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Explaining Political Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The Role of Demography

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i. Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to identify and investigate the underlying causal mechanisms behind the expected causal relations leading demographic factors to result in political violence in the attempt of answering the more specific research question of what role demography plays in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In doing so, theory-testing process tracing has been employed to trace back the influence of the Democratic Republic of Congo's youthful age-structure, high urbanization rate, and high degree of multi-ethnicity, respectively, based on document analysis backed by data. The analysis' results concerning the influence of both the high urbanization rate and the high degree of multi-ethnicity remain somewhat inconclusive due to empirical limitations. The analysis did, however, find sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that there is a causal relationship between the young population structure in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the country's current state of violence, thereby also indicating that demography does in fact play a role in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence. This finding appears to particularly relate to the youths' low opportunity costs of engaging in political violence caused by insufficient institutional capacities that would otherwise likely render them unemployed and possibly subject to poverty. Based on these findings, the thesis recommends a greater focus on related policies, such as policies concerning job creation and family planning, in order to create better preconditions for stabilizing efforts. Moreover, since the investigations on the influence of high urbanization rate and high degree of multi-ethnicity require additional empirical evidence, further research would benefit from its own data collection.

ii. Acknowledgements

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iv. List of abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
CNDP	National Congress for the Defence of the People
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HDI	Human Development Index
IDP	Internally displaced people
LUCHA	Lutte pour le Changement
M23	March 23 Movement
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UN	United Nations

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1. Introduction

Political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) seems to have become a never-ending nightmare, going back decades with numerous surges in especially the eastern DRC.[1] One of the more prominent outbursts in recent years is the late 2021 re-escalation of violence between the Congolese government and a rebel group known as the March 23 Movement (M23) in particular which has been followed by a general increase in political violence that is still ongoing albeit with a slight decrease since 2021 and 2022.[2] Although the DRC has undergone several peacemaking efforts instigated by different initiators, the violence plaguing the country seems to persist.[3] This thesis aims to dissect the potential role demography plays in the conflictual state of the DRC, since this could provide invaluable insights into how the DRC may be able to exit the violent deadlock that is currently displacing large masses of the Congolese population. The following chapter will introduce the contextual background for the thesis, and more specifically, for the research problem the thesis aims to investigate. This will be followed by an introduction of the research question that will be guiding the research. Finally, the structure of the thesis will be presented.

The current conflictual state in the DRC dates back around 30 years to the Rwandan genocide in 1994, which triggered the two Congo Wars, and provided the foundation for the conflictual conditions that are still prevalent in the DRC today.[4] Today, more than 7 million people in the DRC are internally displaced, while an estimated 6 million deaths have been caused by the conflict in eastern DRC alone since 1996.[5] When looking at data on political violence, the DRC experienced an exceptionally rapid and sudden increase in particularly battles and acts of violence against civilians, peaking in 2021.[6] Since this sudden increase in political violence in the DRC succeeds decades of

[1] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo," Council on Foreign Relations, 2024, accessed August 11, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo.
[2] Ladd Serwat, "Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)," ACLED, March 23, 2023, accessed August 17, 2024, https://acleddata.com/2023/03/23/actor-profile-m23-drc/.; Clionadh Raleigh et al., "Political Instability Patterns Are Obscured by Conflict Dataset Scope Conditions, Sources, and Coding Choices," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10 (February 25, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01559-4.
[3] Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Chronology," August 21, 2009, accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/21/dr-congo-chronology#_A_New_Government; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[4] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[5] UNHCR - Kinshasa, *DRC AT A GLANCE: as of 30 June 2024*, July 24, 2024, *UNHCR*; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[6] Raleigh et al., "Political Instability Patterns Are Obscured by Conflict Dataset Scope Conditions, Sources, and Coding Choices."

sustained fighting and violence, it also confirms the continuous need for further research on political violence in the DRC in order to approach a solution to the current impasse.

When aiming to investigate the role of demography in the violent situation of the DRC, there is already a relatively rich literature on demography and how it can be connected to social unrest within a society, which is important to consider. One of the key theories, which is also included in the research conducted in this thesis, is the age-structural theory of state behavior. In broad terms, the age-structural theory of state behavior claims that younger age-structures are more prone to violence due to for instance institutional and structural grievances and shortcomings.[7] Another demographic factor considered in this thesis, that literature has frequently mentioned as a potential contributor to instability, is urbanization. This is considered, given that the sudden increase in population density, that typically arises in urban areas due to urbanization, can result in institutional incapacities as well which can further frustrate the population.[8] Other studies point to the influence that multi-ethnicity in a society can have on future conflicts of ethnic nature which is also investigated in this thesis.[9]

It is nondebatable that the existing research on demographic patterns and the implications thereof has in fact contributed with great knowledge to how it is possible to understand and analyze conflicts today, but said research is nonetheless often based on larger datasets containing data from multiple countries. While some demographic analyses of individual countries do exist, research tracing the process between certain demographic factors and the recent re-escalation of political violence in the DRC in late 2021 has not been identified. Given the novelty of the 2021 re-escalation of violence and the fact that this re-escalation is following decades of trying to ease the tensions between different parties to the conflict without any luck, this thesis attempts to contribute to the literature by conducting a case-study for which the following research question will work as the point of departure:

What role does demography play in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

[7] Richard Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, (August 22, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.327.
[8] E.g. see Ronak B. Patel and Frederick M. Burkle, "Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis," *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 27, no. 2 (April 2012), https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049023x12000568.
[9] E.g. see Tanja Ellingsen, "Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?: Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict during and after the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 2 (April 2000), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002700044002004.

The thesis will continue with a literature review in chapter 2. The literature review aims at presenting an extensive exploration of the existing research, to ensure the theoretical foundation for the analysis. The literature review is divided into four subsections focusing on the age-structural theory, urbanization, other factors influencing political violence, and the historical context of the DRC, respectively. Furthermore, the hypotheses presented in the methodological chapter and subsequently analyzed in the analysis are based on expectations derived from the existing research and literature presented in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 will go on to present the methodological considerations made regarding both the research design, operationalization and the method of analysis. Methodologically, this thesis will investigate how different demographic factors may or may not be causally linked to the recent re-escalation of political violence in the DRC in late 2021 through theory-testing process tracing. These demographic factors are the DRC's youthful age-structure, high urbanization rate, and high degree of multi-ethnicity, respectively, and will be investigated through three separate hypotheses presented in the operationalization along with each of their associated expected causal chains.

The analysis is therefore three-fold and will be presented along with its results in chapter 4, where each hypothesis is investigated through each their own sub-analysis. This is followed by a discussion in chapter 5 that will assess the findings of the analysis and their implications for the Congolese population as well as the prospects for stability in the DRC. Moreover, the methodological decisions and limitations will be evaluated in the discussion, followed by recommendations for future research. Finally, chapter 6 will present the conclusion of the thesis.

2. Literature review

In the following chapter, the literature that creates the basis for analyzing the research question will be reviewed. The literature review will commence with a broader review of research investigating the link between youthful age structures and political violence. Next, the literature review will go over some of the literature investigating the relationship between urbanization and political violence. This will be followed by a section briefly describing the effect on political violence by various other commonly mentioned factors. Lastly, a section will present a brief historical context of the DRC along with the ethnic nature of its conflictual history, that, together with the previous sections of the literature review, will form the foundation of the subsequent analysis.

2.1. Age-structural theory and the demographic transition

The age-structural theory is part of the wider demographic transition which provides an explanation as to why and how population changes occur, often associated with a certain societal behavior.[10] Richard Cincotta presents an extensive description of the age-structural theory of state behavior in its current form alongside insights to the methodology of the theory.[11] He employs a system published in the U.S. National Intelligence Council's Global Trends series of publications, where the age-structural transition is divided into four discrete phases based on median age.[12] Following this methodology, the age-structural phases are classified as the youthful, the intermediate, the mature, and the postmature phases.[13]

In youthful states, where the median age is lower than 25.5 years, the state's institutional capacity will typically have difficulty keeping up with the large number of young people.[14] This shows itself for instance in school crowding and placement insufficiency, underemployment, and an elevated risk of social instability and political violence as a result.[15] The youthful stage of the demographic transition is typically characterized by a very high fertility rate alongside an equally high mortality

[10] John R. Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues* (Cengage, 2015), 98.
[11] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 2.
[12] Ibid., 5.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

rate.[16] This results in a large number of births canceled out by an equally large number of deaths, continuously leaving the society young.[17]

Countries with a median age between 25.5-35.49 find themselves in the intermediate phase of the age-structural transition where they typically experience a higher level of stability.[18] The intermediate phase of the age-structural transition is typically triggered by a decline in mortality allowing the population to grow older, although in some cases, it can also be triggered by a decline in fertility.[19] Given that a higher percentage of the population has now entered the workforce, this phase is often accompanied by economic development and wealth accumulation.[20] States are thus also better able to invest in health services and schools, and should they choose to do so, they have better odds at taking advantage of their upcoming demographic dividend, which presents itself in the third age-structural phase.[21]

The third age-structural phase is the mature phase which is entered when the state's median age is between 35.5-45.49.[22] If the age-structural transition was triggered by a decline in mortality, fertility would now also start to fall.[23] During this stage, the state can potentially harness the so-called demographic dividend if they manage to increase their human capital during the intermediate stage.[24] Even though the economic growth can slow during this phase, the state typically experiences favorable economic and political conditions.[25]

The demographic dividend is a theory which presumes that a society's large entry into the workforce, alongside a shrinkage of the cohort consisting of children and young adolescents, paves the way for an economic boost per capita within said society.[26] This, in turn, will allow the inhabitants to make saving accounts and invest, which will drive productivity even higher.[27] According to Goldstone and May, however, taking advantage of the demographic dividend depends on the society's

[16] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 98–100.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior.", 5.
[19] Ibid.; Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 98–100.
[20] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior.", 5-6.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 6.
[23] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 98–100.
[24] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior.", 6.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Jack A. Goldstone and John F. May, "Contemporary Population Issues," in *International Handbook of Population Policies*, ed. John F. May and Jack A. Goldstone, vol. 11 (Cham: Springer, 2022), 10–12, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-02040-7_1.
[27] Ibid.

ability to ensure that the growing workforce is in fact working and being productive.[28] Meanwhile, Canning et al. present three necessary conditions for the ability to capture the demographic dividend; The health status of the society must be improved, higher investments in health and education for the cohort following the youth bulge, and an economic environment that fosters well-paying jobs.[29]

The fourth and final stage of the age-structural transition is the postmature state which the state is subject to when the median age of its population is higher than 45.5.[30] When the state enters the postmature phase, it is yet again challenged by the increased dependency ratio. The postmature population structures are characterized by a large proportion of elderly people vis-à-vis a decreasing share of the workforce population which will challenge the state economy and productivity.[31] This is caused by simultaneously low birth and mortality rates, since the baby bulge once experienced during the youthful age-structural phase when fertility was high has now grown older without a younger cohort big enough to replace them.[32]

Cincotta furthermore exemplifies how the age-structural theory has yielded strong predictions about future events caused by demographic structures. He makes an example out of the Arab Spring, which started in 2010, but was predicted in 2008.[33] Cincotta was cited in 2008, claiming that, among others, a cluster along the North African coast would be expected to start democratizing soon, with one or two countries even expected to be stable liberal democracies before 2020.[34] It was furthermore suggested that Tunisia would be the starting point for the democratization process due to its sustained near-replacement fertility and the rapid maturing of Tunisia's population age structure at the time.[35] In 2010, only two months prior to the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Cincotta predicted that a color revolution in Tunisia would take place within two years with a transition into a liberal democracy.[36] In 2015, Tunisia was officially classified as "free" by Freedom House.[37] Despite Tunisia's

[28] Ibid.
[29] David Canning et al., eds., *Africa's Demographic Transition: Dividend or Disaster?* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015), 4-5, https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0489-2.
[30] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior.", 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 98–100.
[33] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior.", 3-4.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Freedom House, "All Data, FIW 2013-2024," Data set (Freedom House, 2024), accessed July 28, 2024, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/All_data_FIW_2013-2024.xlsx.

recent reclassification to "partly free" again in 2022, the age-structural theory provided valuable insights into how state behaviors are affected by demographic changes.[38]

While Cincotta's research above deals with age-structural phases based on median age, other scholars use other demographic measures to try to explain political scenarios with age-structures, such as e.g. "youth bulges" and "working-age bulges", with youth bulges being one of the most commonly used forms of youth measurement in demographic research.[39] A youth bulge generally involves an extraordinarily large number of young people within a society even though there is not just one commonly accepted definition or measurement. According to Castree et al., a youth bulge is a quantitative and proportional increase in a society's youthful population in the age-brackets of either 16-25 or 16-30.[40] Heinsohn, however, argues that the youth bulge happens when either 30 percent of the population are aged between 15 and 29 or if at least 20 percent are in the 15-25 age bracket.[41] Giordano defines the youth-bulge as the situation in which at least 20 percent of the population are within the 15-24 age bracket while at least 30 percent are in the 0-14 age bracket.[42]

Meanwhile, other scholars also note the importance of genders in youth bulges.[43] When Yair and Miodownik investigate the effect of youth bulges on the onset of ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars respectively, they measure the youth bulge as the country's ratio of men ages 15-29 to the total male population ages 15+.[44] Wagschal and Metz have also stated that it is especially male youth bulges that

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Deborah J. Brooks et al., "The Demographic Transition Theory of War: Why Young Societies Are Conflict Prone and Old Societies Are the Most Peaceful," *International Security* 43, no. 3 (February 1, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00335; Alfonso Giordano, "Mondialisation et révolution géo-démographique [English version]," *Outre-Terre, Revue Européenne De Géopolitique* 50 (2017); Alfonso Giordano, "Youth Bulge Dynamics in the Mediterranean Region: The Geopolitical Implications of Human Capital on Security and Stability," in *States, Actors and Geopolitical Drivers in the Mediterranean*, ed. Riccardo Redaelli and Francesca M. Corrao (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Yair, Omer, and Dan Miodownik. "Youth bulge and civil war: Why a country's share of young adults explains only non-ethnic wars." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33, no. 1 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894214544613.
[40] Noel Castree et al., *A Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199599868.001.0001, as cited in Giordano, "Youth Bulge Dynamics in the Mediterranean Region: The Geopolitical Implications of Human Capital on Security and Stability.", 107-108.
[41] Gunnar Heinsohn, *Söhne und Weltmacht: Terror im Aufstieg und Fall der Nationen* (Orell Füssli, 2003), as cited in Giordano, "Youth Bulge Dynamics in the Mediterranean Region: The Geopolitical Implications of Human Capital on Security and Stability.", 107-108.
[42] Giordano, "Mondialisation et Révolution Géo-Démographique [English Version]", 66-67.
[43] Yair and Miodownik, "Youth bulge and civil war: Why a country's share of young adults explains only non-ethnic wars."; Uwe Wagschal and Thomas Metz, "A Demographic Peace? Youth Bulges and Other Population-Related Causes of Domestic Conflict," *Statistics Politics and Policy* 7, no. 1–2 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1515/spp-2017-0004, as cited in Lesley Pruitt, "Rethinking Youth Bulge Theory in Policy and Scholarship: Incorporating Critical Gender Analysis," *International Affairs* 96, no. 3 (May 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa012; Pruitt, "Rethinking Youth Bulge Theory in Policy and Scholarship: Incorporating Critical Gender Analysis."
[44] Yair and Miodownik, "Youth bulge and civil war: Why a country's share of young adults explains only non-ethnic wars.", 30.

are highly significant when it comes to the driving forces of war.[45] Pruitt, however, criticizes the youth bulge theory for inaccurately stereotyping young men as predominantly violent and at the same time often disregarding the role of women.[46] Instead, she argues that scholars should supplement with a critical gender analysis that will also shed more light on *why, how,* and *which* young men get involved in not only violence but also peacebuilding.[47]

Henrik Urdal attempts in his study from 2006, to investigate whether youth bulges increase the prevalence of three different types of internal political violence: armed conflicts, terrorism, and riots.[48] He finds that youth bulges may in fact increase the risk of terrorism, riots, and armed demonstrations, while he also suggests that youth bulges provide better explanations for low-intensity political violence than large-scale wars.[49] Much like Urdal, other scholars also distinguish between different kinds of political violence in their research. Yair and Miodownik distinguish between ethnic civil war and non-ethnic civil war and find that youth bulges affects the onset of non-ethnic armed conflicts, but not ethnic conflicts.[50] Cincotta and Weber distinguish between non-territorial intrastate conflicts (revolutions) and territorial conflicts (separatist conflicts).[51] They find that the onset of territorial conflicts is more likely when a country experiences a youth bulge in comparison to non-territorial intrastate conflicts.[52]

2.1.1 Mechanisms leading young populations to aggression

Now let us have a look at the mechanisms leading youthful age structures to be more prone to political violence. What are the dynamics that seem to be driving young people in particular? What do scholars point to when considering the *why* more than the *if*?

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[45] Wagschal and Metz, "A Demographic Peace? Youth Bulges and Other Population-Related Causes of Domestic Conflict", 55, as cited in Pruitt, "Rethinking Youth Bulge Theory in Policy and Scholarship: Incorporating Critical Gender Analysis", 721.
[46] Pruitt, "Rethinking Youth Bulge Theory in Policy and Scholarship: Incorporating Critical Gender Analysis", 711.
[47] Ibid., 713.
[48] Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 2006): 608, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00416.x.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Yair and Miodownik, "Youth bulge and civil war: Why a country's share of young adults explains only non-ethnic wars", 25.
[51] Richard Cincotta and Hannes Weber, "Youthful Age Structures and the Risks of Revolutionary and Separatist Conflicts," in *Global Political Demography*, ed. Achim Goerres and Pieter Vanhuysse (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 58, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73065-9_3.
[52] Ibid., 83-84.

