysse & Goerres, 2012). Unlike Coleman and Basten (2015), Goldstone (2012: 25–27) posits that globally, the next few decades will see the relative decline of Europe and the Americas compared to Asia and Africa, “a fun house mirror of aging” of older rich countries and very young poor countries, and “migration, migration everywhere”.

But—what is ageing? It is certainly true that Europe, like East Asia and South America, are becoming demographically older continents when the aggregate age is measured by standard (chronological) old-age dependency ratios (henceforth OADRs, the number of 65plussers per 100 people aged 18–64). But of course, especially in the richer regions of

these same continents and among the richer classes within them, chronologically elderly citizens are also likely to grow both cognitively fitter and *prospectively* younger, with longer remaining life expectancy at later ages (Kristensen et al., 2009; Sanderson & Scherbov, 2010, 2019; Skirbekk, 2012). As Vanhuyse and Perek-Bialas (this volume) put it, with few notable exceptions, many of the world’s rich societies today are *simultaneously* ageing (chronologically) and not ageing or even rejuvenating (prospectively).

However, these observable trends—themselves a result of better lifestyles, health policies, health treatments and technologies, and early-life conditions—are unlikely to translate *proportionately* into outcomes of political economy importance, whether in terms of increased productivity, economic growth, faster technology adoption or higher levels of labour market participation on the part of older workers through later retirement or even unretirement (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017; Gordon, 2016). Neither are they likely to be compensated by massive (and politically unpalatable) immigration boosts. Despite improvements in prospective old-age dependency ratios, the continued increase of chronological old-age dependency ratios therefore implies that there will be fewer young and prime working-age people burdened with providing fiscal foundations for ageing welfare states (Sanderson & Scherbov, 2019; Vanhuyse, 2015a). For instance, the UN Population Division estimated that already by 2030 the number of 60plussers will be two-thirds larger than that of children below 15 in France and more than twice as large in Germany. As Goldstone (2012: 26) notes, these are “astonishing numbers, never before seen in human history”.

### 3 GREY POWER AND VOTING: PRO-ELDERLY POLICY BIAS AND THE RISE OF GERONTOCRACY?

In political science and political economy, the near-universal acceleration of population ageing since the 1990s in the advanced democracies has led to renewed debates about elderly power. This literature puts forward three main propositions: (1) currently, older persons receive more overall public transfers than in past decades (Kotlikoff & Burns, 2012); (2) older persons receive more than children (Vanhuyse, 2013) when looked at cross-sectionally; and (3) the elderly/children public transfer ratio has been increasing. The tendency is alternatively referred to as ‘grey power’,

‘gerontocracy’ (Sinn & Uebelmesser, 2002), or ‘pro-elderly bias’ (Tepe & Vanhuyse, 2010a). More alarmist accounts even speak of generational ‘storms’ or ‘clashes’ (Kotlikoff & Burns, 2012). Here, too, non-linear and non-functionalist thinking would be welcome. Direct evidence of resource grabs by elderly voters is mixed at best thus far.<sup>2</sup> True enough, advanced welfare states do indeed appear to be distinctly, if variably, elderly oriented in their *public transfer* patterns (Tepe & Vanhuyse, 2010a; Vanhuyse, 2013, 2014). But once we shine a wider light on what resources generations give each other and also look at private transfer patterns (cash and time), the ensuing picture is not just more complete but also radically different. These same welfare states, it turns out, are actually embedded within societies composed of strongly *child*-oriented families (really, parents) (Gal et al., 2018; Vanhuyse & Gal, 2021). Also, the social status of older people is lower in some contemporary societies, even though their relative numerical share is higher (Foner, 1984). In other words, it may be that grey power is talked about most in contexts in which the social status of older people (especially, older men) has never been lower. That said, changes in the distribution of political power and other key resources are highly likely to follow from the *uneven* demographic growth rates of key ethnic, religious and age groups within the population (Goldstone, 2012; Teitelbaum, 2015). Uneven growth is crucial for politics—these *relative* power changes in turn are likely to lead to distinct political developments and conflicts at the meso-, macro- and inter-state level.<sup>3</sup>

Our overarching question in this book is how the ever-evolving political economy and political sociology traits of some population groups relative to others—notably in terms of numerical size, economic clout and political capacity—can be expected to affect public policies, political actions and political order, via the intermediary of political and institutional processes, and how this may then produce various feedback effects. What does the demographic profile in terms of statics and dynamics tell us

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Vanhuyse (2001), Goerres (2007a, 2009), Tepe and Vanhuyse (2009, 2010b, 2012) and Goerres and Vanhuyse (2012).

