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THE YOUTH BULGE IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA: INTERROGATING DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, ELECTORAL SECURITY AND NATIONAL RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's demographic trajectory has important implications for development, governance, and security. Southwest Nigeria recorded the largest absolute population of people aged 15–35 among the country's six geopolitical zones in the National Youth Survey 2020. This paper examines how youth demographic change intersects with electoral security and national resilience in the region ahead of the 2027 General Election. It draws on a documentary research design, using the National Youth Survey 2020 for demographic comparison, the Independent National Electoral Commission's report on the 2023 general election, ACLED's analysis of political violence in the 12 months preceding the 2023 election, and relevant academic and policy literature. For demographic comparison, the paper adopts Nigeria's National Youth Policy definition of youth (15–29 years); the survey's broader 15–35 estimates are identified separately and are not combined with the narrower age group. The analysis compares the six geopolitical zones using published survey age bands and examines documented electoral-security incidents in the Southwest through thematic analysis. It organises the discussion around five connected domains: economic, physical, civic, health and electoral security. The evidence indicates that the Southwest had the largest absolute number of people aged 15–29 in the survey and experienced 45 violent events involving political-party supporters in the year preceding the 2023 election. INEC also documented attacks on electoral facilities in four Southwest states during the period covered by its report. These findings do not establish that young people were responsible for the incidents or that youth population size caused electoral violence. Rather, the paper argues that the implications of demographic change depend on economic opportunity, political inclusion, public services, and institutional accountability. It proposes the Youth Demographic Security Pact and advances the Youth Electoral Security and Democratic Inclusion Framework (YESDIF) as policy proposals for connecting youth development with electoral integrity and democratic resilience.

Keywords: Youth Bulge; Electoral Security; Democratic Consolidation; National Resilience; Demographic Dividend; Southwest Nigeria

1 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's demographic trajectory has important implications for development, public policy and security. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' World Population Prospects 2024 projects continued population growth in Nigeria over the coming decades (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2024). The implications of this growth vary across the country. Southwest Nigeria comprises Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti States and combines major urban centres, commercial activity, educational institutions and cross-border connections. These characteristics make the region an important setting in which to examine the relationship between demographic change, opportunity and security.

The region's demographic profile is particularly relevant to the discussion of youth. The National Youth Survey 2020, produced by the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics, estimated 23,758,879 people aged 15–35 in Southwest Nigeria. This was the largest absolute youth population among the six geopolitical zones, followed by the Northwest with 20,773,698 and the South-South with 14,199,016 (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development & National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). These figures use the survey's 15–35 age range and should not be confused with the narrower 15–29 definition in Nigeria's National Youth Policy. A large youth cohort does not, by itself, establish a security threat. Its implications depend on the economic, political and institutional conditions in which young people live. Urdal's (2006) work identifies an association between youth bulges and political violence, while also showing that the relationship varies with political and socioeconomic context. The demographic-dividend literature similarly emphasises that a favourable age structure produces economic gains only when institutions and public policies enable productive employment and investment (Bloom & Williamson, 1998).

The 2027 General Election heightens the importance of understanding these relationships. Elections are periods of political competition in which institutional trust, public security and the ability of citizens to participate freely are tested. Evidence from the 2023 election cycle demonstrates that electoral violence is a real concern in the Southwest. ACLED recorded 45 violent events involving political-party supporters in the South-West during the 12 months preceding the 2023 election, compared with 46 in the South-East, 38 in the South-South and 32 in the North Central zone (Carboni & Serwat, 2023). INEC's report on the 2023 General Election also records ten incidents involving attacks on its facilities in four Southwest states: seven in Osun and one each in Ogun, Lagos and Ondo. These incidents are part of the longer period covered by INEC's report and should not all be represented as incidents occurring during the 2023 election itself (Independent National Electoral Commission [INEC], 2024). The records demonstrate an electoral-security environment in which youth participation and political mobilisation take place; they do not identify the ages of perpetrators.

Digitalisation has also transformed the electoral environment. Political campaigns, voter education, public debate and election monitoring increasingly take place through digital platforms. These platforms can widen participation and make information more accessible, but they can also facilitate the circulation of misleading claims, inflammatory content and coordinated attempts to influence public opinion. The 2023 election-observation and political-violence reports identify the information environment, political mobilisation and violence as relevant dimensions of electoral integrity (Carboni & Serwat, 2023; INEC, 2024). The paper therefore considers digital communication as part of the civic and electoral-security environment, without assuming that all online mobilisation is harmful.