When considering what mechanisms lead youthful age structures to be more prone to violence, it is crucial to examine why young people are beneficial to recruit from a rebel group perspective, and at the same time the circumstances in which joining rebel groups is desirable for young people. Thus, while the fact that youths are more attractive for recruitment of violent groups may explain how a bigger youth cohort is fruitful from the recruiter's perspective, it fails to explain what the potential recruits achieve from joining these violent groups. The truth is, however, that youths, and more often children, do not always have a choice. This question thus divides the literature into two different strands: Coerced recruitment and voluntary recruitment.[53]

A part of the literature suggests that youths and children are often being coerced into joining rebel groups through threats, abduction, and abuse.[54] Furthermore, data on rebel groups specifically located in Africa demonstrates the link between coercion and child recruitment by showing that rebel groups who recruit by force typically would have 2-3 times more child recruits than groups who do not use coercion.[55] Although children may be weaker in terms of fighting, violent groups could still perceive them as beneficial for other roles such as spying and guarding.[56] Moreover, the literature points to the fact that children and adolescents are more responsive to coercive methods and easier to indoctrinate, influence, punish, and manipulate, making them more obedient soldiers.[57]

The stream of literature on coercive recruitment appears to focus more specifically on children rather than young adults in contrast to the literature on voluntary recruitment and the conditions that drive particularly younger people to allow themselves to be recruited to politically violent groups on a voluntary basis. While, as earlier mentioned, some data reveal how rebel groups who recruit by force would have more child recruits than groups not using coercion, several other studies find that most youths and children in armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have joined the conflicts voluntarily.[58] As previously mentioned, Cincotta has explained how youthful age structures can be more demanding than the respective state's institutional capacity can manage and thus lead to school

[53] Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman, "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion," *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818312000409; Matthias Flückiger and Markus Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 9 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717707303.
[54] Beber and Blattman, "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion", 67.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Christopher M. Faulkner and Blair Welsh, "Rebel Child Soldiering and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2022): 4, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqac073.
[57] Ibid.; Beber and Blattman, "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion", 68-69.
[58] Beber and Blattman, "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion", 67; Flückiger and Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa", 1935.

crowding and placement insufficiency, underemployment, and an elevated risk of social instability and political violence.[59] As it turns out, however, it is the societal conditions arising from youthful population structures, such as for instance crowding and underemployment, that often *cause* the elevated risk of political violence - mostly through voluntary recruitment.

The argument that institutional bottlenecks and lack of employment opportunities drive youths to be more inclined to participate in political violence on a voluntary basis is backed by many other scholars.[60] Flückiger and Ludwig mention lack of employment opportunities and the hope to escape poverty as drivers, which both seem rather interrelated.[61] An abundance of young people within a society will often likely create a surplus of young people entering the working age compared to the demand. Collier argues that these conditions lower the opportunity costs for young people of being recruited to rebel groups, as the alternative for many would be unemployment and poverty.[62] Rather, joining a rebel group can for many even be the solution to have an alternative income, since recruits are often offered a range of different both material benefits such as salaries and loots, alongside non-material benefits such as protection measures.[63]

Brett and Specht found strong empirical data backing Collier's argument during interviews with young soldiers.[64] Through these interviews, Brett and Specht found that poverty, lack of schooling, and low alternative income opportunities were key considerations when deciding to join rebel groups.[65] In other words, voluntary recruitment appears worthwhile when potential gains of joining are sufficiently high while the opportunity costs are sufficiently low.

Özerdem and Podder describes the difference between recruitment and mobilization, since these are formed by two distinct processes.[66] Recruits are either people who are forced to join rebel

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[59] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 5.
[60] Flückiger and Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa"; Paul Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective," in *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, ed. Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (Boulder, United States of America: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685850012-006, as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence"; Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight* (Lynne Rienner Pub, 2004), as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence."
[61] Flückiger and Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa", 1935.
[62] Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective", as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610-611.
[63] Ibid.; Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder, *Youth in Conflict and Peacebuilding: Mobilization, Reintegration and Reconciliation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 15.
[64] Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Özerdem and Podder, *Youth in Conflict and Peacebuilding: Mobilization, Reintegration and Reconciliation*, 15.

groups or attracted through material and/or non-material benefits as mentioned earlier.[67] Mobilization, on the other hand, relies more on popular support due to injustices and discontent by the mobilized, rather than material benefits.[68] Moreover, they distinguish between two types of mobilization: The first type of mobilization is political and involves collective and agreed upon action against, inter alia, authorities through measures such as demonstrations, riots, strikes, and petitions.[69] The second type of mobilization is classified as conflict-related due to the involvement of different types of violence at both collective and individual level and in different strengths and scales.[70] However, it is common for both types of mobilization that they are triggered by deprivation and dissatisfaction with the authorities due to for instance inequality or maldistribution of goods.[71] This demonstrates that people, although not having been directly recruited, can still be mobilized into other types of action based on grievances, which could very well be linked with the existence of an extraordinarily large ratio of youths to the total population.

Faulkner and Doctor suggest instead that much of the existing research on child recruitment distinguishes between the supply and demand side of recruitment.[72] On the supply-side, they echo the suggestion made by several other scholars that structural conditions such as high unemployment rates and poverty are likely to push children into rebel groups and movements.[73] This, they posit, is however also the case for adults.[74] Thus, when an excessive supply of young adults emerges, structural deficiency and insufficient capacity of the state can likewise create a substantial supply of youths likely to join rebel recruitment or violent mobilization. The demand-side, on the other hand, focuses on the number of children specifically demanded by rebels rather than the number of potential recruits available as on the supply-side.[75]

The distinction between supply and demand also distinguishes somewhat between the recruiter and the recruitee perspective much like the previously mentioned distinction between coerced

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 15-16.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Christopher M. Faulkner and Austin C. Doctor, "Rebel Fragmentation and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers," *International Studies Quarterly*, (2021): 2–3, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab031.
[73] Ibid.; Flückiger and Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa"; Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective", as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence"; Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence."
[74] Faulkner and Doctor, "Rebel Fragmentation and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers", 2.
[75] Ibid., 2-3.

recruitment and voluntary recruitment. However, the distinction between supply and demand focuses on the driver and purpose of recruitment while the distinction between coerced recruitment and voluntary recruitment focuses more on the procedure of the recruitment.

These considerations about the specific dynamics leading youthful age-structures to be more prone to violence show the significant part insufficient institutional capacity in general plays in lowering the opportunity costs of carrying out political violence for young people. While institutional bottlenecks such as the lack of employment opportunities can in fact in large parts be explained by youth bulges entering the workforce, other demographic factors can be influential as well.

2.3. Urbanization

Another factor often associated with the occurrence of political violence and emergence of mobilized rebel groups is urbanization. While urbanization may contribute to the lack of employment opportunities as mentioned above, urbanization is also linked with several other potential vulnerabilities in terms of e.g. access to water, health services, food, and shelter.[76] Urbanization can be beneficial and economically fruitful. In less-developed societies, however, crucial infrastructure can have difficulty keeping up with the large urban influx of people, especially in urban slums, creating basic preconditions for conflict and violence.[77]

Urbanization is the social change that happens when there is an increase in the population living in urban places, i.e., characterized by high density and non-agricultural.[78] More specifically, urbanization refers to a relative measure, where 0 percent means that the population is entirely rural, and 100 percent means that the population is entirely urban.[79]

The global growth in urbanization has been stimulated in part by the massive growth in the total world population experienced over the past 200 years.[80] The world population has even doubled over the span of 50 years from almost 4 billion people in 1973 to 8 billion people in 2023 alone.[81]

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[76] Patel and Burkle, "Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis", 194.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 353-354.
[79] Ibid., 356.
[80] Ibid., 36.
[81] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Demographic indicators by region, subregion and country, annually for 1950-2100," Data set (United Nations Population Division, 2024), accessed July 26, 2024, https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/MostUsed/.

Population growth was initially triggered by increasingly low death rates compared to fertility rates, resulting in a higher number of births than deaths every year.[82] However, death rates were lowered at different speeds in different areas of the world, leading populations to have grown disproportionately as well.[83] This disproportionate population growth, in turn, set in motion the migration transition eventually resulting in the urban transition.[84]

Since most of the population have lived in rural areas for the longest part of human history, this has also been where population growth would initially lead to a surplus of young people looking for jobs that were not available, forcing them to seek elsewhere for economic prosperity.[85] The first migration transition started in rural Europe where rural Europeans ended up migrating to the Americas where there was much land to settle on since that part of the world had yet to experience overpopulation due to population growth.[86] Today, most of the world - at least the habitable part of it - is populated to the point where rural habitants have nowhere else to migrate to than the cities, thus leading to the urban transition.[87]

The urban transition and trends in urbanization are also highly visible when examining data. Data from the United Nations Population Division shows that while 34 percent of the total population in the world was living in urban areas in 1960, this percentage had risen to 57 percent in 2023.[88] If examining the urban population in SSA solely, this amounts to 43 percent of the total population in 2023 within SSA.[89] In the DRC the percentage of the total population living in urban areas in 2023 amounted to 47 percent which is thus 4 percentage points higher than in SSA as a whole.[90] While the global annual urban growth rate has decreased over time from 2.8 percent annual urban growth in 1961 to 1.7 percent annual urban growth in 2023, the urban growth rate in specifically SSA was nonetheless 3.8 percent in 2023.[91] Again, the urban growth rate in the DRC shows itself to be yet

[82] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 39-40.
[83] Ibid., 40-42.
[84] Ibid., 42, 98.
[85] Ibid., 100-101.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] United Nations Population Division, "Urban population (% of total population)," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed August 16, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?view=chart.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] World Bank, "Urban population growth (annual %)," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed August 16, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.GROW.

even higher and amounts to 4.5 percent.[92] These statistics are presented in Table 1 along with the temporal development of the past 10 years.

Some part of the explanation as to why the urban growth rate is comparatively high in SSA, and therefore also the DRC, is the fact that death rates declined at different speeds in different areas of the world as earlier mentioned.[93] Up until the second world war, only the more economically developed areas such as Europe and North America experienced declining death rates.[94] Thus, the higher urban growth in SSA and the DRC is likely connected with a later emergence of the urban transition along with still relatively high birth rates.[95]

Table 1: Urban trends from 2014 to 2023 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the world

	Urban population (% of total population)			**Urban population growth (annual %)**		
Year	*DRC*	*SSA*	*World*	*DRC*	*SSA*	*World*
2014	42.2	38.1	53.4	4.8	4.2	2.1
2015	42.7	38.6	53.8	4.7	4.2	2.1
2016	43.3	39.2	54.3	4.8	4.1	2.0
2017	43.9	39.7	54.7	4.8	4.1	2.0
2018	44.5	40.2	55.2	4.6	4.1	1.9
2019	45.0	40.8	55.6	4.5	4.0	1.9
2020	45.6	41.3	56.1	4.5	4.0	1.8
2021	46.2	41.8	56.5	4.5	3.9	1.6
2022	46.8	42.4	56.9	4.5	3.9	1.6
2023	47.4	42.9	57.3	4.5	3.8	1.7

Data source: United Nations Population Division and World Bank, accessed at World Bank.[96]

Above all, these numbers illustrate 1) how the urban share of the world population has risen significantly in recent times, 2) that while the annual urban growth rate has lowered, it is positive nonetheless, pointing to a continuing growth in urbanization, and 3) that the high annual urban growth

[92] Ibid.
[93] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 40.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.; Goldstone and May, "Contemporary Population Issues.", 12-13.
[96] United Nations Population Division, "Urban Population (% of Total Population)"; World Bank, "Urban Population Growth (Annual %)."

rate in the DRC, combined with their current lower-than-world-average urban population share, deem it likely that the DRC still has considerable urbanization growth ahead of them in the future.

In the study by Henrik Urdal, he investigates how different factors affect or moderate the relation between youthful population structures and violence.[97] He finds significant results for moderating effects by both economic growth, expansion of higher education, dependency ratio, and regime type.[98] As for what regards urbanization, however, Urdal finds no significant interaction effect.[99] When investigating causes of political violence and social unrest, urbanization is, nonetheless, frequently mentioned in the literature as a possible factor.

Several scholars have found urbanization to be correlated with political violence of different types.[100] Goldstone argues that urbanization can factor into an increase of political violence.[101] More specifically, he believes that the risk of political violence increases if a country's urban growth is not matched by an increase in economic growth.[102] This, he says, is just one aspect of the problems that arise when the size of the labor force exceeds the availability of jobs, which is a very possible outcome of increased urbanization.[103]

Although Urdal's study from 2006 does not find significant evidence of the interaction effects from urbanization on how youthful age structures affect violence, Urdal nonetheless presents findings from other scholars who argued that geographical crowding can generate motives for political violence.[104] Furthermore, another scholar found that rapid urbanization would increase the likelihood of terror specifically, since terrorism is more prevalent in urban settings.[105]

A very recent study done by Duan and Cao revisits the relation between urbanization and violence through an extensive literature review and a case study of Xinjiang, China.[106] Based on the

[97] Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence."
[98] Ibid., 618-622.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Jack A. Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 1 (2002), https://www.jstor.org/stable/24357881; Andrey Korotayev et al., "Urban Youth and Terrorism: A Quantitative Analysis (Are Youth Bulges Relevant Anymore?)," *Political Studies Review* 21, no. 3 (February 22, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299221075908; Haiyan Duan and Xun Cao, "Revisiting the Urbanization-violence Nexus: The Mediating Effects of Local Ethnic Diversity," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 74 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2023.101903.
[101] Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict."
[102] Ibid., 10.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 613.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Duan and Cao, "Revisiting the Urbanization-Violence Nexus: The Mediating Effects of Local Ethnic Diversity."

literature review, they suggest that future research should be more attentive of factors mediating the effects of urbanization on violence - in particular, they propose a focus on the role of ethnic diversity.[107] They expect the benefits of urbanization in terms of for instance increased wealth to lead to a lower risk of violence in ethnic homogenous societies while ethnically diverse societies would be more exposed to violence as a result of urbanization.[108]

As previously mentioned, urbanization is triggered by changes in both the fertility rate, the mortality rate, and rural-urban migration. Moreover, the rural-urban migration in SSA is predominantly made up by youths migrating for reasons such as wealth, education, marriage, and as an escape from the agricultural sector.[109] Based on the rationale that much previous research found mixed results on the effect of urban youth bulges on conflict, Menashe-Oren sets out to examine whether specifically migrant-based youth bulges increase the likelihood of social conflict in urban SSA.[110] However, Menashe-Oren finds no empirical evidence of migrant-based youth bulges having an increasing effect on the likelihood of social conflict in urban SSA.[111]

A more recent study from 2022 suggests that an urban youth bulge is a very significant predictor of terrorist activity, and even more so than both a national youth bulge and urbanization examined separately.[112] Their research is based on the Global Terrorism Database and thus investigates terror activities only.[113] When running a test on the impact on terror of urbanization and youth bulges separately, they found no significant results on either.[114] In another model, they instead test the impact of an interaction between youth bulge and urbanization which shows both positive and significant results.[115] In other words, they find that a youth bulge's effect on the prevalence of terror activities is indeed strengthened by urbanization. The two studies by Menashe-Oren and Korotayev et al. respectively, reiterate how demographic factors can influence different types of political violence in different ways from one another.[116]

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[107] Ibid., 2.
[108] Ibid., 4.
[109] Ashira Menashe-Oren, "Migrant-based Youth Bulges and Social Conflict in Urban sub-Saharan Africa," *Demographic Research* 42, no. 3 (January 10, 2020): 61, https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2020.42.3.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 80-81.
[112] Korotayev et al., "Urban Youth and Terrorism: A Quantitative Analysis (Are Youth Bulges Relevant Anymore?)", 565-567.
[113] Ibid., 556.
[114] Ibid., 559.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Menashe-Oren, "Migrant-Based Youth Bulges and Social Conflict in Urban Sub-Saharan Africa"; Korotayev et al., "Urban Youth and Terrorism: A Quantitative Analysis (Are Youth Bulges Relevant Anymore?)."

Research on how urbanization and youthful population structures affect political violence, both combined and separately, has found mixed results in different studies. However, based on the above presented literature, the expected finding in this thesis is that a higher urbanization rate strengthens the likelihood of political violence within a society in SSA such as the DRC.