<sup>3</sup> To quote Kaufmann and Toft (2012: 5): “Unbalanced age (and sex) ratios tend to alter rates of economic growth, unemployment, instability, and violence. Urbanization creates dislocations that have traditionally been associated with religious, ethnic, class, or nationalist movements. And differential ethno-religious population growth may set the stage for ethnic, religious, and nationalist violence, value conflict, or challenges to the unity of what are often fragile states”.

about the political problems that a country or a macro-region was facing in 1990, is facing today, and will be facing by 2040? This demographic structure in turn reflects stages of socio-economic modernization. Cohort sizes influence citizens' demand on the state in certain policy areas, as mediated by institutions, notably constellations of trade unions and age-relevant interest groups, electoral, legal and constitutional rules, policy and governance cultures, and welfare state regimes. The degree to which these factors affect a cohort's relative political power will then affect its command of policy resources and the cornerstones of political order. To analyse these many variables empirically and coherently, we have built the Global Political Demography Database (Goerres et al., 2020) as an empirical companion to this book, which covers many more countries than we can analyse in depth here.

## 4 PUTTING THE GLOBAL POLITICAL DEMOGRAPHY DATABASE TO WORK

### 4.1 *The Age Composition of Societies*

It is worth pointing out from the outset that the observation that a larger number of people can expect to live longer lives (of quality) is, perhaps first and foremost, a yardstick of social progress (Vanhuyssse, 2015b). Moderately low levels of fertility may actually imply improvements in living standards (Lee, 2014). In fact, they may even be desirable as long as human capital levels increase and environmental costs decrease (Dasgupta, 2019; Striessnig & Lutz, 2013). Population ageing is therefore not a moral problem as such. Nor is it necessarily a political *problem* everywhere, as many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate. Globally, the median age rose from 23.4 in 1990 to 29.3 in 2015. It is projected to rise even further to 35.6 in 2040. Let us turn towards the share of older people as more directly relevant indicator from an ageing perspective. Globally, the proportion of people aged 65+ had a mean of 6.0% in 1990, 8.4% in 2015 and is estimated to rise to 14.5% in 2040. This implies an increase by a factor of 2.4 in 50 years. Moreover, the heterogeneity of the share of older people is also increasing strongly, from a standard deviation of 3.9% in 1990 to 8.9% in 2040. In other words, the population make-up with regard to older people will be getting more heterogeneous as we progress into the future. The per-country change in the proportion of older people relative to the population across the period 1990–2040



varies dramatically, too. Seven countries, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Chad, Sao Tome and Principe, Central African Republic, Lesotho, Burkina Faso are projected to experience a small decline in the proportion of older people between 1990 and 2040, with the 1.2 percentage point decline in Equatorial Guinea being the largest. Among all other 193 countries and regions in the sample, the projection points towards an increase in the proportion of the older people between 1990 and 2040. South Korea is the world leader in population ageing with an estimated increase of +25.9 percentage points from 5.2 to 31.1% (also Klein & Mosler, this volume). This almost universal picture of population ageing does not go hand in hand with a universal awareness of population ageing as a political issue. In fact, surprisingly, even some countries with rapid ageing, such as India, show no indication yet of that being problematized (James & Balachandran, this volume).

Other demographic indicators mirror a similar pattern. To touch briefly on the young end of the distribution, globally the relative proportion of young people (aged 0–17) had a mean of 41.2% in 1990 and is projected to decline to only 26.8% in 2040. But even in 2040, there will still be a lot of cross-country-heterogeneity as to the variation of the share of young people between the minimum of 13.8% in Portugal and the maximum of 53.2% in Congo. In 2040, the proportion of young people will be roughly four times as high in Congo as in Portugal with a large potential for conflict in the former compared to the latter (Urdal, 2012; Cincotta & Weber, this volume).