The youth bulge is thus both a long-term demographic phenomenon and a factor to be considered in the electoral-security environment before, during and after the 2027 General Election. Understanding how youth demographic patterns interact with democratic institutions at the sub-national level is important. This paper examines the relationship between youth population patterns, socioeconomic conditions and electoral security in Southwest Nigeria. It compares the region with other geopolitical zones where the available demographic data permit and uses documented electoral incidents to ground the discussion of security. Its central argument is that demographic change does not determine insecurity; its consequences are shaped by governance, inclusion and the capacity of institutions to create productive and peaceful avenues for youth participation.

2 YOUTH BULGE AND CONFLICT RISK

There is no universally accepted age bracket for youth. The African Youth Charter uses the range 15–35 (African Union Commission, 2006), while Nigeria's National Youth Policy (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019) defines youth as persons aged 15–29. The National Youth Survey 2020 also adopts the 15–35 range, which explains why its regional population estimates are broader than the national policy definition (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development & National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). This paper uses 15–29 as its principal analytical definition, consistent with Nigeria's National Youth Policy. The survey's 15–35 totals are reported only when explicitly labelled as such. For electoral participation, the relevant population is further limited by the constitutional voting age of 18 and

above. These categories are not interchangeable and the paper does not combine their statistics as if they measured the same population. Age is also not the only relevant feature of youth experience. Economic independence, political voice and social status shape the transition to adulthood. Honwana's (2012) concept of "waithood" captures the prolonged period of uncertainty that can arise when young people are unable to secure stable livelihoods or independent adult status.

Urdal's (2006) cross-national study examined the relationship between youth bulges and several forms of political violence. It tested the association between youth cohorts and internal armed conflict over 1950–2000, and between youth bulges and terrorism and rioting over 1984–1995. The study found a statistically robust association, but its findings should not be reduced to a fixed percentage increase in conflict likelihood for every percentage-point increase in the youth population. Urdal also found that the relationship varies with contextual conditions, including regime type and economic change. These findings support a conditional rather than deterministic interpretation. Collier and Hoeffler (2004), in a related analysis of civil war, draw attention to opportunity costs and economic conditions that can influence participation in rebellion. Neither study provides a direct prediction of violence in Southwest Nigeria; their value here is explanatory, helping to identify conditions that deserve attention in the regional analysis.

Bloom and Williamson (1998) explain that East Asia's demographic transition contributed to economic growth because the working-age population grew more rapidly than the dependent population during the relevant period. Their argument is not that a youth bulge automatically produces a dividend. Rather, demographic change can create an opportunity when education, employment, investment and public institutions enable a larger working-age population to contribute productively. The dependency ratio is an age-based measure comparing the population generally classified as dependent (children and older persons) with the working-age population. It is not a measure of unemployed young people. Consequently, a dependency-ratio estimate should not be used as a proxy for youth unemployment in Southwest Nigeria.

Sommers' (2012) study of Rwandan youth and Branch and Mampilly's (2015) work on popular protest in Africa show that young people's experiences in urban settings are shaped by livelihood constraints, political relationships and the opportunities available for collective action. The #EndSARS protests of October 2020 provide a Nigerian example of youth-led civic mobilisation. Amnesty International (2021) documented the nationwide protests and the state response. The movement demonstrated the capacity of digitally connected citizens to organise around public concerns, while also exposing tensions between citizens and security institutions. Available sources reviewed for this study do not provide a sufficiently transparent age-disaggregated estimate of the protest participants to support a precise percentage. The protests remain relevant because they brought questions of accountability, policing, and youth voice into national debate.

Yunusa et al. (2022) examine the disruption of social life and the growth of informal security groups in Southwest Nigeria in the context of kidnapping and banditry. Their study provides a regional account of human-security concerns and community responses. It does not, however, establish that youth population growth caused the crimes discussed or quantify the age profile of those involved. This distinction is important: criminal activity, informal security provision and policing challenges should be analysed alongside institutional capacity and local conditions, rather than attributed to demographic structure alone.