2.4. Other factors

Scholars have studied the link between demographic factors and political violence for decades, and thus also other factors besides age-structures and urbanization have been found to be influencing factors of political violence.[117]

In an article from 2002, Goldstone briefly summarized some of the key findings that scholars had been able to identify up until the publication of said article.[118] Inter alia, these findings dictated that environmental degradation does not necessarily lead to political violence, but that population growth can lead to political violence due to increasingly scarce resources, if the political violence involve competition over or stealth of said resources.[119] Moreover, Goldstone asserted that population changes such as urbanization, rapid growth in the working-age population alongside scarcity of jobs and change of local balance of ethnic groups can increase the risk of political violence, thus adding a few factors to the list of potential influencers.[120] However, as Goldstone himself also wrote in his article, the body of evidence and research at the time was still incomplete albeit growing.[121]

A factor considered by several scholars, when examining the onset of political violence, is the state of the economy of the country in question.[122] Goldstone suggests that some conflicts could be avoided, had the structural conditions and industrial economy within urban settings ensured the growth necessary.[123] According to him, political unrest is more likely to emerge when urban growth is not matched by a sufficient increase in economic growth.[124] Urdal finds that the interaction between

[117] Herbert Moller, "Youth as a Force in the Modern World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10, no. 3 (1968), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417500004898; Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict"; Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence."
[118] Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict", 4-5.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 14.
[122] Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict"; Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence."
[123] Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict", 10.
[124] Ibid.

youth bulges and low economic growth increases the risk of terrorism, but at the same time does not seem to affect the risk of armed conflict.[125]

Another aspect that scholars have connected with political violence is education. Faulkner and Doctor mention that states with limited education possibilities are more likely to experience child recruitment to rebel groups.[126] Findings from Collier and Hoeffler also suggest that higher male secondary schooling rates reduce the risk of conflict.[127] Since highly educated males would be able to get better-paying jobs than less-educated males, the opportunity costs of joining rebellions are higher for the former than the latter.[128] Urdal, however, finds that the interaction between youth bulges and a rapid expansion in higher education in fact increased the risk of terrorism, which he theorizes can be caused by increased frustration and grievances from highly educated graduates that cannot be accommodated by the workforce despite their educational efforts.[129]

Gender is another recurrent theme in the literature on violence. As previously mentioned, several scholars investigate the effect of especially male youth bulges on violence, and Wagschal and Metz even suggest that particularly male youth bulges are highly significant predictors of war.[130] Menashe-Oren furthermore notes that men are more prone to violence and are more risk-taking from a behavioral ecological perspective, while also acknowledging that female youth bulges could be related to social conflict as well due to for instance higher unemployment rates.[131] Several other studies point to how regime type can affect the emergence of political violence, claiming mostly how anocracies are more prone to experience intrastate conflicts than either democracies or autocracies.[132]

The above-mentioned potential influencing factors on political violence exhibit why and how many of these mechanisms are particularly relevant in a Sub-Saharan African context, considering

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[125] Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 624.
[126] Faulkner and Doctor, "Rebel Fragmentation and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers", 2.
[127] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 573-574, https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064.
[128] Ibid., 588.
[129] Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 624, 612-613.
[130] Yair and Miodownik, "Youth bulge and civil war: Why a country's share of young adults explains only non-ethnic wars"; Wagschal and Metz, "A Demographic Peace? Youth Bulges and Other Population-Related Causes of Domestic Conflict", as cited in Pruitt, "Rethinking Youth Bulge Theory in Policy and Scholarship: Incorporating Critical Gender Analysis"; Pruitt, "Rethinking Youth Bulge Theory in Policy and Scholarship: Incorporating Critical Gender Analysis."
[131] Menashe-Oren, "Migrant-Based Youth Bulges and Social Conflict in Urban Sub-Saharan Africa", 60.
[132] Khusrav Gaibulloev et al., "Regime Types and Terrorism," *International Organization* 71, no. 3 (January 1, 2017): 519, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818317000169; Patrick M. Regan and Sam R. Bell, "Changing Lanes or Stuck in the Middle: Why Are Anocracies More Prone to Civil Wars?," *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2010): 747, https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912909336274.

the respective population structures and demographic trends within Sub-Saharan African countries. One of these countries, the DRC, will now be dealt with in further detail.

2.5. Historical context of the Democratic Republic of Congo

As the largest country by area within SSA, the DRC is a highly relevant case to study in this literature, given especially the social unrest experienced throughout the past few decades.[133] While the aim of this thesis is to identify potential causal relationships between specific demographic factors and the increase of violence in the DRC in recent years as a case study with particular interest in the eastern DRC, it is crucial to consider the historical context of the DRC. While the 2021 offense by M23 is the most recent critical event in the history of violence in the DRC, it is not the first one.[134] As this thesis will have a closer look at the increase of political violence in the DRC in recent years, it is critical to cover a more general historical context alongside past episodes of mobilization that can be connected to the current situation. The following section will present a brief chronological overview of significant events from 1960, where the DRC gained independence from Belgium, up to the current security situation.[135]

When the DRC gained independence in June 1960 after nearly 80 years of Belgian colonial rule, institutional and political insecurity followed.[136] The DRC only had 16 university graduates left, and the army was both small and largely untrained.[137] This also prompted one of the first United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions in Africa, when the first democratically elected prime minister Patrice Lumumba needed assistance with removing Belgian soldiers from the DRC and with general security measures until the national army in the DRC was yet again capable of protecting themselves.[138] However, Lumumba was arrested in September 1960 and killed in January 1961, and after a few years of power struggles, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (now Mobutu Sese Seko) became the president

[133] World Bank Group, "The World Bank in the DRC: Overview," 2024, accessed August 10, 2024, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview.
[134] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[135] Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Chronology."
[136] Ibid.
[137] Council on Foreign Relations, "Eastern Congo: A Legacy of Intervention," accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/eastern-congo-legacy-intervention.
[138] United Nations, "Historical Timeline of UN Peacekeeping: Establishment of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC)," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed August 12, 2024, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/historical-timeline-of-un-peacekeeping; Council on Foreign Relations, "Eastern Congo: A Legacy of Intervention."

in 1965.[139] Mobutu remained President of the DRC for 32 years and named it Zaire while adapting an authoritarian regime with execution of opponents and abolishment of political parties.[140]

The next critical point in the DRC history would in fact turn out to take place in Rwanda, since the Rwandan genocide in 1994 was one of the factors leading to the First Congo War in 1996.[141] The 1994 Rwandan genocide resulted in the death of more than 1 million people alongside rapes of between 150,000 and 250,000 women.[142] The genocide marked the culmination of a conflict between the Tutsi ethnic group (14 percent of the total population in Rwanda) and the Hutu ethnic group (85 percent of the total population in Rwanda) primarily, while the victims of the genocide were mainly Tutsi and to a lesser extent moderate Hutu sympathizers who had been killed by extremist Hutu authorities.[143] After the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front had gained military control after over two months of genocide, over 1 million Hutu civilians and militia fled to the DRC which was at the time called Zaire.[144]

After having fled to Zaire, former Hutu forces were able to use the refugee camp as a base from which they could re-arm and prepare for invasions into Rwanda.[145] Meanwhile, Rwandan troops and Zaire-based Tutsi planned an invasion into Zaire with the help of neighboring states such as Uganda and Burundi, later also Angola.[146] The offense by Rwandan troops and Zaire-based Tutsi in 1996 was brutal and became what is now referred to as the First Congo War where the aim of the Rwandan soldiers and allies was to overthrow Zaire's President Mobutu.[147] The First Congo War ended in 1997 when the Rwandan army seized Kinshasa, the capitol of the DRC, and announced the new President Laurent Kabila.[148] The country is also officially renamed "the Democratic Republic of Congo".[149]

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[139] Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Chronology."
[140] Council on Foreign Relations, "Eastern Congo: A Legacy of Intervention."
[141] United Nations, "Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations," accessed August 12, 2024, https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[144] United Nations, "Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations."
[145] Ibid.; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "DRC: Mapping human rights violations 1993-2003: Info note 6: Involvement of neighbouring states" (United Nations OHCHR, 2010), 1.
[146] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "DRC: Mapping Human Rights Violations 1993-2003: Info Note 6: Involvement of Neighbouring States", 1.
[147] Ibid.; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[148] Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Chronology."
[149] Ibid.

In the aftermath of the First Congo War, the relations between the DRC and Rwanda deteriorated yet again regardless of the change of president. To distance himself from Rwanda, Kabila ordered Rwandan soldiers to leave the DRC, dismissed the Rwandan army chief of staff, and allowed mobilization of Hutu near the border to Rwanda.[150] Some Tutsi soldiers crossed these orders and chose instead to organize an invasion of the DRC in 1998 alongside Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi.[151] The DRC on the other hand were backed by Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan.[152] This invasion launched the Second Congo War during which the UN launched a monitoring mission (MONUC).[153] After the assassination of Laurent Kabila in 2001, Kabila's son Joseph Kabila took power and formally ended the Second Congo War in 2002, although he was not officially elected until 2006 where the DRC held its first democratic elections in over 40 years.[154] Since the Second Congo War, instability has persisted in the DRC with one of the most noteworthy rebel groups being the M23, who primarily consists of ethnic Tutsis.[155]

The rebel group M23 is the successor of the group National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP)[156]. After the two Congolese wars, many fighters chose to remain in the North Kivu province in the eastern DRC to form the CNDP and claimed their aim was to protect Congolese people who were of the Tutsi ethnic group.[157] Meanwhile, around 80 percent of the most senior commanders of the CNDP were from the Tutsi community themselves.[158] A peace agreement was made between the CNDP and the government of the DRC on March 23, 2009, where they agreed to, inter alia, integrate the police force and armed units of the CNDP into the Congolese National Police and Armed Forces of the DRC, as well as transform the CNDP into a government-recognized political party instead of a politico-military movement.[159]

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[150] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "DRC: Mapping Human Rights Violations 1993-2003: Info Note 6: Involvement of Neighbouring States", 2; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[151] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "DRC: Mapping Human Rights Violations 1993-2003: Info Note 6: Involvement of Neighbouring States", 2.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[154] Ibid.; Council on Foreign Relations, "Eastern Congo: A Legacy of Intervention."
[155] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[156] Serwat, "Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)."
[157] Ibid.
[158] Jason Stearns, *From CNDP to M23 Kivu: The Evolution of an Armed Movement in Eastern Congo* (Rift Valley Institute (RVI), 2012), 11, https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/rvi/2012/en/97677.
[159] The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP), "Peace Agreement between the Government and le Congres National pour la Defense du Peuple (CNDP)," *United Nations Peacemaker* (Goma, Congo, Democratic Republic of the, March 23, 2009), article 1, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/cd090323peace20agreement20between20the20government20and20the20cndp.pdf.

However, after the integration process of the police force and armed units of the CNDP fell through in 2012, some former CNDP militants decided to establish M23, named after the failed peace agreement, made on March 23 in 2009.[160] It is believed that Rwanda was supporting M23, which deteriorated the relationship between the DRC and Rwanda even further[161]. After causing the displacement of several hundred thousand people in eastern DRC, the M23 was defeated in 2013.[162] As shown earlier in this section, much of the instability seems to be between different ethnic groups, resulting in deep divisions in the population. Multi-ethnicity is therefore also a demographic factor that could influence the level of political violence.

Jens Rydgren connects ethnic conflict with a history of past conflicts, arguing that a history of past conflicts makes it more likely that new conflicts will erupt, but also goes on to investigate what underlying mechanisms lead the history of past conflicts to contribute to the likelihood of new conflicts.[163] He argues that an overestimation of the likelihood of conflict often happens due to memory biases that lead groups to mobilize for protective reasons, where this will in fact stir up conflict instead.[164] Moreover, he emphasizes that the need to glorify one's own ethnic group's past actions can collide with other ethnic groups and thus also foment unrest.[165] In addition, Ellingsen finds that multi-ethnicity has a strong and significant influence on domestic conflict.[166]

However, since there are also many countries where different ethnic groups live side by side in harmony, this, again, emphasizes the necessity to investigate different demographic factors that could be influencing the conflictual situation in synergy. Several other smaller uprisings besides that of M23 have also taken place in the DRC since the two Congo Wars.[167] However, after the more prominent rebel group M23 revived in 2021, militant attacks between especially M23, Rwandan troops, and Congo forces have become more frequent[168]. M23 gained control over large parts of the North Kivu province located in the eastern DRC in July 2023.[169] Despite both the DRC and Rwanda agreeing in November 2023 to reduce military presence near the border, hate speech and attempts to

[160] Serwat, "Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)."
[161] Ibid.
[162] Council on Foreign Relations, "Eastern Congo: A Legacy of Intervention."
[163] Rydgren, Jens. "The Power of the Past: A Contribution to a Cognitive Sociology of Ethnic Conflict." *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 3 (September 2007), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2007.00306.x.
[164] Ibid., 239.
[165] Ibid., 239-240.
[166] Ellingsen, "Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?: Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict during and after the Cold War", 244-245.
[167] Council on Foreign Relations, "Eastern Congo: A Legacy of Intervention."
[168] Ibid.; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[169] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

manipulate the political systems of the opposite country, the lethal conflict is still ravaging today.[170] While violence in the DRC is not limited to the eastern part only, regions in eastern DRC are currently the most exposed regions to violence.[171] Therefore, even if political violence has also intensified in the remainder of the DRC, Center for Preventive Action argues that further expansion of fighting in the eastern Congo is one of the biggest threats with regards to the current conflictual state of the DRC.[172]

[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.

3. Methodology

The following chapter aims to present the methodological foundation for this thesis and its analyses. Presenting the methodological decisions and processes clearly is crucial to ensure the research criteria of replicability.[173] Although qualitative studies, like the one conducted in this thesis, can be harder to replicate than quantitative studies, presenting the methodology also better enables scholars to trust the results of this study and use them as either starting points or inspiration for future research.[174]

First, the research design providing the general procedure of the analysis will be presented along with a description of the considerations regarding the case selection. Next, the operationalization will present the hypotheses alongside their expected associated causal chains. In addition, this section will identify the expected causal mechanisms and operationalize the primary factors investigated. Lastly, the chapter will go over the method of analysis as well as the nature of the empirical evidence that will be used in the analysis.

3.1. Research design

The academic findings of this thesis will be found through a single-case study research design. As explained by Toshkov, single-case studies are examining multiple pieces of empirical evidence about the case decided to investigate.[175] Thus, instead of looking at a few variables across many cases, this thesis will seek to include many different observations related to the single-case study: the DRC. The research design applied in this thesis furthermore centers around the explanatory dimension since the aim of the case-study is to investigate the causes of events and identify causal mechanisms between demographic factors and political violence.[176] If it is possible to explain parts of the recent re-escalation of political violence in the DRC by looking at demographic factors such as the composition, age-structure, and movement of the population within, it may also be possible to offer valuable insights into how peace can be achieved based on said demographic characteristics.

The case-study will in large parts be investigated through theory-testing, where the objective is to test whether the theoretical expectations from the existing literature can be used to explain the

[173] Lotte B. Andersen, "4. Forskningskriterier," in *Metoder i Statskundskab*, ed. Lotte B. Andersen, Kasper M. Hansen, and Robert Klemmensen, 2nd ed. (Latvia: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2012), 98.
[174] Ibid.; Dimiter Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science* (Palgrave, 2016), 335-337.
[175] Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 285.
[176] Ibid., 35.

political violence in the DRC.[177] There are two ways in which the thesis has the potential of contributing to the existing literature, depending on the outcome of the analysis. Either the hypothesized expectations are strengthened, and the recent re-escalation of political violence experienced in the DRC has in fact potentially been influenced by demographic factors. If that is the case, this thesis may be able to shed some light on causal mechanisms behind the motivation for violence that can contribute to the literature on how demographic factors can influence peacemaking processes, since it is vital to break down the mechanisms behind violence to approach potential peacemaking efforts. However, if the results turn out to deviate from the hypothesized expectations, the thesis contributes to the existing literature by weakening the confidence in the theorized expectations in relation to violence in the DRC. This may still prompt further research on the theory regarding the relation between political violence and demographic factors such as youthful age-structures, urbanization, and population composition.

As previously noted, this thesis seeks to explain the case-specific outcome, recent re-escalation of political violence in the DRC, through looking at existing demographic research and theories, in order to discuss potential peacemaking strategies. However, it also has the opportunity to explore potential other explanations for political violence than those presented in the literature review, if the empirical material turns out to propose other explanations. Therefore, this research design contains elements from both the inductive and deductive research dimensions when following the abduction method.[178]

3.1.1. Case selection

When conducting a single-case study analysis using theory-testing process tracing, it is crucial to select a case where both the X and Y are present, which in this analysis therefore should be a case where both the specific demographic conditions (X), as will be presented later in section 3.2, and political violence in 2021 (Y) are present.[179] Moreover, the case selection considerations have also been focusing on the substantive relevance.[180] Not only does the DRC have a general significant level of political violence within the country, but it has also experienced a very recent re-escalation in 2021,

[177] Ibid., 290-291.
[178] Ibid., 81-82.
[179] Derek Beach and Rasmus B. Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik," in *Metoder i Statskundskab*, ed. Lotte B. Andersen, Kasper M. Hansen, and Robert Klemmensen, 2nd ed. (Latvia: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2012), 243-244.
[180] Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 289.

as previously mentioned, due to, inter alia, a new offensive by the M23 group which has resulted in increased unrest in especially the eastern DRC.[181] Given the relative novelty of this re-escalation alongside the fact that it is still ongoing, the DRC is an interesting case of substantive relevance. Even more so, when considering the size and continuing growth of the affected population, since the DRC had more than 100 million inhabitants in 2023 and is projected to grow to more than 218 million inhabitants in 2050.[182] By choosing to investigate this specific country, the thesis will analyze relationships that could potentially be affecting a significant number of both children as well as adults, while also shedding some light on a conflict that seems to receive relatively little attention on the international stage compared to its scope.

3.2. Operationalization

Since the analysis conducted in this thesis is meant to investigate whether certain demographic conditions have influenced political violence in the DRC, the operationalization will identify the expected causal chains between these demographic factors on the one hand and political violence on the other. Causal mechanisms are defined as the factors that connect the independent and dependent variables in a causal relationship.[183] These variables must be present and observable for the causal chain to be valid.[184] Thus, the following section will present the three specific expected causal chains to be investigated in the analysis, reflecting the theoretical expectations covered in the literature review.

3.2.1. Youthful age structures affecting political violence

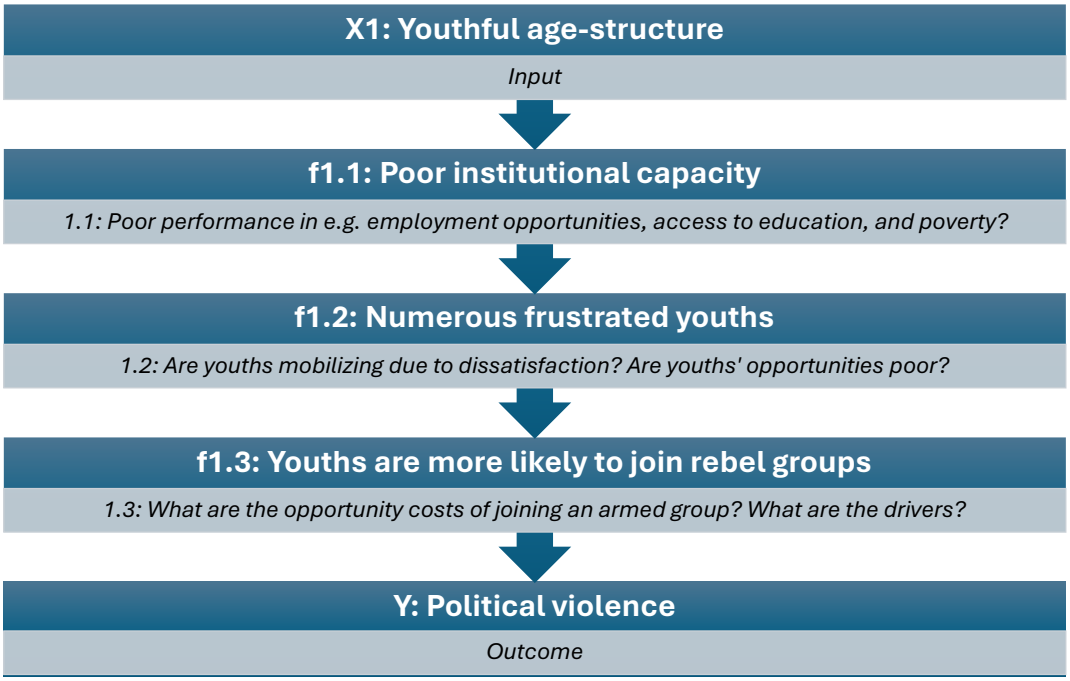
The first hypothesis the thesis will be testing is whether DRC's youthful age-structure has influenced the re-escalation of violence in the DRC. This theoretical expectation is laid out below in H1:

H1: The youthful age-structure in the Democratic Republic of Congo has influenced the experienced re-escalation of political violence in the country in 2021.