Another key demographic indicator is the OADR. This measure is politically very relevant since many age-redistributive systems are built around the notion of taking from the working-age population (with a censoring of working age at 15 and around the mid-60s) and giving it to people aged older than mid-60s, and typically retired around that age (Gal et al., 2018; Vanhuyse & Gal, 2021). Even though the age demarcation lines are likely to change, this idea of cross-age group public redistribution is likely to remain valid into the future of welfare politics. In 1990, across the globe there were on average 9.8 65plussers per 100 people aged 15–64. This number rose to 12.9 in 2015 and is projected to rise to 23.6 in 2040. This means that on average the OADR is estimated to rise by the factor 2.4 in 50 years. In 2040, the minimum (4.8) will be slightly above that in 1990 (1.7), but the maximum will rise from 27.7 in 1990 (Sweden) to 69.3 in 2040 (Martinique). Some countries will see such an OADR increase of 54.7 (Martinique). Other countries that started from

a low OADR level in 1990 will see an unprecedented relative rise by a factor of more than 8, such as the United Arab Emirates (from 1.7 to 16.3). In other words, any system based on cross-age redistribution in the United Arab Emirates is undergoing a drastic change in the relative group sizes that are part of that redistribution. Such drastic changes minimally need political mediation and can maximally lead to political conflict about how to manage such changes politically.

#### 4.2 *International Migration*

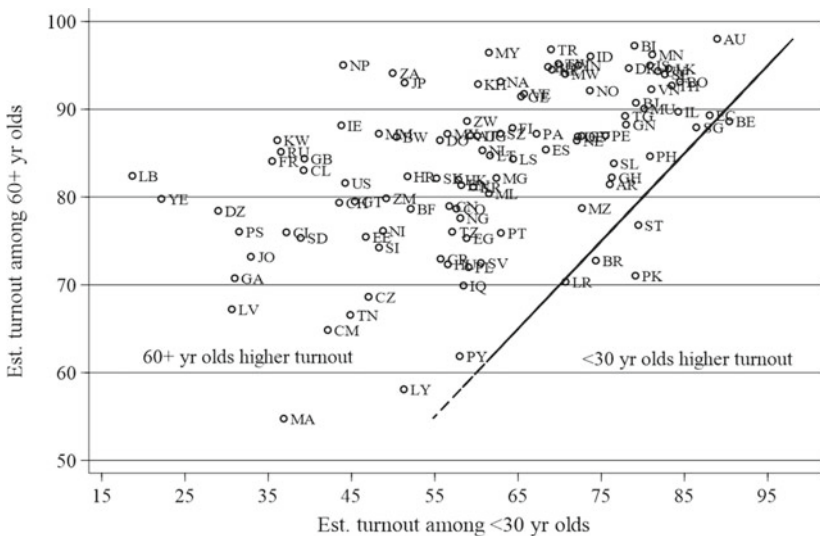
In the five-year period 1985 to 1990, most countries experienced relatively little net migration in percent of their 1990 population size (the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants divided by 1990 population size). The mean was  $-0.7\%$ , meaning that on average countries experiences a slight emigration averaged across the previous 5 years, worth about  $0.7\%$  of their 1990 populace. Indeed, the bulk of countries in the middle 50% of the distribution, within the interquartile range, reached values between  $-1.7$  and  $+0.6\%$ . There were some stark outliers in that period, too. Ten countries had a negative net migration worth more than 10% of its 1990 population size with Liberia at the minimum of  $-19.0\%$  due to its civil war at that time. Four countries had more than 10% positive net migration with Djibouti at the maximum of  $15.3\%$ . The overall picture remained pretty similar in 2015, with a mean of  $0.1\%$ , an interquartile range between  $-1.2$  and  $+0.7\%$ , a minimum of  $-22.5\%$  (Syria due to its civil war) and a maximum of  $+26.9\%$  (Qatar, due to massive domestic investment attracting migrant labourers). These few descriptive statistics suffice to show how single country episodes can drastically change the net migration experience of a country (also Skeldon, this volume). This, we speculate, is the reason that the projections for net migration in the period 2035–2040 (medium UN projection) are much more homogeneous, compared to the historical numbers because single episodes cannot be predicted well. The 200 countries are projected to have much less extreme values as to their net migration. When we compare net migration relative to population size in 2010–2015 with net migration in 1985–1990, we see again the importance of single episodes shifting the migration profile of some countries dramatically, sometimes even from a strong emigration profile to a strong immigration profile. Lebanon, for instance, changed from relative net migration of  $-8.4\%$  in 1990 to  $+21.3\%$  in 2015 due to the combination of its own past civil war

and the civil war in adjacent Syria. This foreshadows some of the patterns that the contributors in this book observe (for instance, Skeldon, this volume).

### 4.3 *Patterns of Covariation Between Population and Political Indicators*

Let us look at three political indicators and see how they co-vary with central indicators of demography: age group composition, net migration and fertility. For our Global Political Demography Database (Goerres et al., 2020), we compiled, more extensively than ever before to our knowledge, age group specific estimates of electoral turnout (see online Appendix A.1 for a detailed table).