Existing scholarship on youth and insecurity in Nigeria often discusses national patterns, while the available data for sub-national comparison remain uneven. The Southwest offers a useful case because it includes a major metropolitan centre, smaller urban and rural communities, active traditional and civic institutions, and international borders with the Republic of Benin. These characteristics create different opportunities and pressures across the six states. The analysis that follows therefore compares the region with other geopolitical zones where the available survey data permit and examines documented electoral incidents rather than assuming that national patterns apply uniformly to the Southwest.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study adopts a documentary research design based on qualitative analysis of published secondary sources, supported by descriptive comparison of demographic statistics. It does not claim to have conducted a new household survey, generated original administrative data or estimated a causal model. Its purpose is to examine what the available evidence can establish about youth population patterns and electoral security in Southwest Nigeria, and to identify the limits of that evidence.

3.1 Sources and Scope

The demographic component draws principally on the National Youth Survey 2020, produced by the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics. The survey provides age-

disaggregated estimates across the six geopolitical zones. The electoral-security component draws on INEC's Report of the 2023 General Election and ACLED's analysis of political violence in the 12 months preceding the 2023 election. These sources were selected because they identify their institutional provenance, describe their observation periods, and provide official or independently documented evidence relevant to the research question. Academic literature on youth bulges, demographic dividends, waithood, popular mobilisation and human security provides the conceptual basis for interpreting the documentary evidence.

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the population aged 15–29 in each geopolitical zone was calculated by adding the National Youth Survey's published totals for the age bands 15–19, 20–24 and 25–29. This provides a consistent comparison using the age range in Nigeria's National Youth Policy. The survey's published 15–35 totals are retained only when explicitly labelled as such. Second, the election reports were examined thematically for documented incidents involving political party supporters, attacks on INEC facilities, campaign violence, and risks to electoral participation. The five domains used in the paper include economic, physical, civic, health, and electoral security; they are analytical categories for organising the available evidence, not presented as five statistically proven effects of youth population size.

3.3 Limitations

The study is not without its limitations. First, the demographic survey relates to 2020 and should not be read as a current population count or a projection. Electoral sources document events in the 2022–2023 election cycle, not events in the 2027 election, which had not taken place at the time of writing. Second, the sources do not consistently identify the ages of perpetrators or participants in violent incidents, nor do they provide a complete, comparable set of Southwest-specific indicators for unemployment, NEET status, health outcomes and political representation. The paper therefore uses the evidence to describe regional patterns and plausible governance concerns; it does not infer that youth population size causes electoral violence.

4 YOUTH BULGE THEORY AND ELECTORAL SECURITY

Hendrixson (2004) offers an important critique of the way youth-bulge arguments can portray young people, particularly young men in the Global South, as inherent security threats. Her work does not propose a three-variable conditional-risk model or numerical thresholds for unemployment and legislative representation. Instead, it warns against treating demographic categories as predictors of violence without considering political narratives, inequality, gender, and the policy choices that shape young people's lives. This critique is relevant to the present study: young people should not be treated as a security problem simply because they constitute a large share of the population. Urdal's (2006) findings and Bloom and Williamson's (1998) demographic-dividend argument provide a basis for examining the conditions that may shape outcomes.

Sen's (1999) Capability Approach reframes development in terms of people's substantive freedoms and their ability to live lives they have reason to value. Access to education, decent work, health and participation therefore matters not only as a development objective but also as part of human security. Where these capabilities are restricted, young people may experience exclusion and reduced confidence in public institutions. The available UNDP report does not establish a comparable Southwest-specific Human Development Index score for the purpose used here. The Capability Approach remains useful for interpreting the relationship between youth inclusion and resilience.

Democratic security concerns the protection of constitutional institutions, civil liberties, electoral processes and the peaceful transfer of political authority. Electoral security is one part of this wider concern. It involves protecting the electoral cycle from voter registration and campaigning through voting, counting, dispute resolution and post-election reconciliation from violence, intimidation, manipulation and other forms of interference. The 2023 election reports provide a basis for assessing the challenges that may require attention before the 2027 election (Adedimeji, 2019; Carboni & Serwat, 2023; INEC, 2024).