[181] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."
[182] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion and Country, Annually for 1950-2100"; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "Probabilistic Population Projections based on the World Population Prospects 2024: Probabilistic projection of total population (both sexes combined) by region, subregion, country or area, 2024-2100 (thousands)," Data set (United Nations Population Division, 2024), accessed September 9, 2024, https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/.
[183] Beach and Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik", 242.
[184] Ibid.

When analyzing the existence of a causal mechanism for a specific case, it is crucial to operationalize the specific expected causal factors and their observable implications.[185] In practice, this means to identify the causal chain of factors that is expected to lead youthful age-structures to political violence along with how these factors will be observed empirically. Based on the literature review, the first expected causal chain is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Causal chain 1



Note: Causal chain 1 shows the expected causal mechanisms behind H1. The three factors appearing in the causal chain are marked f1.1, f1.2, and f1.3 while the ways in which the respective factors are observed through empirical evidence are marked as 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3.

As mentioned in the presentation of the age-structural theory of state behavior, the state will often have trouble developing the sufficient institutional capacity needed to occupy a large number of young people, which can result in unemployment/underemployment, lower capacity in educational institutions, and therefore also a large surplus of young people lacking purpose or occupation.[186] This will be investigated by looking at how the government in DRC has handled the increase in youths in terms of e.g. employment opportunities, access to education, and poverty in general. Next, the large

[185] Ibid.
[186] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 5.

supply of young people is expected to be frustrated by the deficiencies in functionality of the country, giving them more reason to want to retaliate. This will be investigated by 1) searching for indications that youths are mobilizing in the DRC, and 2) assessing whether the opportunities for youths are poor and would likely cause frustration. Besides the personal driver for retaliating, the causal mechanism also expects youths to be financially and practically inclined to join rebel groups such as M23 because the alternative is worse.[187] This in turn will be investigated empirically by searching for evidence that can indicate what the opportunity costs are of joining armed groups vis-à-vis not joining, as well as the drivers for joining armed groups from a youthful perspective.

3.2.2. Urbanization affecting political violence

The second hypothesis will be testing whether urbanization in the DRC has contributed to the recent re-escalation of violence in the DRC. The theoretical expectation of this hypothesis is laid out below in H2:

H2: The high urbanization rate in the Democratic Republic of Congo has influenced the experienced re-escalation of political violence in the country in 2021.

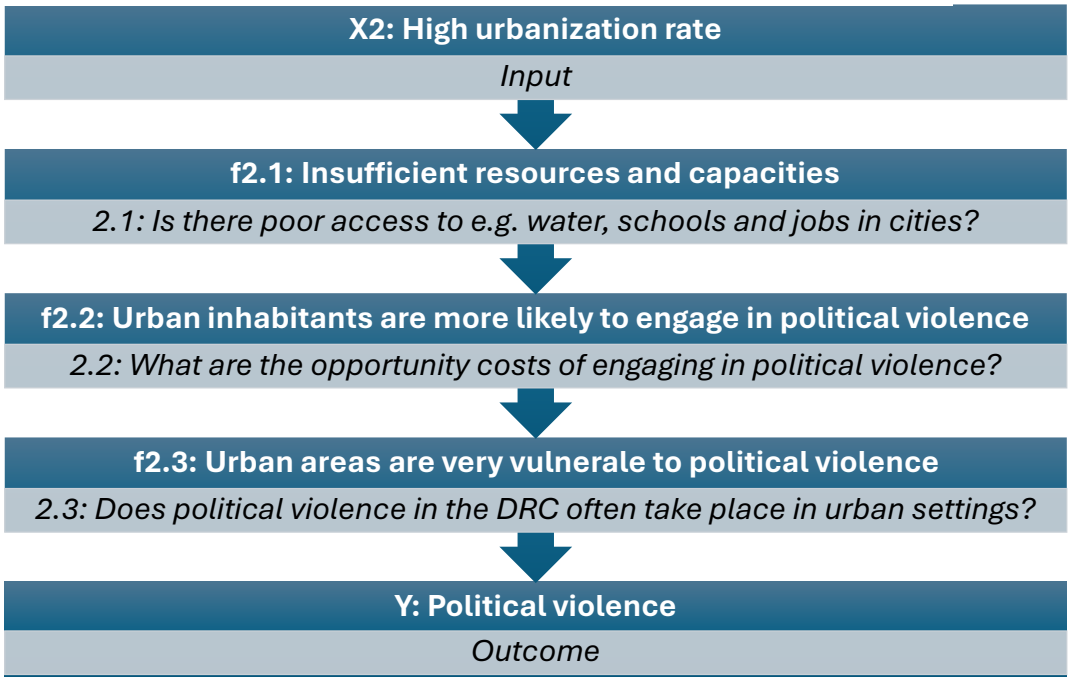
As with H1, the expected causal chain for H2 has been identified and is presented in Figure 2. Again, the causal chain will consist of both the causal mechanisms expected to lead to political violence and the operationalization of them in terms of observable implications.

As shown in Figure 2, the second causal chain also contains three expected causal mechanisms leading the X (in this case, high urbanization rate) to result in Y (political violence). The first expected causal mechanism (f2.1) in Figure 2 deals with insufficient resources and capacities. Since urbanization is the increase in the population living in urban places, it also results in a higher density of people gathered in the same places, which can be difficult to keep up with.[188] Because of the large influx of people in urban areas, urban inhabitants can experience vulnerabilities such as unemployment alongside access to food, water, and a place to call home, wherefore the factor of

[187] Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective", as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610-611; Özerdem and Podder, *Youth in Conflict and Peacebuilding: Mobilization, Reintegration and Reconciliation*, 15; Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610.
[188] Weeks, *Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, 353-354; Patel and Burkle, "Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis", 194.

insufficient resources and capacities will investigate the prevalence of those vulnerabilities.[189] The second factor expected to be part of the second causal chain leading to political violence is connected to how urbanization enlarges the labor force within a limited area, while it does not necessarily lead to a greater availability of jobs.[190] Thus, while it is closely connected to f2.1, f2.2 will investigate the opportunity costs that can potentially make it more worthwhile for people in urban areas to participate in political violence. The last causal mechanism included in this causal chain is the expectation that urban areas are very vulnerable to political violence, arguing that rapid urbanization can increase political violence, if the specific form of political violence most often occurs in urban settings.[191] This will be investigated by looking at how often political violence in fact takes place in urban settings. If it is the case, that political violence often takes place in urban areas, then a great influx of people to urban areas could result in more widespread political violence.

Figure 2: Causal chain 2



Note: Causal chain 2 shows the expected causal mechanisms behind H2. The three factors appearing in the causal chain are marked f2.1, f2.2, and f2.3 while the ways in which the respective factors are observed through empirical evidence are marked as 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

[189] Ibid.
[190] Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict", 10.
[191] Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 613.

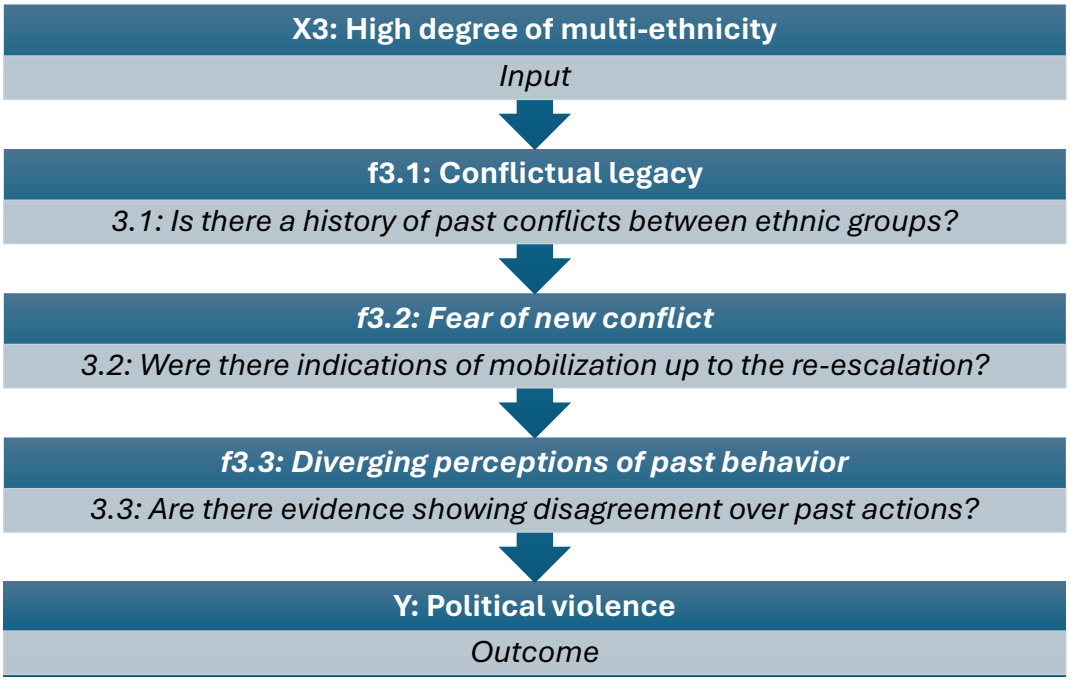
3.2.3. Multi-ethnicity affecting political violence

The third and last hypothesis expects the high degree of multi-ethnicity in the DRC to have contributed to the re-escalation in political violence in the DRC, since armed groups can have ethnic natures such as the M23. This theoretical expectation is formally presented in H3 below.

H3: The high degree of multi-ethnicity in the Democratic Republic of Congo has influenced the experienced re-escalation of political violence in the country in 2021.

Three causal mechanisms are again expected in the operationalization of H3 and will therefore be investigated. The expected causal chain for H3 is operationalized in the same format as the ones for H1 and H2. The causal chain for H3 is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Causal chain 3



Note: Causal chain 3 shows the expected causal mechanisms behind H3. The three factors appearing in the causal chain are marked f3.1, f3.2, and f3.3 while the ways in which the respective factors are observed through empirical evidence are marked as 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

As mentioned in the literature review, previous research points to the fact that multi-ethnicity can increase the likelihood of violence within a country.[192] One of the reasons in the literature for why ethnic conflicts happen is that there exists a conflictual past between the ethnic groups in speaking which therefore constitutes the first expected causal factor in the causal chain.[193] This will be investigated by looking at the history of conflicts in the DRC including a consideration about the ethnic nature of participating armed groups. The theory tested with this causal chain also posits that two specific factors are relevant in relation to how a conflictual history can contribute to the likelihood of a new conflict, and these two factors are reflected in the second and third expected causal mechanism, respectively. Hence, the second expected causal mechanism is that a biased fear of a new conflict leads ethnic groups to mobilize as a protective measure.[194] The investigation of the second causal link will be conducted by searching for observable indications that mobilization by one ethnic group happened prior to the actual escalation due to fear of another ethnic group. The third and last causal mechanism is based on Rydgren's argument that an ethnic group's need to glorify past actions and look good, can collide with how other ethnic groups perceive said past actions, leading to increased tensions between them.[195]

3.3. Method of analysis

The analysis conducted in this thesis will be done through the so-called process tracing method, which is a qualitative method used to test whether certain theorized causal mechanisms are present in a case[196]. In other words, the method can be used to create causal inference.[197] In this process, the analysis will rely on existing knowledge established through prior research and investigate how different events or other empirical data are linked together by causal mechanisms with strong implied links.[198] In practical terms, this means that the analysis in this thesis will attempt to identify the operationalized observable implications that can link political violence in the DRC, and the recent re-escalation thereof, to the country's youthful age structure, high urbanization rate, and high degree of

[192] Ellingsen, "Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?: Multiethnicity and Domestic Conflict during and after the Cold War", 244-245.
[193] Rydgren, "The Power of the Past: A Contribution to a Cognitive Sociology of Ethnic Conflict", 239-240.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Beach and Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik", 235; Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 297-298.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 297-298.

multi-ethnicity, respectively. As shown in the operationalization, and in Figure 1, 2, and 3 specifically, process tracing thus aims at breaking up the causal chains into several underlying observable mechanisms.[199]

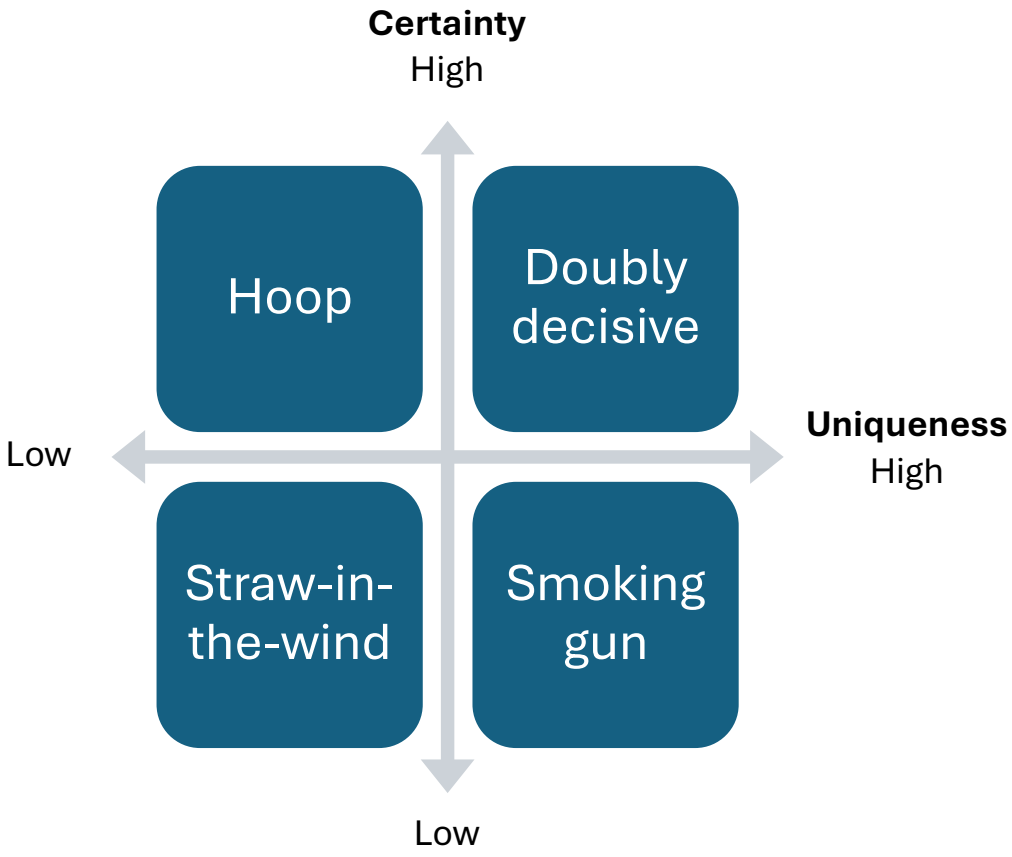
The operationalization has already identified which factors are expected to bridge the X and the Y in each of the three investigated causal chains, along with operational indicators for each factor which, if found empirically, can potentially support the existence of the expected causal relationship between X and Y.[200] The empirical evidence will primarily be found through document-analysis, which will be backed by data when applicable. Whether or not the empirical observations for a causal mechanism can be used to either support or oppose the existence of a given causal chain depends on the quality of the given observations. The quality of the tests will be assessed along two dimensions going from "low" to "high" on separate continuums: *Certainty* and *uniqueness*.[201] A high certainty indicates that the hypothesis will be difficult to confirm if the evidence is not available, while a high uniqueness indicates that only one hypothesis can produce the evidence in speaking.[202] These two dimensions serve as the foundation for the typology illustrated in Figure 4, which divides types of evidence into four tests: 'doubly decisive', 'hoop', 'smoking gun', and 'straw-in-the-wind'.[203]

Following the typology in Figure 4, passing the doubly decisive test is ideal, since evidence that is high in both certainty and uniqueness will disconfirm all other hypotheses than the one where certainty is high.[204] However, in practice, it is almost impossible to formulate predictions that are both high in uniqueness and certainty, given the difficulty in finding the type of evidence that would qualify for passing the doubly decisive tests.[205] Hoop evidence cannot disconfirm alternative hypotheses due to the low uniqueness, but the hypothesis, for which it has high certainty, remains possible.[206] However, if evidence fails the hoop test, it will be possible to disconfirm the existence of the specific causal mechanism in the causal chain.[207] The implication of the smoking gun evidence is that the expectation is unique, meaning that finding it will make the hypothesis stand very strong, while not finding it would have no implications.[208] Lastly, straw-in-the-wind evidence is the weakest type of

[199] Beach and Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik", 236.
[200] Ibid., 246.
[201] Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 295; Derek Beach and Rasmus B. Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (United States of America: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 102.
[202] Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 295.
[203] Ibid., 295-297.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 104.
[206] Toshkov, *Research Design in Political Science*, 295-297.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.

evidence out of the four, since it will not be possible to conclude anything meaningful regarding the existence of a specific causal mechanism in the associated causal chain.[209]

Figure 4: Typology of the four different types of evidence



Note: Typology illustrating the four different tests alongside the two dimensions, certainty and uniqueness, operating on continuums.[210]

In process tracing, the aim is therefore to increase the number of empirical observations for each link in the causal chain to maximize the number of relevant possible tests of the evidence type which can contribute to our knowledge about whether the given causal chain is valid.[211]

[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid.; Beach and Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik", 248-253.
[211] Beach and Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik", 235.