Figure 2 reveals an almost universal political demography observation: older people are more likely to go to the polls compared to young people in the same country. Only few countries are on or to the right



**Fig. 2** Estimated turnout rates in the last national election in or just before 2015 for young people (aged 18–29) and older people (60+) (*Source* Own computations from Global Political Demography Database [Goerres et al., 2020])

of the 45-degree line (which captures countries where the turnout rates are the same), possibly due to a rather universal process of habituation and growing norm-abidance associated with individual ageing (Goerres, 2007b). If we combine these two pieces of information into one data point by producing a ratio (estimated turnout of older people divided by estimated turnout among young people), we get a variable of the turnout of older people (those aged above 60) relative to that of younger people (those aged 18–29). This relative turnout ratio varies between 0.89 (Pakistan) to 4.4 (Lebanon), with a mean of 1.5. This means that on average turnout among older people is 1.5 times as high as that of younger people. Can we predict this relative turnout by demographic indicators, with simple controls for electoral system, average turnout and GDP? When we run a multivariate regression, we find that higher net migration relative to the 2015 population positively predicts the ratio. Countries with more immigration also tend to have an electoral turnout ratio skewed more in favour of older people. For every percentage point more of net migration, the turnout ratio is estimated to increase by 0.04 (90% c.i. [0.013; 0.07.3]). Recall that the turnout ratio ranges from 0.9 to 4.4. There is thus a correlational pattern between the ratio of turnout rates and migration even after we have included simple control variables.

Let us now go one step further and add the relative population size of each age group to the relative turnout measure. We multiply the relative turnout ratio by the age group size ratio (those aged above 60 divided by those aged 18–29). This new variable, *relative elderly power*, proxies the electoral-numerical strength of older relative to younger age groups. It can take high values when the relative share of older people gets bigger and when the turnout of older people gets bigger relative to that of younger people (Table 1). Japan comes out top because it has both a high share of older people relative to that of younger people and a relatively high electoral turnout among older people (also Klein & Mosler, this volume). All five other countries in the top six of the ‘relative elderly power’ ratio globally are European. Three of these are demographically still somewhat younger countries from East Central Europe, a macro-region where many countries have developed strong tendencies towards premature gerontocracy and pro-elderly bias (Vanhuyssse, 2006; Vanhuyssse & Perek-Bialas, this volume). These East Central European countries have remarkably low turnout rates among young people relative to older people, placing these countries high on that measure.

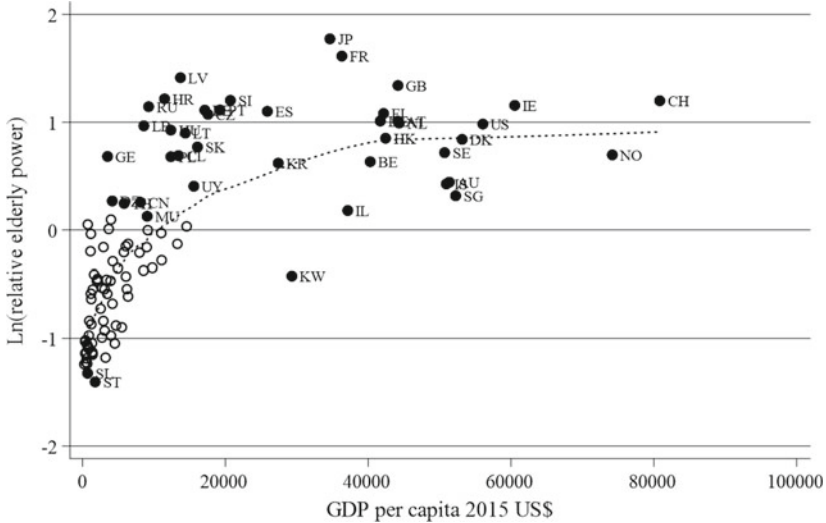
**Table 1** Relative elderly power across the world in 2015

Top 6	5.9 Japan
	5.0 France
	4.1 Latvia
	3.8 UK
	3.4 Croatia
	3.3 Slovenia
Mean	1.3
Bottom 5	0.25 Sao Tome and Principe
	0.27 Sierra Leone
	0.29 Burundi, Uganda, Liberia

*Source* Own computations from Global Political Demography Database (Goerres et al., 2020)

At the bottom of Table 1, we find a number of demographically very young societies in Africa where young people are relatively active in terms of turnout. We take the natural logarithm of this variable in order to stretch out the range between 0 and 1 and to make the ranges below and above 1 more comparable unitwise. We plot this variable against GDP per capita in 2015 (Fig. 3) and find a relatively clear relationship. Richer countries tend to have higher values on the  $\ln$  (relative elderly power) variable. The increases are particularly large among the poorer countries and less so at higher levels of GDP/per capita. This relationship holds in a regression set-up when we control for net migration and voting turnout. That is, richer countries tend to have an old-age power measure more tilted in favour of older people, and this relationship is much steeper among the bottom half poorest countries than in the top half.