5 FACTORS SHAPING YOUTH BULGE CHALLENGES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

5.1 Demographic Profile and Regional Comparison

Table 1: Estimated population aged 15–29 by geopolitical zone, calculated from the National Youth Survey 2020

Geopolitical zone	Estimated population aged 15–29	Share of six-zone total
Southwest	16,884,887	25.5%
Northwest	13,961,289	21.1%
South-South	10,510,300	15.9%
North Central	9,838,884	14.9%
Southeast	7,624,697	11.5%
Northeast	7,423,297	11.2%
Total	66,243,354	100.0%

Note. Figures are the authors' calculations from the National Youth Survey 2020 age bands 15–19, 20–24 and 25–29. Percentages are shares of the six-zone total. The survey estimates refer to 2020 and are not current population projections.

The National Youth Survey 2020 provides a basis for comparing the size of the youth population across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development & NBS, 2020). Its published tables report age groups in five-year bands. For this paper, the population aged 15–29 in each zone was calculated by adding the reported totals for ages 15–19, 20–24 and 25–29. On this consistent basis, the Southwest had an estimated 16,884,887 people aged 15–29, compared with 13,961,289 in the Northwest, 10,510,300 in the South-South, 9,838,884 in the North Central, 7,624,697 in the Southeast and 7,423,297 in the Northeast. These are survey-based estimates, not current population counts or projections. They show that the Southwest had the largest absolute number of people in this age range in the survey. They do not, on their own, demonstrate that the Southwest had the highest youth share of its total population or the highest youth unemployment rate.

5.2 Employment, Underemployment and Economic Inclusion

Employment is central to whether a large youth cohort becomes a demographic dividend. The National Youth Survey 2020 includes information on youth employment and economic activity (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development & NBS, 2020). However, the available published data do not provide a clearly comparable Southwest unemployment, underemployment and NEET series using the age ranges and methodology required for this analysis. The paper therefore avoids presenting a precise zonal rate without a traceable table. The broader point remains important: limited access to stable work, skills mismatch, insecure informal employment and prolonged transitions from education to work can constrain young people's ability to participate in the formal economy. These conditions should be examined through comparable age- and state-disaggregated labour data.

5.3 Political Participation and Representation

Young people's numerical presence in the population does not necessarily translate into equivalent influence in political institutions. The National Youth Survey 2020 includes information on political affiliation and participation in elective offices (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development & NBS, 2020), while the 2023 election reports discuss party competition, political participation and barriers to electoral integrity. The sources reviewed do not establish comparable percentages for the share of Southwest legislative seats held by persons under 35, the age profile of registered voters and levels of trust among different age groups. Political inclusion remains relevant, but it should be supported with clearly defined age categories and verifiable records of elected officeholders, candidates and voters.

5.4 Urban Services and Infrastructure

Rapid urban growth places pressure on housing, transport, water, sanitation, electricity and public services. These pressures are particularly visible in large urban centres, and where infrastructure and services fail to keep pace with urban growth, young people may face higher living costs, longer journeys to work and school, and fewer opportunities to participate in productive economic activity. These conditions are relevant to human security, but not evidently a youth-driven criminality still.

5.5 Crime, Informal Economies and Community Security

Economic exclusion and insecurity may interact with criminal economies, but the relationship must be demonstrated rather than assumed. The available public sources reviewed for this study did not provide traceable evidence for the specific figures concerning EFCC internet-fraud convictions by age and state, cult-related deaths attributed to an NBS survey, or the percentage of Southwest drug users aged 15–29. Those figures are therefore not used. Yunusa et al. (2022) provide a qualitative discussion of kidnapping, banditry and informal security groups in Southwest Nigeria. Their findings support attention to community safety and the regulation and accountability of non-state security providers, but they should not be interpreted as proof that a large youth population causes these security problems.

5.6 Health and Human Security

Health security is an important part of the wider human-security framework. Access to healthcare, sanitation, mental-health support and protection from preventable disease affect young people's capacity to study, work and participate in public life. The sources reviewed for this paper do not provide complete, identifiable and comparable Southwest-specific evidence for the figures concerning tuberculosis prevalence in Lagos informal settlements, mental-health screening among University of Ibadan students, returns on investment in youth mental health or Nigeria's mental-health budget. Health remains an important dimension of human security, while the limits of available regional evidence are made explicit.

6 YOUTH BULGE AND NATIONAL SECURITY RISKS

The preceding discussion shows why youth demographic change should be considered within a broader governance and human-security framework. Rather than treating the five domains below as proven causal effects of a youth bulge, this paper uses them as analytical categories for organising the available documentary evidence. The strength of evidence differs across domains: demographic and electoral sources provide clearer regional indicators, while health, employment and some civic indicators require more consistent age- and state-level data.