4. Analysis and results

The following chapter will present the analysis and results of the research conducted in this thesis. The aim of this chapter is therefore to map out whether the current state of unrest in the DRC is likely to have been influenced by a youthful population structure, a high urbanization rate and a multi-ethnic population composition, respectively. In approaching potential peacemaking efforts, it is vital to first break down the mechanisms and reasonings behind the current state of conflict. Of course, this thesis cannot solve the conflicts and political violence currently unfolding in the DRC. However, as argued in section 3.1, it might be able to shed light on causal mechanisms behind the motivation for violence which can contribute to the literature on how demographic factors can influence peacemaking processes through the right policies.

As previously mentioned, the theory-testing method of process tracing requires us to already know that both the primary influencing factor (X) and the outcome (Y) are present in the case the theory is tested on.[212] Since the expected outcome is the same for all three hypotheses, namely the recent re-escalation in political violence in 2021, the chapter will commence with a general look at how political violence has evolved in the DRC during the past few decades as well as the violent consequences of the revival of M23 specifically. This will prove the existence of Y in the case of the DRC. This is followed by three separate analyses of the three hypotheses, where each section will initiate with evidence that the respective X is present in the DRC.

4.1. Political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo

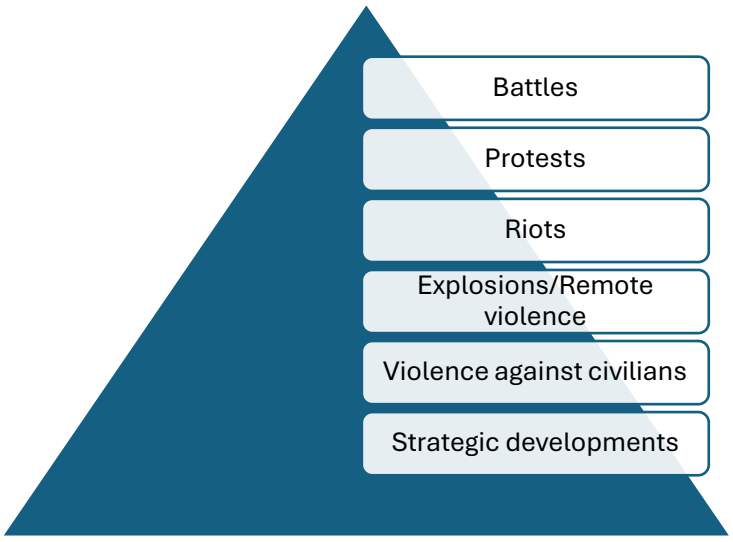
To show how the landscape of political violence has evolved in the DRC including the level of political violence in 2021, data from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) has been used.[213] ACLED tracks a range of violent and non-violent actions either committed by or affecting political agents such as governments, rebels, militias, protesters and civilians.[214] These violent and non-violent

[212] Beach and Pedersen, "10. Process tracing: metode, design og forskningslogik", 243-244.
[213] Raleigh et al., "Political Instability Patterns Are Obscured by Conflict Dataset Scope Conditions, Sources, and Coding Choices."
[214] ACLED, "ACLED Codebook 2023," *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*, (2023): 3, https://www.acleddata.com.

events are then divided between six different event types: battles, protests, riots, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, and strategic developments.[215]

The ACLED database is coded in real time and updated weekly, which is why it is important to note that the dataset used in this thesis was accessed on 4 June 2024.[216] The dataset was furthermore filtered to only include activities from January 1, 1997, to December 31, 2023, in Eastern Africa, Central Africa, Western Africa, and Southern Africa, although only data from the DRC has been used in the end. The six different event types within ACLED are placed in a hierarchical structure to ensure that an event or act of violence is not being double counted.[217] For instance, if an act of violence against civilians occurred during a battle and was thus included in both variables, this could potentially skew the results and thus lead to inaccurate conclusions. In practice, the hierarchical structure means that if an event is part of several event types, the event will be recorded under the hierarchically higher event type. Thus, if there is an act of violence against a civilian as part of a battle, this act would be recorded as a battle event.[218] The hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 5, with 'Battles' highest in the hierarchy, and 'Strategic developments' lowest.[219]

Figure 5: Hierarchy of types of violence

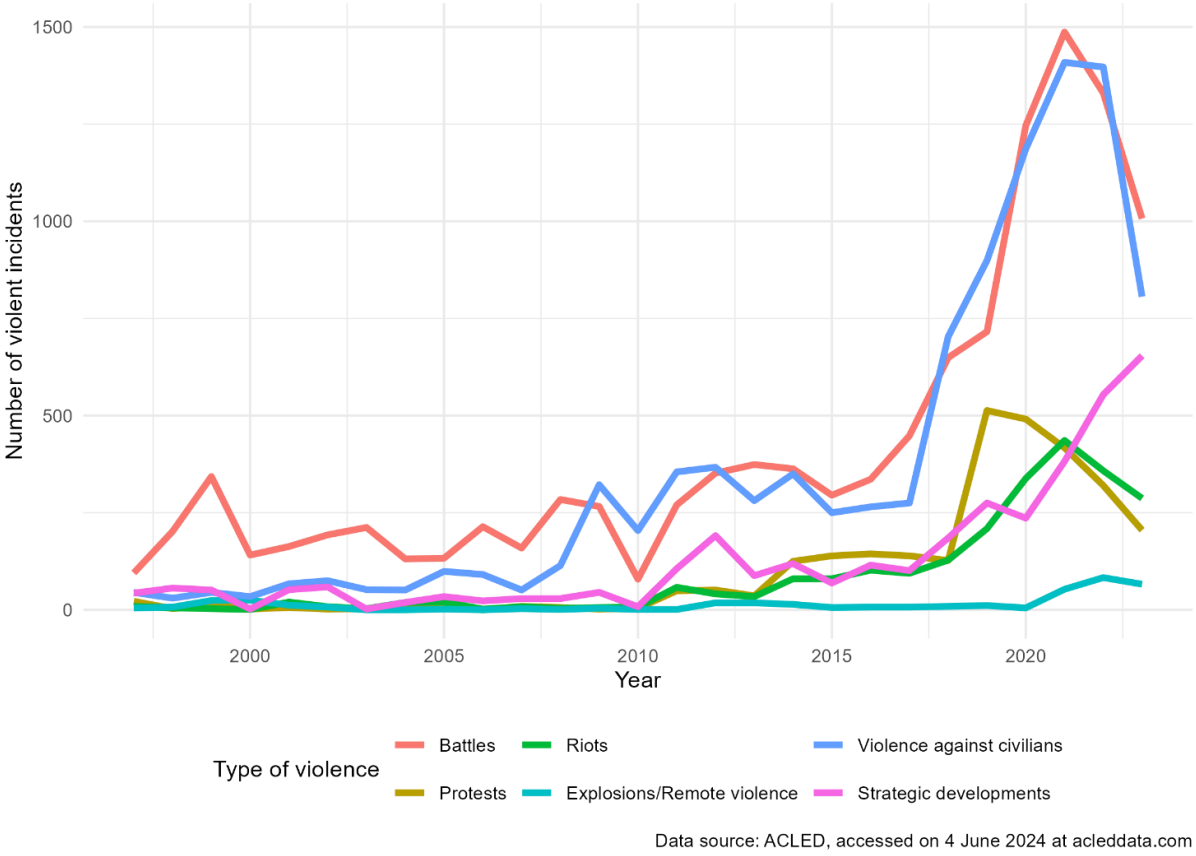


Note: Illustration of the hierarchy of types of violence, with 'Battles' highest and 'Strategic developments' lowest.[220]

[215] Ibid., 9-10.
[216] Ibid., 3.
[217] Ibid., 9-10.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid., 9-10.

In the raw dataset, each row represents one single act of political violence.[221] The data has therefore been aggregated so that all the individually recorded acts are clustered together to instead show the number of acts of political violence each year in each Sub-Saharan African country. The data on political violence in the DRC has then been used to create the plot in Figure 6 using ggplot in Rstudio.[222] Figure 6 illustrates the evolution of violence in the DRC from 1997 to 2023 across battles, protests, riots, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, and strategic developments.[223]

Figure 6: Evolution of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1997 to 2023



Note: Aggregated number of violent incidents of battles, protests, riots, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, and strategic developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo each year between 1997 and 2023.[224]

[221] Raleigh et al., "Political Instability Patterns Are Obscured by Conflict Dataset Scope Conditions, Sources, and Coding Choices."
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.

As expected, violence in the DRC seems to be increasing significantly before 2021 while being very high in 2021 and 2022. Although some types of political violence peaks at slightly different times, it is clear in Figure 6 that the level of violence in 2021 was substantially high overall. It is furthermore noticeable that both battles and violence against civilians seem to happen much more frequently than protests, riots, explosions/remote violence, and strategic developments respectively.[225] However, that may also simply be a result of the hierarchical structure of the data, meaning that for instance a riot would count as a battle if it happened during a battle.[226] Thus, many acts of both protests, riots, explosions/remote violence, and strategic developments could potentially be hidden in other types of violence. Nonetheless, the pattern shown in Figure 6 confirms that political violence was indeed present in the DRC at significant levels in and around 2021 (cf. the requirement of both X and Y to be present in the investigated case when theory-testing through process tracing).[227]

According to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, more than 120 militias and armed groups are active in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika Provinces which are all located in the eastern DRC.[228] They furthermore report that at least 2,446 civilians were killed in Ituri, South Kivu, and North Kivu during the first 10 months of 2023 alone, with a significant increase of both sexual violence and violence against children, and cases of gender-based violence having increased five-fold within a year.[229] Moreover, the violence experienced in the DRC during the past few years has had grave consequences for internally displaced people (IDP) in the DRC, going from 5.26 million IDP as of July 31, 2021, to 7.3 million IDP as of April 30, 2024, showing an increase of 2 million IDP in less than three years.[230] Having established the prominent increase in acts of political violence in and around 2021, the thesis will now advance to the analyses of the three separate hypotheses, H1, H2, and H3, in the attempt of identifying causal patterns.

[225] Ibid.
[226] ACLED, "ACLED Codebook 2023", 9-10.
[227] Raleigh et al., "Political Instability Patterns Are Obscured by Conflict Dataset Scope Conditions, Sources, and Coding Choices."
[228] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Democratic Republic of the Congo," May 31, 2024, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/#:~:text=More%20than%20120%20militias%20and,against%20humanity%20and%20war%20crimes.
[229] Ibid.
[230] UNHCR - Kinshasa, *DRC AT A GLANCE: as of 31 July 2021*, August 16, 2021, *UNHCR*; UNHCR - Kinshasa, *DRC AT A GLANCE: As of 30 June 2024*.

4.2. Analysis 1: Youthful age-structure affecting political violence

The first analysis attempts to settle whether the youthful age-structure in the DRC (X1) has had a causal effect on the increase in political violence in the DRC (Y) in 2021 (cf. H1). As illustrated by Figure 1 in chapter 3, the causal chain going from youthful age-structures to political violence contains three expected causal mechanisms which function as drivers for the causal relationship. The causal mechanisms that are expected to be found existing within the DRC are poor institutional capacity, numerous frustrated youths, and a higher likelihood that young people will join rebel groups (cf. section 3.2.1). If there is substantial evidence of all three causal mechanisms in the DRC, it is considered more likely that the youthful age-structure in the DRC has had a causal effect on political violence.

4.2.1. Assumption of the Democratic Republic of Congo having a youthful age structure

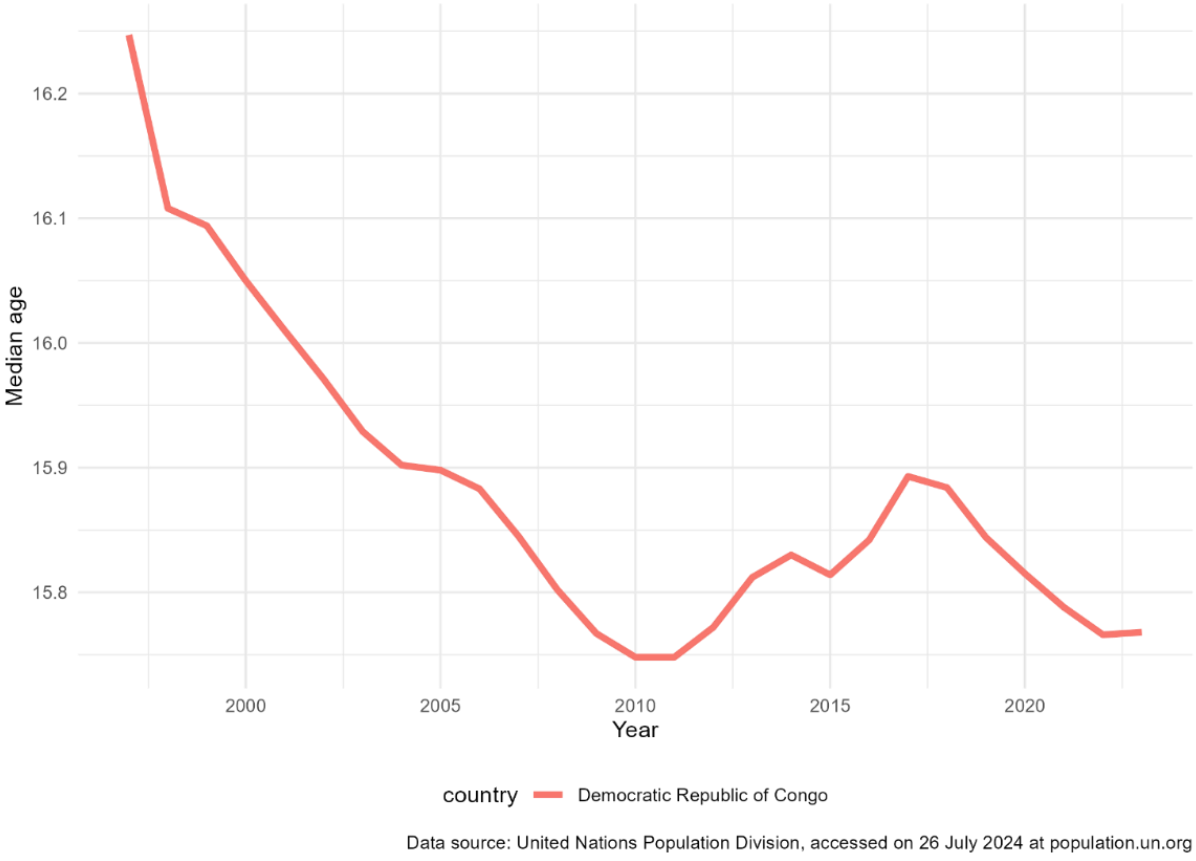
The primary influencing factor in H1, whose causal effect on political violence in the DRC is examined, is the degree of youthfulness within the DRC in 2021. Since theory-testing process tracing requires both X and Y to be present in the chosen case, this first section is meant to show that the DRC had a youthful age-structure in 2021 (X1). Much research in the field of how youthful age-structures influence the prevalence of violence is examined using youth-bulges as the measurement. However, as shown in the literature review, children younger than the typical age-range for youth bulges also have a higher risk of being pushed into joining rebel groups.[231] Therefore, to include this consideration in the analysis, the age-structure will first be illustrated as the median age for the DRC. The evolution of the median age in the DRC from 1997 to 2023 is shown below in Figure 7 using the ggplot in Rstudio. The data used is from the United Nations Population Division.[232]

Although the slope looks very volatile in Figure 7, the median age in the DRC has in fact been relatively stable over the years, while substantively still being very low in absolute terms when considering the values on the Y-axis.[233] With a median age of 15.8 in 2021 the median age is well under the 25.5-year threshold for the youthful age-structural phase according to the age-structural theory of

[231] See e.g. Beber and Blattman, "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion."; Faulkner and Welsh, "Rebel Child Soldiering and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence."
[232] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion and Country, Annually for 1950-2100."
[233] Ibid.

state behavior.[234] The median age of 15.8 also illustrates that 50 percent of the population was younger than 15.8, while the other 50 percent was older.