In 2015, the 183 countries for which our Global Political Demography Database has information showed government revenue of between 7.6 and 160% of GDP, with a mean of 29.6%. Stronger states can collect more revenue relative to the size of their economies. Such stronger state capacity is clearly related to population structure: government revenue is predicted to be higher in countries with a higher share of older people, but it is not significantly associated with net migration. The significant estimate from the share of older people takes the predictive power away from GDP per capita, which otherwise positively predicted revenue. In other words, government revenue is higher in richer countries, but this effect is ultimately mediated by the share of older people: population structure beats economic prosperity in terms of explanatory power.



**Fig. 3** The curvilinear relationship between relative elderly power (logged) and GDP per capita (around 2015) (*Source* Own computations from Global Political Demography Database [Goerres et al., 2020])

This short exploratory analysis has revealed a number of striking patterns. First, population ageing is a near universal experience across much but not all of the world. Second, population ageing shows increasing heterogeneity across societies. The world is becoming more different in terms of its population ageing experience with sometimes stark differences between 1990 and 2040 as to measures of ageing. Third and in contrast, international migration does not change much if we compare the aggregate snapshot pictures of 1990 and 2015. However, there are strong differences in the experience of migration change across countries. Fourth, we have explored electoral turnout of older people relative to younger people, relative elderly power and government revenue as key variables of political demography. For all three variables, we detect patterns of association with various demographic measures that introduce a number of patterns worth exploring.

## 5 GLOBALLY CROSSCUTTING THEMES OF POLITICAL DEMOGRAPHY: MIGRATION, RELIGION AND AGE PROFILES

After three overarching globally comparing chapters, this book analyses selected countries in all the world's major geographic macro-regions. We are reminded of the central place of migration in the political founding myths of states and nations in history by Ronald Skeldon (this volume). The social construction of migration has always been a powerful narrative to explain political change. Moreover, Skeldon points towards a global shift in the politics of migration. Seen from the countries with low and further declining fertility, there is a growing need for immigrants from other countries that also tend to have higher fertility. At the same time, there is an increasing fear of 'the others' who are migrating, with extreme right-wing and/or nationalist-populist parties and other political actors capitalizing on that fear. How democratic polities with low fertility navigate the political consequences of their need for immigration may be one of the most important open questions for political demography. Finally, Skeldon analyses the importance of diaspora politics, both for the countries of residence and for the sending countries (also Collier, 2014). Members of the diaspora may be transnational drivers of political change. In their countries of residence, they might influence the foreign policy towards the countries they or their ancestors originally came from. Financial remittances and the diffusion of, for instance, democratic norms may fundamentally change elements of political life in these sending countries.

Vegard Skirbekk and José Navarro (this volume) provide a novel description of the religious composition of the poorest one-fifth of people worldwide, around a billion individuals. They argue that religions traditionally offer ways of coping with poverty, including meaning and hope, and could also steer flows of financial wealth. The religious composition of a country or a region may also affect the level of social support and level of financial transfers, as welfare and social welfare systems can be organized through religious groups and indirectly affected by the degree of social welfare. Some religious groups have relatively large shares living in poverty, such as the Hindu community. These religions may motivate different political behaviour if a large share of their compatriots is poor. For instance, this could motivate a stronger preference for transfers within the particular religions—but may also lower the ability to implement an effective, universal and sufficiently generous social security scheme as the

economic burden would be too high on the rest of the community whose members might be unwilling to shoulder it.

Richard Cincotta and Hannes Weber (this volume) analyse the relationship between age transition of countries (the shift in the mean age) and intra-state conflicts across the globe. They demonstrate that societies at an early stage of the age transition, as characterized by a ‘youth bulge’ on the age pyramids, have a higher likelihood of experiencing revolutionary conflicts. This pattern is also visible for separatist conflicts, but not as clearly. The authors thus add to the theoretical notion that higher numbers of younger people with low risk aversion and not enough social and economic mobility create political conflict (also Goldstone, 2002; Urdal, 2012). Interestingly, Cincotta and Weber’s findings can be juxtaposed with the literature about gerontocracy in advanced industrial democracies (Tepe & Vanhuyse, 2009, 2010a). Cincotta and Weber demonstrate that young societies have a particularly high likelihood to experience intra-state conflict, but this likelihood decreases as societies age. In mature welfare states, in contrast, older societies with a higher share of older people are feared because they mean a higher number of beneficiaries that need to be financed.