Table 2: Analytical domains for examining youth demography and security in Southwest Nigeria

No.	Domain	Analytical concern	Evidence base and limitation
1	Economic security	Employment, underemployment, skills and access to sustainable livelihoods.	National Youth Survey 2020 provides youth employment information; no unverified Southwest NEET or unemployment rate is asserted.
2	Physical security	Exposure to kidnapping, banditry, cult-related violence and the role of formal and informal security providers.	Yunusa et al. (2022) provide qualitative Southwest-focused analysis; this does not establish a causal link with youth population size.
3	Civic security	Political participation, public accountability, trust and the right to peaceful mobilisation.	The #EndSARS experience and election literature provide context; no unsupported age-specific trust percentage is asserted.
4	Health security	Access to healthcare, sanitation and mental-health support as components of human security.	Health is a relevant human-security dimension; comparable Southwest-specific indicators were not established in the sources reviewed.
5	Electoral security	Campaign violence, attacks on electoral facilities, intimidation and information integrity.	ACLED (2023) and INEC (2024) document electoral-cycle risks; perpetrators' ages are not consistently reported.

The domain is interconnected. For example, economic exclusion fuels criminal economies; political exclusion breeds protest and distrust. While health insecurity reduces productivity, electoral insecurity undermines democratic legitimacy.

6.1 Economic Security

Economic insecurity is an important concern in a region with a large youth population. Unemployment, underemployment, insecure work and limited access to finance can restrict young people's ability to establish independent livelihoods. The National Youth Survey 2020 provides a national and zonal evidence base on youth employment and economic activity. However, the data should be interpreted according to the survey's age range and

reference period. It would be misleading to combine its 15–35 population estimates with unemployment rates for a different age group or statistical methodology. Employment policy should therefore be treated as both a development priority and a contribution to social resilience.

6.2 Physical Security

Physical insecurity in Southwest Nigeria includes kidnapping, banditry, cult-related violence and other forms of criminal activity. Yunusa et al. (2022) discuss the effects of kidnapping and banditry on social life and the emergence of informal security groups in the region. Their qualitative analysis is useful for understanding local responses and human-security concerns, but it does not provide a statistical test of the relationship between youth population size and crime. A careful account must distinguish between young people as members of communities affected by insecurity, young people as participants in civic life, and individuals who may be recruited into criminal networks.

Beyond these local manifestations, the geographical dimension of insecurity underscores the need to understand youth security within the broader regional security environment. Yusuf and Jatto (2026), in their study of corridor diffusion and the spatial reconfiguration of insecurity in North-Central and South-West Nigeria, demonstrate the importance of examining insecurity beyond isolated incidents and administrative boundaries. Their analysis draws attention to the interconnected nature of security threats across communities and geographical corridors, with implications for institutional responsiveness, community protection and public safety. For young people, these conditions may affect access to education, employment, mobility and meaningful participation in community life. This perspective reinforces the argument that the security implications of demographic change cannot be understood solely through population size or youth unemployment; they must also be examined in relation to the geographical spread of insecurity, institutional capacity and the resilience of affected communities.

6.3 Civic Security

Civic security concerns the relationship between citizens and public institutions. Young people's ability to organise, express grievances and participate in decision-making is an important part of democratic life. The #EndSARS protests showed the scale and speed of youth-led mobilisation, while the literature on popular protest in Africa highlights the relationship between collective action, political exclusion and institutional response (Amnesty International, 2021; Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Sommers, 2012). Civic mobilisation should not automatically be classified as insecurity: peaceful protest and political participation are legitimate democratic activities the word over. The security concern arises where state responses, political intimidation, or unresolved grievances lead to violence or undermine citizens' ability to participate freely, and this requires critical attention in emerging democracy/

6.4 Health Security

Health security extends the analysis beyond crime and electoral violence. Access to healthcare, safe water, sanitation and mental-health support affects the ability of young people and their communities to withstand economic and social pressures. The sources reviewed for this paper do not provide sufficiently consistent Southwest-specific evidence to quantify the contribution of youth demographic structure to health insecurity. Health is therefore included as a relevant dimension of human security, not presented as an empirically demonstrated consequence of the youth bulge.