Figure 7: Median age in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1997 to 2023



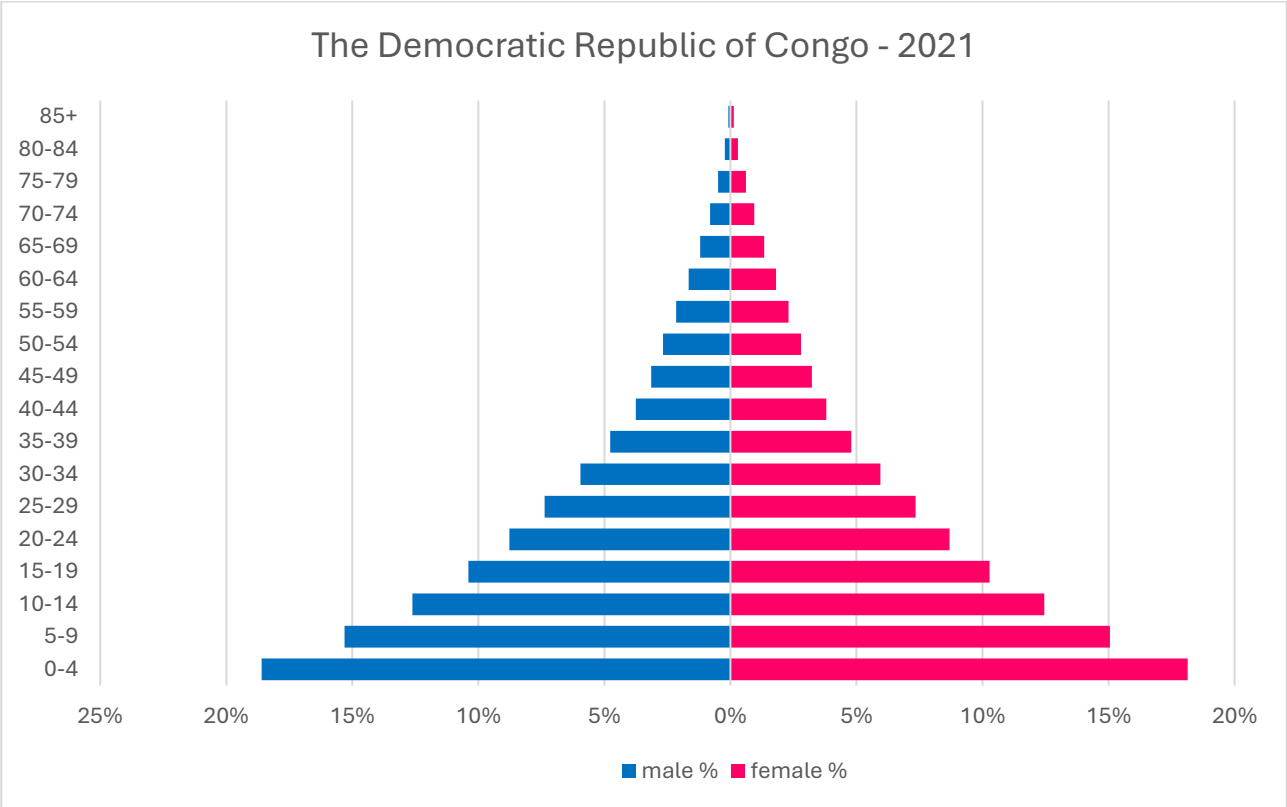
Note: Median age in the Democratic Republic of Congo each year between 1997 and 2023.[235]

Another way of visualizing the youthful age-structures is through a population pyramid. The population pyramid illustrated in Figure 8 below has been constructed in Excel using data from the United Nations Population Division and shows the age composition in the DRC in 2021 divided by gender.[236] In other words, the pyramid exhibits the percentage each age-group makes up of the total

[234] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 5.
[235] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion and Country, Annually for 1950-2100."
[236] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Male population by five-year age group, region, subregion and country, annually for 1950-2100 (thousands)," Data set (United Nations Population Division, 2024), accessed September 7, 2024, https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/.; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

population divided between males and females, where the X-axis shows the percentage, while the Y-axis shows the various age-groups. As shown by the expansive shape of the pyramid, it is again demonstrated how the population in the DRC is very young.

Figure 8: Population pyramid for the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2021



Note: Population pyramid for the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2021 based on data from the United Nations Population Division.[237]

It is therefore safe to say that the DRC had a very youthful population in 2021 when the political violence in the DRC reached a very significant and substantial level, wherefore it is possible to move forward with the analysis of the first causal chain reflecting H1.

Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Female population by five-year age group, region, subregion and country, annually for 1950-2100 (thousands)," Data set (United Nations Population Division, 2024), accessed September 7, 2024, https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/.

[237] Ibid.

4.2.2. Poor institutional capacity in the Democratic Republic of Congo (f1.1)

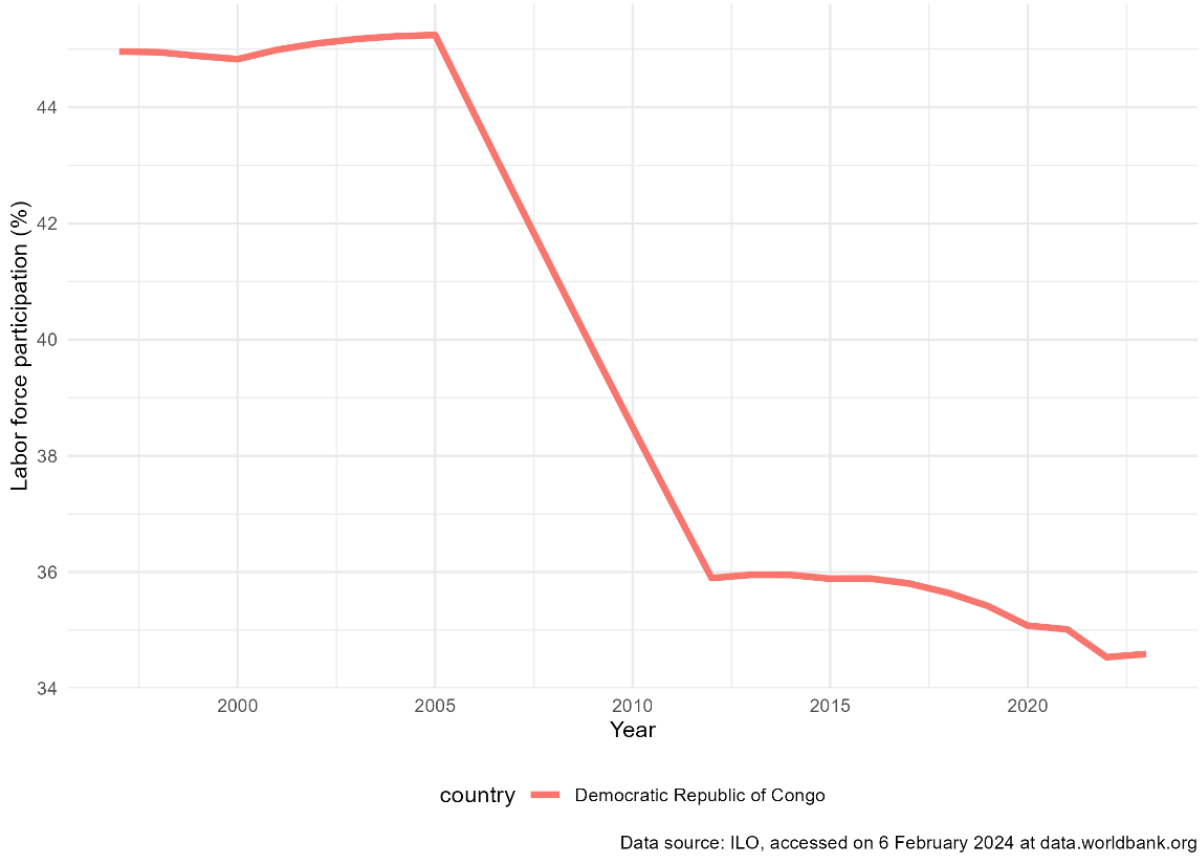
The first causal mechanism the thesis will try to identify in the case of the DRC is poor institutional capacity caused by the large influx of young people increasing the institutional demand (cf. Figure 1). As the investigation of this has been based on document analysis, the focus has been on especially the institutional capacity highlighted in the literature that can be subject to a decrease when faced by a growing young population, often in terms of employment opportunities and education. The test of the DRC having poor institutional capacity will empirically expect to find poor performance in e.g. employment opportunities, access to education, and poverty in general. This type of evidence would be considered sufficient to prove that there is poor institutional capacity in the DRC, but it is not considered necessary since other forms of institutional performances not considered here could nonetheless be poor even if the above-mentioned ones are not.[238] The type of empirical evidence is therefore subject to the smoking gun test, wherefore the DRC can be considered to have a poor institutional capacity if the evidence is found.[239]

A growing young population calls for more available jobs on the market in order for this preponderance of youths to be occupied and thus be able to contribute financially to their family. In a report from 2019, the International Labour Organization mentions how almost 70 percent of the population within the DRC were youths, of whom more than 80 percent were unemployed.[240] They, moreover, go on to state that there are still significant challenges to overcome in terms of particularly youth employment, even though the DRC has already made substantial improvements in the non-agricultural sectors specifically.[241] Figures 9 and 10 are made using data from the International Labour Organization and show the labor force participation rate for ages 15-24 and 15-64 respectively.[242] The

[238] Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105; David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 825-827, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049096511001429.
[239] Ibid.
[240] International Labour Organization, "State of Skills: The Democratic Republic of the Congo," (*ILO*, 2019): 7, accessed August 22, 2024, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/genericdocument/wcms_742204.pdf.
[241] Ibid., 9.
[242] International Labour Organization, "Labor force participation rate for ages 15-24, total (%) (modeled ILO estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep.," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed February 6, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.1524.ZS?end=2023&locations=CD&start=1991&view=chart; International Labour Organization, "Labor force participation rate, total (% of total population ages 15-64) (modeled ILO estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep.," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed February 6, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.ACTI.ZS?end=2023&locations=CD&start=1991&view=chart.

labor force participation rate for ages 15-24 is the proportion of the population between 15 and 24 years of age that is economically active by supplying labor to produce goods and services.[243]

Figure 9: Labor force participation for ages 15-24 in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1997 to 2023

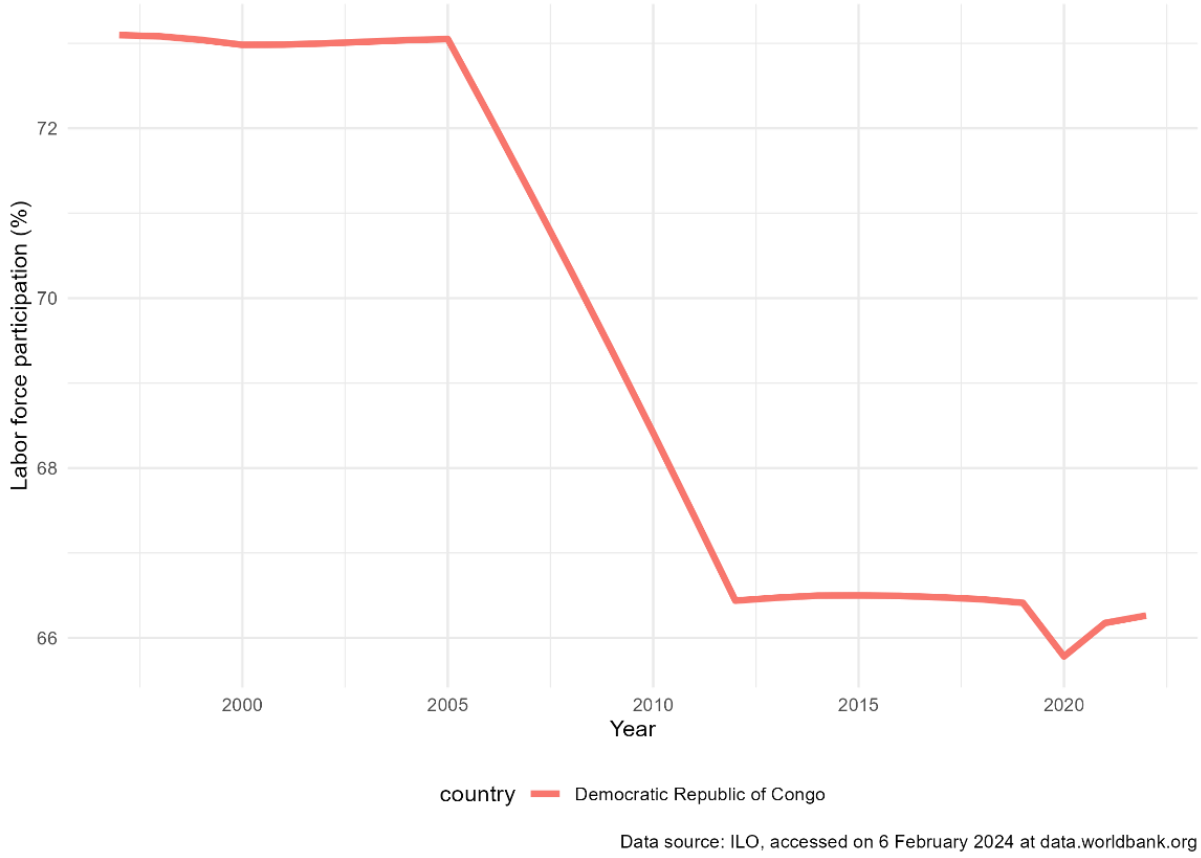


Note: Measured as the proportion of the population aged 15-24 economically active by supplying labor.[244]

Likewise, the labor force participation rate for ages 15-64 is the proportion of the population between 15 and 64 years of age that is economically active by supplying labor to produce goods and services.[245] Available data for the labor force participation by 15–64-year-olds was only measured up until 2022.

[243] International Labour Organization, "Labor Force Participation Rate for Ages 15-24, Total (%) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep."
[244] Ibid.
[245] International Labour Organization, "Labor Force Participation Rate, Total (% of Total Population Ages 15-64) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep."

Figure 10: Labor force participation for ages 15-64 in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1997 to 2022



Note: Measured as the proportion of the population aged 15-64 economically active by supplying labor.[246]

When looking at the data for each age group it is striking that 35 percent of the population ages 15-24 were economically active in 2021, while the labor force participation rate for ages 15-64 was higher than 66 percent in the same year.[247] This could indicate that it is more difficult for young people to enter the labor market, than it is for people older than 24. Moreover, it is easy to imagine, that the significant decline in the labor force participation rates over the past 20 years for both age groups can be caused – at least partly – by the large influx of young people into the working age, if

[246] Ibid.
[247] International Labour Organization, "Labor Force Participation Rate for Ages 15-24, Total (%) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep."; International Labour Organization, "Labor Force Participation Rate, Total (% of Total Population Ages 15-64) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep."

said large influx of young people have not been accommodated by a correspondent increase in the number of available jobs.

Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures poverty and deprivation on a range of different indicators that are also related to the institutional capacity, why it is included here. The dimensions of MPI are health, education, and standard of living, whereas the specific indicators measured are nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets.[248] The last available MPI in the DRC is measured based on a survey conducted in 2017/2018, where 64.5 percent of the total population were estimated to be deprived vis-à-vis the various MPI indicators.[249] When considering the MPI calculated based on a 2013/2014 survey, where 72.5 percent of the total population were in multidimensional poverty, the DRC seems to be in a positive development.[250] However, when looking at the distribution of the different dimension's contributions to overall poverty, education accounted for 15.6 percent of the MPI in 2013/2014, while accounting for 19.9 percent of the MPI in 2017/2018.[251] This increase in the attribution of MPI to education can, however, also be a result of an increase in both the health and living standards dimensions and can therefore not necessarily be a reliable reason to declare an increasingly poor institutional capacity in education. Nonetheless, it still appears to be poor. Moreover, Amnesty International also claims that "alleged squandering of public resources" makes the government incapable of securing fundamental rights such as the right to food, water, healthcare, housing, and education.[252] Table 2 below gives an overview of the MPI, share of population in multidimensional poverty, as well as the contribution of deprivation in each dimension to overall multidimensional poverty in the DRC in both 2013/2014 and 2017/2018.

[248] United Nations Development Programme, "2023 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Unstacking global poverty: Data for high impact action," July 11, 2023, accessed August 23, 2024, https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi#/indicies/MPI.
[249] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 2024): 298-300, https://doi.org/10.18356/9789213588703.
[250] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2016*, *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 2017): 218-219, https://doi.org/10.18356/b6186701-en.
[251] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2016*, 218-219; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, 298-300.
[252] Amnesty International, "DRC: President Tshisekedi Must Use Second Term to Tackle Human Rights Crisis," June 24, 2024, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/06/drc-president-tshisekedi-must-use-second-term-to-tackle-human-rights-crisis/.

Table 2: Overview of selected variables related to the Multidimensional Poverty Index in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Year of survey	*MPI value*	*Population in multidimensional poverty (%)*	*Share of the MPI attributed to deprivations in health (%)*	*Share of the MPI attributed to deprivations in education (%)*	*Share of the MPI attributed to deprivations in living standards (%)*
2013/2014	0.369	72.5	31.0	15.6	53.4
2017/2018	0.331	64.5	23.1	19.9	57.0

Data source: United Nations Development Programme.[253]

Thus, this section suggests that there are evidence pointing to poor institutional capacity within the DRC, more specifically in the employment and educational sectors which can cause grave implications for youths in particular. In terms of employment, this incapacity has furthermore experienced an increase and seems more prevalent among youths. With regard to education, it is difficult to assess the development over time, while evidence nonetheless points to education being at a poor institutional capacity due to the high MPI in the DRC in which a significant share is attributed to the education dimension. Consequently, since evidence suggesting a poor institutional capacity in the DRC has been identified and the smoking gun test has been passed, the confidence in this causal mechanism taking part in the first hypothesized causal chain is strengthened.

4.2.3. Numerous frustrated youths (f1.2)

The second causal mechanism the thesis will try to identify in the case of the DRC is whether there is a significant number of frustrated youths in the DRC (cf. Figure 1). The test of the DRC having numerous frustrated youths will empirically expect to find poor opportunities for youths and youths who are mobilizing due to frustration. Neither type of evidence is necessary, but they are both considered sufficient indicators that the DRC would be expected to have numerous frustrated youths if found in the DRC.[254] Both types of evidence are thus subject to the smoking gun test, meaning that the DRC with high certainty has numerous frustrated youths if the empirical evidence is found.[255]

[253] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2016*, 218-219; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, 298-300.
[254] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-827.
[255] Ibid.