## 6 THE ‘OLD’ CONTINENT: IS THE EUROPEAN PHOENIX GOING BACK TO ASHES?

The countries in Western Europe, broadly defined, are prime examples of the political consequences of population ageing. Increasing life expectancy and low fertility have for decades led to older and continuously ageing societies. Elias Naumann and Moritz Hess (this volume) show that Germany, Italy and Sweden, despite having very different welfare state regimes, have dealt with the political challenges of ageing very similarly. They have introduced various measures to reconcile paid work and unpaid parental care and integrate more women and older people into the paid workforce. Immigration has not met the demands for more workforce thus far. Although there is little evidence that mass immigration has de-legitimized the welfare state, it has contributed to the rise of right-populist parties wide across Western Europe. It remains to be seen whether these countries will remain able to maintain their extensive welfare states despite continuously ageing populations merely by gradual and marginal adjustment of their welfare state structures (Tepe & Vanhuyse, 2009, 2010b, 2012).



In East Central Europe, a quarter-century-long demographic window after 1990 offered extensive opportunity to prepare for fast population ageing ahead. But this opportunity has largely been spurned, and the window is now shut. As Pieter Vanhuyse and Jolanta Perek-Bialas (this volume) note, the new East Central European democracies, despite having started the post-communist era with comparatively young populations, subsequently adapted their policy models insufficiently for the predicted accelerated greying of their populations. Especially in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and the Czech and Slovak republics, this failure is reflected in comparatively low ranks in active ageing and child well-being indexes, small social investment in early human capital, weak improvements in prospective old-age dependency ratios, and often dramatic levels of outmigration of young people. The latter four countries and Slovenia, but not the Baltics, also developed into “pensioners’ welfare states” with prematurely high levels of pro-elderly policy bias. In some cases, massive politically induced early labour market exit worsened pension system unsustainability while boosting pensioners’ electoral power (Vanhuyse, 2004, 2009). However, around the time when the demographic window started closing (2010–2015), the political salience of family policies, work-family reconciliation policies and active ageing policy increased, often spurred by the same Christian-conservative and/or nationalist-populist parties that also drove a larger trend of weakening governance and significant democratic backsliding alongside. But as Vanhuyse and Perek-Bialas note, by that time the relative political power of elderly voters during elections in East Central Europe was among the highest in the world (see our comparative data above). This macro-region will catch up fast with Western European population structures in the two decades ahead, while facing the added challenge of the consequences of large-scale (young) brain drain to Northern and Western Europe, especially from Romania and the Baltics.

Going geographically further to the east, Rza Kazimov and Sergei Zakharov (this volume) systematically compare the politics of population change in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. They shed light on the politics of three main developments that set these societies apart from both Eastern and Western European countries: fertility rates vary massively across regions and ethnic groups (with minorities often showing higher fertility rates in the geographical and political periphery), there are large gender gaps in mortality (with men having much shorter life spans) and there is sizable emigration driven by violent conflict and economic

recession. These three countries differ from the other European countries (apart from Hungary) analysed in this book in that they are not full liberal democracies. According to the 2020 Freedom House Status (2020), Belarus and Russia qualified as not free and Ukraine just as partly free. The authoritarian governments of these three countries recognize the problems by incentivizing higher fertility by more cash transfers. However, Kazimov and Zakharov see these policies as insufficient and point to the risk of political destabilization in these three countries.

## 7 THE POLITICS OF ROUTINE MASS IMMIGRATION: AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Australia and New Zealand are intriguing country experiences. Both countries belong to the OECD world and share many institutional features with other liberal democracies, such as established welfare states. However, as Peter McDonald and Andrew Markus (this volume) demonstrate (with a particular emphasis on Australia), the political experience of population change here differs in significant ways from the rest of the OECD world. Mass immigration has been more typical of these two countries since they opened the way to a more diverse group of immigrants in the 1970s. The increase, especially of citizens of Asian descent, has not led to a politicization of race and has not significantly altered election results despite some recent episodes of anti-immigrant public sentiment. Multicultural values find widespread support in the populace. The main political challenge of population change is the concentration of more and more citizens in the large metropolitan areas with ensuing pressures on housing prices; population ageing is relatively mildly politicized and race/ethnicity is remarkably silent as a political issue.