6.5 Electoral Security

Electoral security is particularly important as Nigeria approaches the 2027 General Election. The 2023 election cycle provides recent evidence of the types of risks that may require attention. ACLED recorded 45 violent events involving political-party supporters in the Southwest in the 12 months preceding the 2023 election, the second-highest zonal total after the South-East (46) (Carboni & Serwat, 2023). INEC's report also records attacks on electoral facilities in Osun, Ogun, Lagos and Ondo States during the period covered by its historical incident summary (INEC, 2024). These records demonstrate that the region experienced electoral-security incidents, but they do not establish the ages of perpetrators or show that youth population growth caused the incidents. They provide a grounded basis for discussing preventive measures ahead of 2027.

Electoral security encompasses more than physical protection on polling day. It includes voter registration, party primaries, campaigning, access to information, election administration, voting, counting, dispute resolution and post-election reconciliation (Adedimeji, 2019). Young people participate throughout these processes as voters, candidates, party members, election workers, observers, civic educators and digital communicators. The policy task is therefore not to treat youth as a risk category, but to protect their participation and prevent political actors from exploiting economic vulnerability or social exclusion.

Taken together, the five domains show that youth demographic change intersects with economic development, community safety, democratic participation, health and electoral integrity. The available evidence is strongest where

official demographic surveys and election-monitoring records provide identifiable measures. However, the paper identifies policy concerns and evidence gaps as a necessary distinction.

7 TRANSFORMING THE YOUTH BULGE INTO A DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

The 2027 General Election presents both opportunities and challenges for young people in Southwest Nigeria. The region's youth population, urban centres, universities, media and civic organisations provide a basis for participation and innovation. At the same time, economic insecurity, exclusion from decision-making and weaknesses in electoral administration may create conditions that political actors can exploit. The 2023 election cycle demonstrates that political violence and attacks on electoral processes are not merely hypothetical concerns. The question is how public institutions can strengthen opportunities for youth participation while protecting the integrity of the electoral process.

7.1 Digital Economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Southwest Nigeria is at the heart of Africa's booming digital economy. Lagos leads as a technology hub, attracting venture capital and hosting a vibrant ecosystem of fintech, AI, cybersecurity, e-commerce, and digital payment startups (e.g., Paystack, Flutterwave, Kuda). The Federal Government's 3MTT (Three Million Technical Talent) initiative prepares youth for future labor markets. However, this potential requires continued investment in broadband, reliable electricity, digital literacy, and research, and stronger government-university-private sector collaboration. Such investment reduces unemployment, expands opportunity, and bolsters resilience.

7.2 Creative Economy, Cultural Industries and Sports Development

Nigeria's global leadership in film, music, fashion, and entertainment is centered in the Southwest. Creative industries offer employment, foster entrepreneurship, and build social cohesion. Sports development. Community facilities, talent academies, and e-sports provide healthy, inclusive pathways for youth engagement.

7.3 Agricultural Transformation and Green Employment

Despite high urbanization, agriculture remains essential. Large tracts of fertile land, if modernized with agri-tech, mechanization, and climate-smart practices, can absorb youth labor, drive food security, and promote diversification. Agro-industrial corridors, supported by modern logistics, credit, and guaranteed market access, can reverse rural-urban migration and promote green jobs in renewable energy, conservation, and recycling.

7.4 Democratic Participation as a Democratic Dividend

Democratic dividends are as important as economic ones. Young people in the Southwest, like in any other part of Nigeria, participate in civic organisations, election observation, public debate, digital initiatives and campaigns for political inclusion. Initiatives such as Not Too Young To Run illustrate the importance of widening access to political office and encouraging participation. Civic education, digital literacy, leadership development and electoral integrity should therefore be central to security policy, not treated as issues separate from it.

Demographic change alone does not guarantee a dividend. Four interdependent conditions remain important: sustained investment in human capital through education, training and health; inclusive economic growth and decent work; effective and transparent governance; and gender equality and social inclusion (Bloom & Williamson, 1998; Sen, 1999).

8 POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing youth-development initiatives provide a starting point for policy, but their effectiveness should be assessed through transparent information on coverage, completion, beneficiary outcomes, and transitions into work. Comparable, traceable evaluation data were not available in the sources reviewed to substantiate claims about the proportion of N-Power beneficiaries entering formal employment, YouWiN! business survival or regional 3MTT completion rates. The table below is therefore framed as a guide to the questions that should inform programme monitoring, rather than as an evaluation based on unavailable outcome data.