As previously mentioned, data from the International Labour Organization showed how 35 percent of the population ages 15-24 were economically active in 2021 and thereby supplying labor to produce goods and services, while the labor force participation rate for ages 15-64 was almost twice as high, indicating challenges for the growing young population to find work.[256] Other statistical measures that can be representative for the population within the DRC, which has an extensively growing total population and thereby also a growing number of children and adolescents, are those related to human development. Although the DRC has experienced a positive development in terms of their MPI over the years (cf. section 4.2.2), 64.5 percent of the total population was nonetheless estimated to be in multidimensional poverty based on a 2017/2018 survey.[257] Furthermore, the DRC had a Human Development Index (HDI) on 0.475 in 2021, which is in the lowest category following the human development classification by the United Nations Development Programme, thereby categorizing the DRC as having low human development.[258] The HDI is composed of four different components: life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling, and gross national income per capita.[259] These low scores on both the MPI and the HDI will presumably be reflected in dissatisfaction among the general Congolese population affected by the different components and indicators measuring these indexes. Thus, given that the population within the DRC is growing at a very fast pace, and thereby also its younger population, these low scores on both the MPI and HDI, along with the low labor market participation rate for youths ages 15-24, are very likely to cause frustration among the growing younger population.

However, likelihood through data, will not be the only evidence used to identify this causal mechanism. Another piece of evidence is the scope and goals of a very active citizen movement called Lutte pour le Changement (LUCHA), which was started by young Congolese people in 2012 who were frustrated and revolted by the situation within the DRC.[260] In a research paper from 2018, Perera et al. state that LUCHA has grown into becoming a nationwide youth movement that is now present in every major city in the DRC, and which, at least at the time of writing, still attracted many

[256] International Labour Organization, "Labor Force Participation Rate for Ages 15-24, Total (%) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep."; International Labour Organization, "Labor Force Participation Rate, Total (% of Total Population Ages 15-64) (Modeled ILO Estimate) - Congo, Dem. Rep."
[257] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024, 298-300*.
[258] United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Index (HDI)," accessed September 9, 2024, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI.
[259] Ibid.
[260] LUCHA, "Who are we," LUCHA: Lutte Pour Le Changement, accessed August 25, 2024, https://www.lucha-congo.org/accueil/.

sympathizers and followers both nationally and globally.[261] What is furthermore noteworthy regarding this specific movement is its principle of non-violence.[262] While there may be other activist movements in the DRC, LUCHA seems to be one of the most prominent non-violent Congolese citizen movements when looking through media presence. This backs the evidence, that there are numerous frustrated youths in the DRC, but can also spike an interest and curiousness in how many frustrated youths there may be in the DRC, who then takes on more violent methods of expressing their frustration instead of through non-violent channels such as LUCHA. Thus, since both smoking gun tests have been passed, there are most likely numerous frustrated youths in the DRC, and the confidence in the hypothesized causal chain is therefore further strengthened.

4.2.4. Youths are more likely to join rebel groups (f1.3)

Lastly, the third causal mechanism investigated in the analysis of H1 is the fact that youths in the DRC are more likely to join rebel groups. This is expected to be found in the DRC by looking at the opportunity costs of not joining as well as the drivers for why children and adolescents choose to volunteer for rebel groups. This mechanism thus expects opportunity costs of joining rebel groups to be low as well as empirical evidence suggesting that there are benefits for younger people in joining rebel groups. Both types of evidence have a high enough uniqueness on the continuum that if found, youth would be considered more likely to join rebel groups, while neither of them are necessary, since youths can also be more likely to be forced to join rebel groups without being able to personally consider the opportunity costs or drivers.[263] Therefore, they are both subject to the smoking gun test which means that youths in the DRC with high certainty are more likely to join rebel groups if the evidence is found, thereby again strengthening the confidence in the hypothesized H1.

In a report from 2019, MONUSCO assesses child recruitment and use by armed groups in the DRC from 2014 to 2017, including also the various push factors that drive children to volunteer to join armed groups.[264] The report follows the definitions set out in the Paris Principles where a "child"

[261] Suda Perera et al., "Youth Participation and Non-Violent Resistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: The Case of LUCHA," *The Africa Portal*, (May 2018): 1, https://www.africaportal.org/publications/youth-participation-and-non-violent-resistance-democratic-republic-congo-case-lucha/.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105; Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-827.
[264] MONUSCO, "'Our Strength Is In Our Youth': Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2014-2017," (January 2019), https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-

refers to "any person less than 18 years of age in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child".[265] The children covered in the MONUSCO report thus also includes adolescents on the verge of entering adulthood. The report mentioned five different factors that drive around 25 percent of children in armed groups to join voluntarily: Revenge & self-defense, economic survival strategy, physical survival strategy, family & peer pressure, and, finally, political ideology.[266] In terms of what potentially makes Congolese youths more likely to join rebel groups vis-à-vis adults, especially economic survival strategy can be highlighted, and to a lesser extend also physical survival strategy and family & peer pressure.

In terms of the economic survival strategy, MONUSCO argued that children would decide to join armed groups because of the severe poverty prevalent throughout the DRC. Thus, promises of economic gains from joining, such as salaries, education, and food, would often make it worthwhile to be recruited.[267] This is especially relevant for youths, due to the job insecurity and education deprivation that are affecting youths in particular. In many cases investigated by MONUSCO, children had agreed to join armed groups due to promises of jobs – something that is already scarce among youths.[268] This clearly suggests that the opportunity costs of joining armed groups are particularly low for youths when held up against the lack of employment opportunities for young people. Thus, when the alternative for youths is to have no job, to not have access to education, and thereby possibly not be able to have any source of income, joining an armed group with the promise of a salary can seem more appealing.[269]

Both physical survival strategy and family & peer pressure are arguably also factors that have a more influencing effect on younger people vis-à-vis adults. Since children and adolescents may have more difficulty protecting themselves in certain situations than for instance their parents would have, they may be more inclined to seek protection by joining armed groups. MONUSCO has reported cases of recruited children who had become lost from their family or who had experienced abuse by parents or teachers – experiences that children and adolescents would assumably often be

content/uploads/2019/12/190128_monusco_our_strength_is_in_our_youth_child_recruitment_and_use_by_armed_groups_in_the_drc_2014-2017_final_english_0.pdf.

[265] UNICEF, "The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups," (February 2007): 7-8, accessed August 25, 2024, https://www.unicef.org/mali/media/1561/file/ParisPrinciples.pdf.

[266] MONUSCO, "'Our Strength Is In Our Youth': Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2014-2017", 25-27.

[267] Ibid., 26.

[268] Ibid.

[269] Ibid.

more vulnerable to, than if it happened to e.g. a 40-year-old man.[270] Moreover, family & peer pressure is also likely to affect youths more than it would adults, due to children often listening to and trusting older family members or being raised from within an armed group, as have been reported by MONUSCO.[271] Since both smoking gun tests of the evidence of f1.3 have been passed, youth are most certainly more likely to join rebel groups in the DRC, and the confidence in the hypothesized causal chain is therefore again further strengthened.

4.2.5. Result of analysis 1

The first analysis attempts to settle whether the youthful age-structure in the DRC (X1) has had a causal effect on the increase in political violence in the DRC (Y) in 2021 (cf. H1). The analysis found evidence for all three expected causal mechanisms in the causal chain investigating H1. With the passing of several smoking gun tests, there is a highly increased confidence in the expected causal chain to be present in the DRC and thus also in H1 expecting youthful age-structures in the DRC (X1) to have affected the increase in political violence in the DRC in 2021 (Y). While this does not necessarily mean that H1 can be confirmed, it nonetheless means that it cannot be rejected. It therefore also stresses the importance of further research in the field.

4.3. Analysis 2: Urbanization affecting political violence

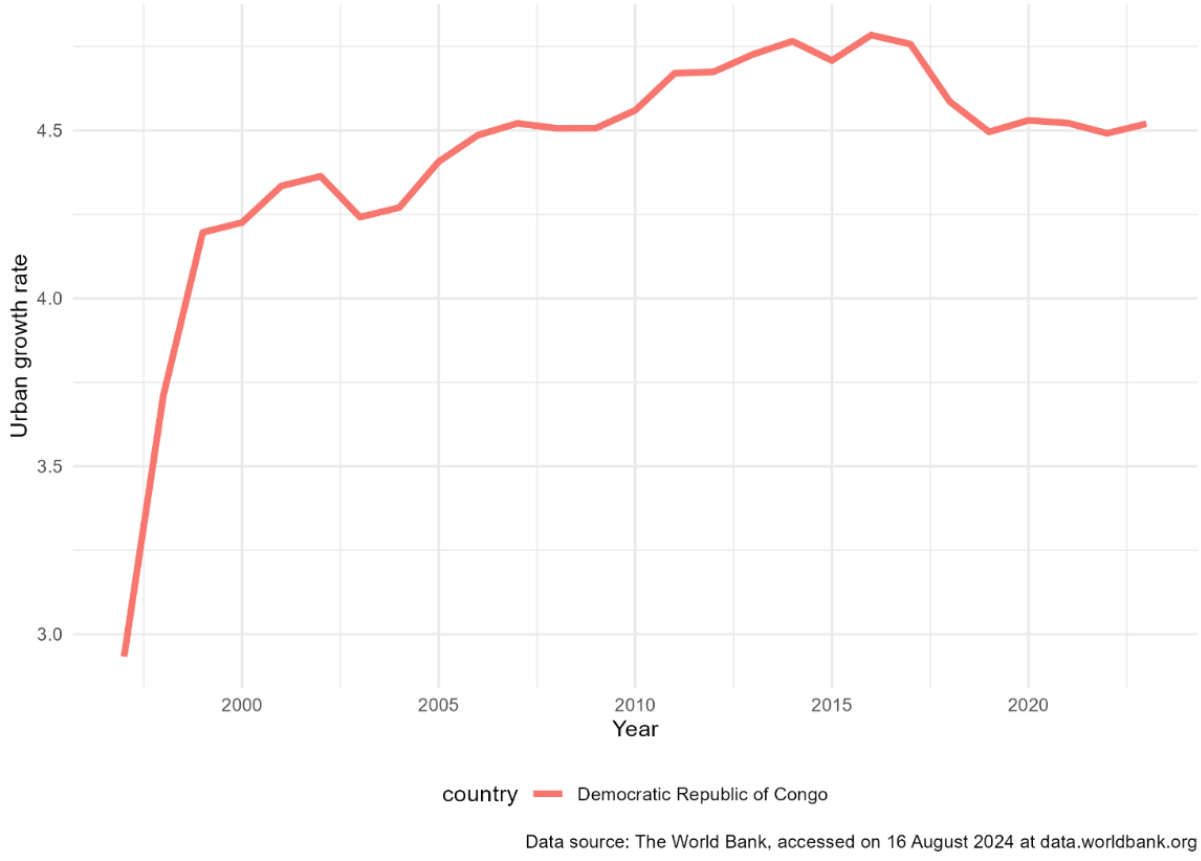
The second analysis investigates whether the high urbanization rate in the DRC (X2) has had a causal effect on the increase in political violence in DRC (Y) in 2021 (cf. H2). The expected causal chain leading the high urbanization rate to have influenced political violence in the DRC will test three different causal mechanisms: Insufficient resources and capacities, higher likelihood for urban inhabitants to engage in political violence, and the fact that urban areas are more vulnerable to political violence (cf. section 3.2.2). The high urbanization rate in the DRC is likely to have had a causal effect on the increase in political violence in 2021 if all three expected causal mechanisms in the causal chain are present in the DRC.

[270] Ibid., 27.
[271] Ibid.

4.3.1. Assumption of significant urbanization in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The second hypothesis H2 argues that there is a causal relation between a high rate of urbanization in the DRC and the increase in political violence in the DRC in 2021. To trace the process of the causal chain reflecting H2 and test whether the theory can be supported in terms of the DRC, the degree of urbanization in the DRC must be high first and foremost. Figure 11 shows the evolution in the annual urbanization growth within the DRC while Figure 12 illustrates the evolution of the urban population as a percentage of the total population in the DRC.[272] Both figures are created using ggplot in Rstudio.

Figure 11: Urban growth rate in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1997 to 2023



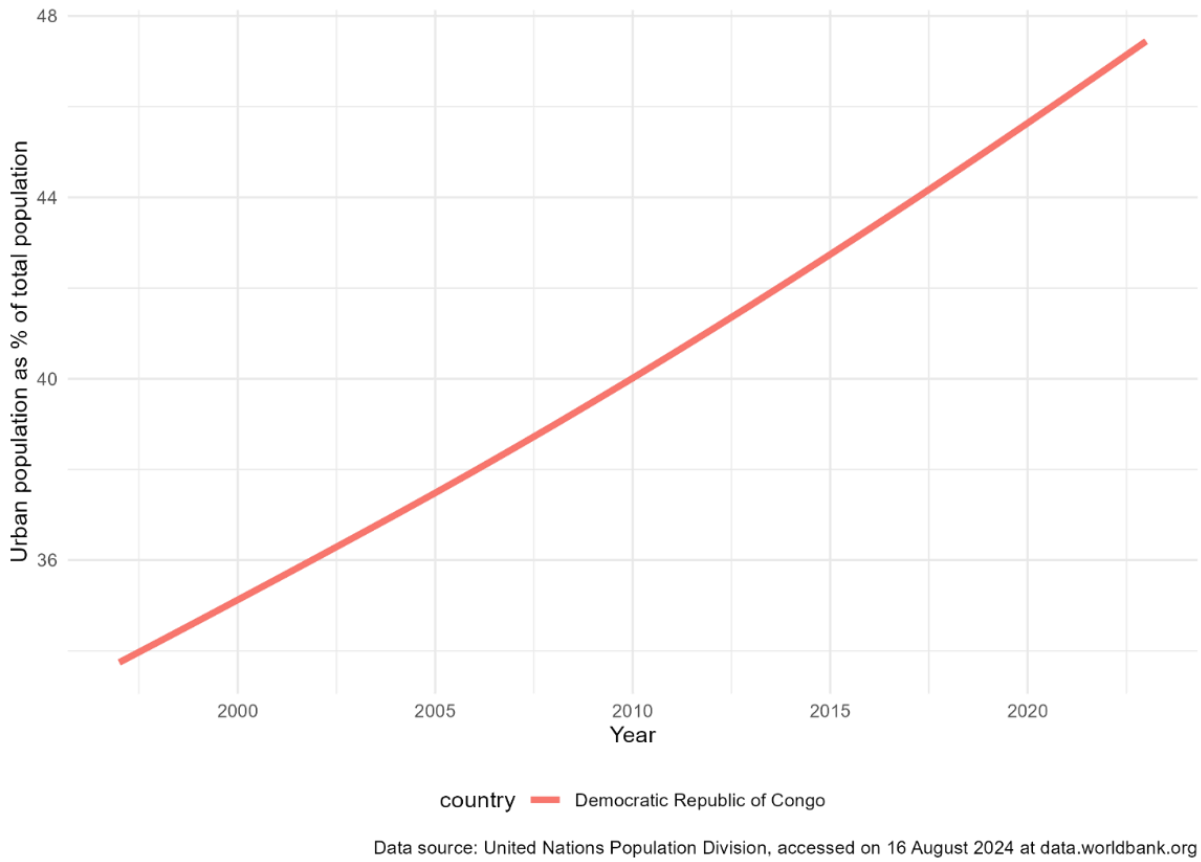
Note: Urban population growth (annual %) in the Democratic Republic of Congo each year between 1997 and 2023.[273]

Given that the primary influencing variable of the causal chain investigated in this second sub-analysis concerns the high urbanization rate, Figure 11 alone would be sufficient in providing

[272] World Bank, "Urban Population Growth (Annual %)"; United Nations Population Division, "Urban Population (% of Total Population)."
[273] World Bank, "Urban Population Growth (Annual %)."

evidence of the high urbanization rate in the DRC. As illustrated in Figure 11, the urban growth rate in the DRC has been moderately stable over the past few decades while ultimately having an annual urban growth rate of approximately 4.5 percent the past five years from 2019 until 2023.[274] For reference, the urban growth rate in both the world and SSA in 2021 was 1.6 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively (cf. Table 1).[275] This gives a clear indication of the very high annual urban growth rate the DRC has experienced during the past decades as well as in 2021, as assumed in the causal chain. Figure 12 below is another illustrative graph visualizing how the annual urban growth rate has influenced the urban population in the DRC as a percentage of the total population.[276]

Figure 12: Urban population in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1997 to 2023



Note: Urban population as % of the total population in the Democratic Republic of Congo each year between 1997 and 2023.[277]

[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] United Nations Population Division, "Urban Population (% of Total Population)."
[277] Ibid.

Having demonstrated that the DRC in fact did experience a substantially high degree of urbanization in 2021, it is now possible to move on to seek evidence for the first causal mechanism and the actual analysis of the causal relationship between a high urbanization rate and the significant increase of political violence in the DRC in 2021.