## 8 THE EVER-DIVERGING AMERICAN CONTINENT

For the Americas, this volume contains comparative analyses of Argentina and Brazil by Diego Wachs, Vitor Calvanti and Clara Galeazzi and of the United States and Canada by Jennifer Sciubba. While these four countries are on the same continent, their political-demographic experiences differ and further diverge widely. In South American Brazil and Argentina, immigration has decreased significantly in the last decades, so that the populations stabilized. Increases in life expectancy and decreases

in fertility further increasing population ageing that cannot be compensated by immigration. At the same time, both countries are characterized by high levels of social inequality. Social policy was primarily used to alleviate poverty. Given the change in population with much less immigration and population ageing, social policies have come under pressure to adapt because the numerical balance between contributors to and beneficiaries from redistribution measures is becoming increasingly unsustainable. In that dynamic, the two South American countries show similarities to Western Europe even though the levels of social spending are different. Southern American countries face the political challenges of providing sensible social policies in the face of population ageing, and high levels of social inequality. Some social groups, such as the older poor, will significantly increase in size, creating a double driver of increased demand for redistributive policies.

In North America, Canada and the United States experienced two similar demographic developments: population ageing and an increasing diversity of the workforces as to race and immigrant background. The former experience makes it necessary for both countries to adapt their redistribution systems to maintain financial sustainability. Currently, the United States may face a bigger problem in the long run with financing Social Security than Canada with its public pension system. The later experience leads to two different ways of dealing with the increasing cultural diversity. Canada shows an elite and media system that is largely united behind the ideal of a multicultural society. In contrast, the United States shows a starkly divided public sphere with strong media outlets that incite part of the populace against the increasing shares of non-Whites. Sciubba (this volume) goes further by pointing out that the electoral registration system in the United States has prevented a sizeable proportion of (new) non-White voters into the electorate whereas Canada is relatively successful at integration visible minorities into the electoral process. On balance, Canada thus seems better equipped to deal with the consequences of population ageing and increasing ethnic diversity.

## 9 THE AFRICAN CONTINENT: FRUSTRATED YOUTH AS A SIMMERING THREAT TO POLITICAL ORDER

Christof Hartmann and Catherine Promise Biira (this volume) discuss political demography in Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire. In line with most other sub-Saharan African states, the population of both countries is still

growing steadily and becoming more youthful. At the same time, both Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda are net importers of immigrants, albeit for different reasons (economic or conflict-induced). The growing number of young people without economic opportunities and the consequent precarious prospects of leading decent lives and starting families have, on the whole, not led to massive eruptions of political violence, nor to the questioning of the legitimacy of the existing political order. Incidents of youth becoming violent in Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire seem to occur in a context of elite-instigated and -controlled mobilization. Economic exclusion makes it easier for politicians to manipulate youth into attending election rallies or intimidating political opponents. In both Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda, the dominant, and thus far successful, strategy of state elites has been to manage access to jobs in the official police and military apparatus and to other private benefits for youth leaders.

The political demography picture looks much different in the northern countries of the African continent, where the Arab Spring occurred a decade ago. As Alessandra Bonci and Francesco Cavatorta point out (this volume), long-standing structural problems (political and economic) are key to understanding the uprisings and demands for radical change in Tunisia and Morocco. Bonci and Cavatorta note that, while youth unemployment is a considerable problem in this part of Africa too, it would be erroneous to focus exclusively on the youth bulge as the 'bulge' is more a myth than a demographic reality when one looks to the medium and long term. The authors emphasize the way in which the political and economic systems in place benefit only a small elite and lead to long-simmering frustrations, rather than offering aspirations and hope, to the sizable young populations in permanent 'waithood'.

## 10 THE ASIAN CONTINENT: POPULATION GIANTS ON THE MOVE

Nele Noesselt (this volume) compares the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. She paints the picture of a constellation of countries very unequal in size, with the People's Republic heavily influencing the other three entities with its policy decisions about how to deal with heavy population ageing. This is a region where population aged heavily due to the One-Child-Policy in place between 1979 and 2015. Different than in other countries, this process of population ageing thus began forcefully before later stages of the socio-economic modernization

process could be reached. Most importantly, labour shortage is at the centre of policy change and the decision taken in the People's Republic as to dealing with shortages affect the labour markets of the other three, too. Next to the theme of ageing before modernization, we also witness an overall successful adaptation of dealing with population change in this region that did not de-stabilize the system.