Table 3: Selected youth-development programmes and issues for evaluation

Programme	Intended contribution	Key implementation question	Evidence needed for evaluation
N-Power	Income support and employability-related training.	What proportion of participants moved into sustained work or further training after programme exit?	Published beneficiary follow-up data, disaggregated by age, sex and state.
National Youth Employment Action Plan (NYEAP)	Policy coordination and alignment of youth employment interventions.	Were the plan's targets funded, implemented and monitored across states?	Official implementation reports and outcome indicators.
YouWiN! / youth enterprise support	Entrepreneurship support, business development and access to finance.	Did supported enterprises remain active and create sustainable employment?	Independent evaluation and longitudinal business-survival data.
3MTT	Digital and Fourth Industrial Revolution skills development.	Did training lead to certification, placement, self-employment or measurable income gains?	Administrative completion records and independently verified post-training outcomes.

Note. This table identifies questions for programme monitoring. It does not report measured programme impacts because comparable beneficiary-level evaluation data were not available in the sources reviewed.

Future interventions should prioritise institutional continuity, measurable outcomes, stronger private-sector partnerships and coordination across Southwest states. Programme performance should be assessed using published administrative data and independent evaluations, with results disaggregated by age, sex, disability and state.

Two policy recommendations follow from the analysis: institutionalising a Youth Demographic Security Pact and establishing a Youth Electoral Security and Democratic Inclusion Framework. Both proposals are intended to connect youth development with democratic participation and community resilience.

8.1 Youth Demographic Security Pact (YDSP), 2026–2035

For the Youth Demographic Security Pact (YDSP 2026-2035), a comprehensive YDSP should coordinate federal, state, and local governments, private sector, educational institutions, civil society, and community groups. This pact, which should be implemented over a decade, should be anchored on six mutually reinforcing pillars:

- **Agro-Industrial Corridors:** Modern, mechanized agriculture in strategic locations with renewable energy, logistics, and digital services.
- **STEM–4IR Compact:** Massive investment in STEM and 4IR skills—AI, robotics, cybersecurity, cloud, biotech, data science—via innovation funds, university-industry partnerships, and scholarships.
- **Youth Legislative Quota and Advisory Council:** Voluntary elective quotas for young candidates; institutionalized youth advisory input into policy and budgeting.
- **Community Policing and Youth Inclusion:** Structured partnerships for neighborhood security, conflict prevention, intelligence, and peacebuilding.
- **Mental Health and Social Cohesion Fund:** Dedicated, cross-sector investment in mental health services, counseling, substance abuse prevention, trauma recovery, and social support.
- **Southwest Youth Observatory:** Centralized data collection and policy reporting on age-disaggregated trends in employment, education, migration, and security.
- Besides, the Youth Electoral Security and Democratic Inclusion Framework (YESDIF) is a definitive test for Nigeria's democracy in the 2027 election, which should combine the following:
- **Civic Education and Democratic Literacy:** Curriculum integration, mass voter education, media and digital literacy.
- **Digital Peace Corps:** Youth volunteers to monitor and counter misinformation, hate speech, and AI-generated manipulation.
- **Youth Election Observation and Governance:** Expanded opportunities for youth as election observers, polling staff, civic tech innovators.
- **Enforcement and Electoral Accountability:** Strengthened investigation, prosecution, and sanctions for electoral offenses, including vote-buying, violence, and cyber manipulation.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue Platform:** Permanent platform for dialogue among all electoral stakeholders, operating throughout the electoral cycle for early warning, mediation, and conflict prevention.

9 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's demographic transition is both a challenge and an opportunity. Southwest Nigeria has a substantial youth population, and the demographic evidence indicates that it had the largest absolute number of people aged 15–29 among the six geopolitical zones in the National Youth Survey 2020. The evidence reviewed also shows that the region experienced documented political-party violence in the period preceding the 2023 election and attacks on electoral facilities during the longer period covered by INEC's report. These findings do not establish that demographic size alone caused the incidents or that young people were responsible for them. Economic opportunity, political participation, public services, institutional accountability and the conduct of political actors all shape the environment in which young people live and participate. The proposed Youth Demographic Security Pact and YESDIF offer a way to connect youth development with democratic resilience. Demographic change is not destiny: its consequences depend on the choices made by public institutions and society.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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