Axel Klein and Hannes Mosler (this volume) discuss Japan (the world's frontrunner in population ageing) and South Korea (which in many demographic ways seems to follow Japan closely). Both societies aged a lot (Japan being further ahead) in the last decades and face population shrinkage. Both countries experience the political problems of labour shortage, which is only partially met by foreign labour, by the activation of women into the paid labour market and by keeping senior citizens in the workforce. Furthermore, there is, especially in Japan, the strategy to develop further various technologies in order to deal with the insufficient supply of labourers (see also Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017). In politics, especially on the right side of the spectrum, the perception of what is going on in other countries with similar demographic profiles creates the impression that a further influx of immigrants could create problems that should be circumvented.

KS James and Arun Balachandran (this volume) discuss the three South Asian super-size countries India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, with a special focus on India as the world's largest democracy. They show that while India and Bangladesh have similar patterns of changes in age-structure and fertility transition, Pakistan is at an earlier stage of such demographic transitions. Consequently, in the coming three decades, India and Bangladesh will show signs of ageing society, whereas Pakistan will still remain a young country. James and Balachandran discuss striking differentials in regional and religious patterns of demographic heterogeneity within both India and Pakistan and illustrate at length the enormous importance of demographic patterns on the political order among these South Asian giants.

The Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, as Patrick Ziegenhain shows (this volume), have all witnessed an enormous demographic transition within a very short period. One major future problem for especially Indonesia and the Philippines could be that economic growth stalls before these societies transition into high-income status. Getting old before getting rich is therefore one of the biggest medium-term structural challenge. Ziegenhain also analyses the

challenges that occurred in relation to the pension system, the labour market, the migration movements, the urbanization as well as the consequences of demographic change in different regions and among different ethnic/religious groups in the respective countries.

## 11 POLITICAL DEMOGRAPHY AS A PERSPECTIVE ON GLOBAL CHALLENGES

At the end of this volume, Stuart A. Gietel-Basten steps back from the detailed, geographically focused analyses of the macro-regional chapters to again look at the big picture. He observes that there always seems to be a political need for managing population change: too many people here; too few there. Fertility rates are too low in some places; too high in others. Population ageing brings unprecedented challenges to social welfare systems and economic growth, while ‘youth bulges’ are associated with security threats. Migration, a partial answer to some of these issues, is frequently seen as politically toxic. Gietel-Basten argues that these apparent demographic travails are, perhaps, downstream consequences of broader institutional malfunctions: symptoms, rather than causes, of ongoing challenges in our societies. As such, any effort to tackle these ‘demographic problems’ with solely demographic solutions may be destined to fail. Only by understanding how these demographic issues have come about can we have any hope of shaping holistic policy solutions to ensure sustainable population development.

The contributions in this book reveal a few major takeaway messages:

*The political consequences and the political embeddedness of population change lie at the heart of the social sciences at large.* The chapters demonstrate that population change tends to generate major opportunities and challenges in any society or political system. It is difficult to think of any minor issue of population change that does not need societal and political reaction. Therefore, political demography as a sub-discipline deals with core questions of the social sciences at large. Paradoxically, this is a study area that is underdeveloped even though its main themes lie at the core of what constitutes societies and political systems.

*Population change creates short-term and long-term challenges, both of which require political solutions.* Among the two major themes of population change in this book, population ageing and migration, there seems to be a clear difference on the time dimension. International migration is much more event-driven and therefore subject to short-term fluctuation

than population ageing, which is due to structural, more slow-moving changes. From a citizen perspective, short-term changes create stronger reactions, as people tend to compare against their recent own status quo *ante*. International migration is therefore not just more volatile but also more politically unpredictable than population ageing.

*Political reactions to population changes follow very context-specific paths because their level of 'problematicness' is socially and politically constructed.* The contributions in this volume demonstrate the richness and heterogeneity in political reactions to and for population change. Some themes re-emerge again and again: a fixation on a certain level of fertility rate, a management of the question who is “the other” and a predominant view of population ageing as something bad. However, how policymakers and the public deal with questions of population change is strongly context-dependent. This seems to be a function of the complexity of the manifestations of population change. What constitutes a problem (and if so, which kind of problem), what constitutes an opportunity (and if so which opportunity) is the outcome of complex political processes in which the histories, institutions and co-occurring discussions matter. This also implies that population change is not political destiny. It requires the active social construction of problems by actors, which can then lead to political reactions.

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