4.3.2. Insufficient resources and capacities (f2.1)

When analyzing the second hypothesis regarding the influence of urbanization on political violence in the DRC, the first causal mechanism investigated is insufficient resources and capacities in the DRC following the large urban influx (cf. Figure 2). As previously mentioned in the literature review, urbanization may contribute to the lack of both employment opportunities, access to water, health services, food, and shelter due to the increased population density within a delimited area.[278] The evidence expected to be found when investigating the presence of f2.1 is therefore poor access to e.g. water, schools, and jobs in urban areas. This type of evidence would be sufficient in order to prove that there are insufficient resources and capacities, but it is not necessary since other forms of resources and capacities could nonetheless be scarce even if the above-mentioned ones are not.[279] The type of empirical evidence is therefore subject to the smoking gun test, wherefore the DRC can be considered to have insufficient resources and capacities if the evidence is found.[280]

Data from 2012 suggests that rural areas had a poverty rate of 64.9 percent, while the poverty rate in urban areas was 66.8 percent, when not including the capital Kinshasa.[281] Moreover, the poverty rate has experienced a larger decline in rural areas (-5.6 percentage points from 2005 to 2012) than in urban areas excluding Kinshasa (-5.1 percentage points from 2005 to 2012).[282] While these numbers suggest that urban areas in general have worse conditions in terms of poverty, there are still certain facilities and resources that are more accessible in urban settings. Handwashing with both soap and water was in 2017 only accessible for 2.2 percent of rural inhabitants, while 7.4 percent of urban inhabitants had access.[283] Urban inhabitants also had a significantly better access to electricity

[278] Patel and Burkle, "Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis."
[279] Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105; Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-827.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Kouassi Yeboua, "Development pathways for the DRC to 2050," *ISS African Futures and Innovation*, (2024): 14, accessed August 26, 2024, https://futures.issafrica.org/special-reports/country/drc/.
[282] Ibid.
[283] Ibid., 24.

in 2019 where 42 percent of the urban population had access while only 1 percent of the rural population did.[284] Even the three-year pre-primary education is only available in a few urban areas, although it is not part of the mandatory education.[285] Furthermore, 24 percent of urban inhabitants had access to safely managed drinking water services in 2021, while only 0.5 percent of the rural population did.[286] However, during 20 years (from 2001 to 2021) the percentage of rural inhabitants having access to safely managed drinking water services has decreased from roughly 0.65 percent to 0.5 percent, while the percentage of urban inhabitants with access to said services has decreased from roughly 33 percent in 2001 to 24 percent in 2021.[287]

Being constrained by insufficient data, it is difficult to assess precise information about the development regarding other resources and facilities for urban and rural areas separately. However, it is safe to say that no matter the comparable differences between urban and rural areas, even the higher urban access to some facilities is relatively low when examined isolated and is therefore nonetheless considered insufficient. Moreover, there are some future challenges connected with the urban growth experienced in the DRC, if the urbanization is not properly planned and managed, and if the future growth in urban youth is not accompanied by a creation of more job opportunities.[288] Another noteworthy consideration is, that an estimated 78 percent of the Congolese population who lived in urban spaces in 2020, were living in slums.[289] The number of urban inhabitants living in slums has, furthermore, been consistently increasing since 2004, and is very likely to increase into the future as well considering the high urbanization rate (cf. section 4.3.1). The definition of a slum household adhered to in this data is "a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, sufficient living area, housing durability, and security of tenure".[290]

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[284] Ibid., 25.
[285] Ibid., 16.
[286] WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, "People using safely managed drinking water services, urban (% of urban population) - Congo, Dem. Rep.," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed September 9, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.H2O.SMDW.UR.ZS?locations=CD&view=chart; WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, "People using safely managed drinking water services, rural (% of rural population) - Congo, Dem. Rep.," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed September 9, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.H2O.SMDW.RU.ZS?locations=CD&view=chart.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Yeboua, "Development Pathways for the DRC to 2050", 12.
[289] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), "Population living in slums (% of urban population) - Congo, Dem. Rep.," Data set (World Bank, n.d.), accessed August 26, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS?locations=CD.
[290] Ibid.

The evidence identified above suggests that resources and institutional capacities in urban areas in the DRC are insufficient even if some are better than in rural areas. Moreover, the higher poverty rate in urban areas excluding Kinshasa also indicates urban deficiencies, especially when considering the different potential factors contributing to such poverty. The smoking gun test is passed, and the confidence in this causal mechanism taking part in the hypothesized causal chain is therefore strengthened.

4.3.3. Urban inhabitants more likely to engage in political violence (f2.2)

The second expected causal mechanism in causal chain 2 is the claim that urban inhabitants are more likely to engage in political violence. As covered in section 4.2.4, there are strong indications that youths are more likely to join rebel groups than adults would be in the DRC, due to grievances and potentially higher costs from *not* joining. The following section will investigate whether the same trends are visible among urban Congolese people resulting in more urban inhabitants willing to engage in political violence. The expected empirical evidence is therefore that the opportunity costs for urban inhabitants to engage in political violence are low. If found, this empirical evidence would be considered sufficient to expect the likelihood of urban inhabitants to engage in political violence to be higher, but urban inhabitants could still choose to engage in political violence, even if the opportunity costs are high, rendering the evidence slightly unnecessary.[291] The evidence is therefore subject to the smoking gun test, meaning that urban inhabitants are more likely to engage in political violence if the evidence is found, while it could potentially still be the case if not found even if somewhat less probable.[292]

As indicated above, there are very likely various grievances among the urban Congolese population. Even if conditions may be somewhat better in urban settings compared to rural settings in the DRC, it has nonetheless been identified that some institutional structures are experiencing a more negative development in urban areas than in rural areas. As mentioned in section 4.3.2, urban poverty is declining at a slower pace than rural poverty (excluding Kinshasa), and access to safely managed drinking water services has worsened by 9 percentage points in urban areas in the DRC from 2001 to

[291] Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105; Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-827.
[292] Ibid.

2021 while only by 0.15 percentage points in rural areas during the same period.[293] Not to mention the fact that approximately 78 percent of the Congolese urban population in 2020 were living in slums – a number that is very likely to increase further in the future.[294] The expectations that these above-mentioned grievances can increase the likelihood of urban inhabitants engaging in political violence is furthermore backed by Verweijen, who notes that the majority of Congolese people points to the extreme poverty raging in the DRC when asked about why violence is so widespread.[295]

In addition, Verweijen argues that the escalation of urban violence in eastern Congo specifically can be a result of a larger violent labor force available to be solicited by e.g. violent rebel groups.[296] It has furthermore been stated that some former combatants moved to cities after the Second Congo War in hopes for fresh starts and potentially a better life, but nonetheless sometimes ended up re-engaging in violence.[297] However, it becomes blurrier whether these arguments are based on political urban violence, or merely urban violence that can take on other shapes such as being personal or revenue-seeking. Even though the above-mentioned arguments may indicate that urban inhabitants would be more likely to engage in political violence, the evidence found is far from bulletproof and would be necessary to back with more specific or certain evidence for the smoking gun test to be properly passed. Consequently, the second expected causal mechanism did not pass the smoking gun test due to the lack of sufficient empirical evidence, and the expectation that urban inhabitants are more likely to engage in political violence is therefore somewhat weakened.

4.3.4. Urban areas are more vulnerable to political violence (f2.3)

The following section will present the investigation of the third expected causal link in the causal chain leading a high urbanization rate to result in an increase in political violence in the DRC, which is the fact that urban areas are more vulnerable to political violence (cf. Figure 2). The expected causal mechanism is, that if urban areas are more vulnerable to political violence, then an increase in

[293]WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, "People Using Safely Managed Drinking Water Services, Urban (% of Urban Population) - Congo, Dem. Rep."; WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, "People Using Safely Managed Drinking Water Services, Rural (% of Rural Population) - Congo, Dem. Rep."
[294] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), "Population Living in Slums (% of Urban Population) - Congo, Dem. Rep."
[295] Judith Verweijen, "Violent Cities, Violent Society: Analyzing urban violence in the eastern Congo" (Rift Valley Institute, 2019): 73, accessed August 27, 2024, https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Violent-Cities-Violent-Society-by-Judith-Verweijen-RVI-Usalama-Project-2019.pdf.
[296] Ibid., 58.
[297] Ibid., 26.

urbanization would result in a broadening of the space in which political violence takes place and thus also the opportunities of engaging in political violence. The test of the urban vulnerability to political violence in the DRC will empirically expect to find political violence to often take place in urban areas. Since the causal link and the expected empirical fingerprint are very close to each other in practical terms, the evidence would be subject to the doubly decisive test which is rarely accomplished in social science.[298] This means that the empirical evidence is high in both certainty and uniqueness and will therefore confirm the presence of this causal mechanism in the causal chain if passed, and eliminate its presence if failed.[299]

It has been argued that there have been misconceptions regarding where different types of violence take place in the eastern DRC. Verweijen explains how violence in rural areas has been perceived as primarily political whereas urban violence most often has been considered criminal violence committed to generate revenue.[300] This, she argues, is nonetheless a misconception. She goes on to clarify how rural violence is also often aimed at revenue generation while urban violence is both directly and indirectly political in nature.[301] Moreover, she finds that large-scale massacres and mass rapes are examples of violence that are primarily occurring in rural areas except for when there is an attack by an armed group. Urban areas, on the other hand, more often experience violence related to demonstrations and protests alongside political repression.[302] Thus, according to Verweijen, political violence is more prevalent in urban areas than most would expect, meaning that urban areas are indeed vulnerable to political violence.

Some of the difficulties in investigating whether political violence often takes place within urban areas, are twofold: First of all, most sources describe violent acts and conflicts as being located in certain e.g. "provinces", "regions", or "areas", rendering it difficult to estimate whether that is in either urban or rural areas *within* said provinces/regions/areas. Moreover, often when sources then do specify whether the violence in question is urban or rural, they fail to specify the nature of the violence, i.e. whether it is political violence, criminal violence, personal violence or something completely different.

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[298] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-828; Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Verweijen, "Violent Cities, Violent Society: Analyzing Urban Violence in the Eastern Congo", 8.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid., 15.

Nonetheless, a report from 2019 reveals that a poll conducted in eastern Congo found that substantially less inhabitants in urban areas felt safe walking alone at night (8 percent in Goma, 10 percent in Bukavu), while far more inhabitants of for instance the Walikale and Lubero territories felt safe (50 percent and 53 percent respectively) even though these two territories are known for armed group activity.[303] As urban violence has experienced an increase and since Verweijen found that urban violence in the eastern DRC is political in nature and often takes the shapes of demonstrations, protests, and political repression, there are indications that political violence is in fact often experienced in urban areas.[304] Whether it is experienced more or less frequently than in rural areas is difficult to tell given the limitations mentioned above. Thus, even if urban areas seem to be vulnerable to political violence, to at least some extent, the empirical evidence nonetheless appear relatively weak when specifying that the investigation concerns *political* violence specifically. As with the preceding causal mechanism, this investigation also advises more certain evidence to be found for the, in this case, doubly decisive test to be passed. Consequently, the casual link should not be considered part of the causal chain.

4.3.5. Result of analysis 2

The second analysis investigates whether the high urbanization rate in the DRC (X2) has been a causal influencer on the increase in political violence in the DRC (Y) in 2021 (cf. H2). The analysis found that the investigation of the first expected causal link passed the smoking gun test which therefore strengthens the confidence that the causal link regarding insufficiency in resources and capacities is part of the causal chain. The second expected causal mechanism concerning the urban inhabitants' likelihood of engaging in political violence did not pass the smoking gun test due to the lack of more certain evidence and is therefore somewhat weakened. The third and final expected causal mechanism in the causal chain, which was subject to the doubly decisive test, also lacked more certain evidence which was subject to the doubly decisive test, and the causal link should therefore not be considered part of the causal chain. Consequently, even if the evidence appears to slightly favor H2, the causal chain leading a high urbanization rate to result in political violence in the DRC is nonetheless subject to empirical deficiencies, why the confidence in H2 is weakened. However, this is not the result of

[303] Patrick Vinck et al., "Voices from Congo" (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Harvard University, March 2019), as cited in Verweijen, "Violent Cities, Violent Society: Analyzing Urban Violence in the Eastern Congo", 11.
[304] Verweijen, "Violent Cities, Violent Society: Analyzing Urban Violence in the Eastern Congo".

evidence of absence but rather absence of evidence. Thus, had more thorough evidence been available, the result might have been different.

4.4. Analysis 3: Multi-ethnicity affecting political violence

The third and last analysis tests whether the increase in political violence in the DRC (Y) in 2021 has been causally affected by the multi-ethnicity inherent in the DRC (X3) (cf. H3). As with the first and second investigated causal chains, also the third causal chain visualized in Figure 3 consists of three separate expected causal mechanisms between X3 and Y. These three causal mechanisms are the DRC having a conflictual legacy, the fear of a new conflict, and diverging perceptions of past behavior (cf. section 3.2.3). If this analysis finds evidence of all three mechanisms in the DRC in the period leading up to 2021, the causal relationship between a high degree of multi-ethnicity and the increase in political violence in the DRC in 2021 is made further probable.

4.4.1. Assumption of the Democratic Republic of Congo having a multi-ethnic population

The primary influencing factor in H3, whose causal effect on the increase in political violence in the DRC is investigated, is the fact that the DRC has a very multi-ethnic population composition. As previously mentioned, theory-testing through process tracing requires both X and Y to be present in the investigated case, wherefore this first section will account for the multi-ethnicity within the DRC.

Due to the unavailability of accurate data regarding the specific composition of ethnic groups within the DRC, it has not been possible to find a complete list of ethnic groups and the respective percentage for each ethnic group. It has, however, been possible to find reliable sources citing approximate numbers of ethnic groups. Central Intelligence Agency states in The World Factbook on the DRC that the population in the DRC consists of more than 200 ethnic groups, of which the four largest, Mongo, Luba, Kongo, and Mangbetu-Azande, make up 45 percent of the total population.[305] Meanwhile, the International Fund for Agricultural Development describes the DRC as a multi-ethnic

[305] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Congo, Democratic Republic of the - The World Factbook," accessed August 21, 2024, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/congo-democratic-republic-of-the/#people-and-society.

country with approximately 250 ethnic groups.[306] Finally, worth mentioning in this regard is also the Minority Rights Group who states that the DRC not only has been assessed of having 250 ethnic groups, but also up to 700 different languages and dialects.[307]

Although not being able to visualize these numbers with graphs due to the limited amount of specific reliable data on ethnic groups in the DRC, these numbers assessed by widely trusted sources are argued to be sufficient in establishing that the DRC is in fact a highly multi-ethnic country. The following sections will therefore go on with the analysis of the three individual expected causal mechanisms for H3.

4.4.2. Conflictual legacy (f3.1)

The first expected causal factor in the investigation of H3 is the fact that the DRC has a conflictual legacy, since Rydgren found this to be a determinator when trying to explain why new ethnic conflicts erupt.[308] This expected causal mechanism will thus be investigated by identifying whether the DRC has a history of past conflicts between different ethnic groups. The expected causal mechanism and the expected empirical evidence to back it are very close in practical terms, wherefore the empirical evidence is both necessary and sufficient for the presence of the causal mechanism to be supported.[309] The empirical evidence is therefore subject to the doubly decisive test which is rarely passed in social sciences.[310]

As previously mentioned, regions in the eastern DRC are currently the most vulnerable areas in terms of violence, and Center for Preventive Action argues that one of the biggest threats with regards to the current state of conflict in the DRC is if the violence in eastern Congo escalates even further.[311] Thus, since the M23 became the most active non-state armed group in North Kivu (a province in eastern DRC) with a thirty-fold increase in group activity in 2022 compared to 2021 after having suddenly re-emerged as a prominent conflict actor in late 2021, this group is particularly

[306] International Fund for Agricultural Development, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples Issues," IFAD, July 2023, accessed August 21, 2024, https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/-/publication/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-country-technical-note-on-indigenous-peoples-issues.
[307] Minority Rights Group, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Communities," accessed August 21, 2024, https://minorityrights.org/country/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/.
[308] Rydgren, "The Power of the Past: A Contribution to a Cognitive Sociology of Ethnic Conflict."
[309] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-828; Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

interesting to look at when investigating the rise in violence in 2021 in the DRC.[312] M23 emerged in the aftermath of ethnic conflict, which is traced back to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. As previously mentioned, the genocide was a culmination of a long-standing conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu ethnic groups in Rwanda. However, after the genocide, the ethnic conflict was in practical terms simply relocated to the DRC through the migration stream from Rwanda to the eastern DRC.[313] M23 is the successor of CNDP whose alleged aim it was to protect Tutsi Congolese people, while the group itself also consisted primarily of Tutsi.[314]

In the Ituri province north of North Kivu, ethnic tensions have worsened as well. Human Rights Watch published a report in 2001 regarding Ugandan presence in eastern DRC, which highlighted the tensions between the Hema ethnic group and the Lendu ethnic group over land disputes beginning already in 1999.[315] During the first incident of Lendu-Hema violence between 1999 and 2000, 7,000 people were killed while 150,000 were displaced. During another incident in 2001, 400 people were killed in one single day and more than 30,000 fled the area.[316] While this report was published in 2001, another report from the International Crisis Group states that the violence between the two ethnic groups continued until 2003.[317]

This conflict has resurfaced again in 2017, where armed groups who were primarily of the Lendu ethnic group began attacks on members of the neighboring Hema population.[318] The Human Rights Watch furthermore writes in 2023 that the primarily Lendu militia group Cooperative for the Development of Congo has attacked camps of IDP in Ituri repeatedly for two years up until the publication of the article in 2023.[319] The article goes on to state that "disputes inherited from colonial-era inequities over land rights and ownership, ethnic relations, meddling by regional powers, and the control of natural resources between communities, particularly between the Hema and Lendu, were a

[312] Serwat, "Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)."
[313] United Nations, "Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations"; Center for Preventive Action, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
[314] Serwat, "Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)"; Stearns, *From CNDP to M23 Kivu: The Evolution of an Armed Movement in Eastern Congo,* 11.
[315] Suliman Baldo, "Uganda in Eastern DRC: Fueling Political and Ethnic Strife" (Human Rights Watch, March 1, 2001), accessed August 30, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/report/2001/03/01/uganda-eastern-drc/fueling-politcal-and-ethnic-strife.
[316] Ibid.
[317] International Crisis Group, "DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri," (July 15, 2020), accessed August 30, 2024, https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/292-drc-ending-violence-in-ituri%20%281%29.pdf.
[318] Ibid.
[319] Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Deadly Militia Raid on Ituri's Displaced," July 24, 2023, accessed August 30, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/24/dr-congo-deadly-militia-raid-ituris-displaced.

central issue then and continue to be", when commenting on issues that should have been addressed in the early 2000s.[320]

Not all ethnic conflicts in the DRC have longer conflictual legacies of ethnic nature. The tensions between e.g. the Teke and Yaka ethnic groups in western DRC started in 2022 while tensions between the Bantu and Twa ethnic groups in the southeastern DRC erupted a few years earlier around 2014 and worsened in 2016, although with visible improvements now.[321] However, conflicts including histories of ethnic rivalries dating more than 20 years back, such as with the previously mentioned Tutsi-Hutu and Hema-Lendu conflicts, are also some of the more prevalent violent conflicts in the DRC today and can thus be argued to have contributed substantively to the re-escalation of political violence in and around 2021. Therefore, the evidence presented above suggests that the DRC does in fact have a history of past conflicts between different ethnic groups, and the doubly decisive test is therefore passed. This means that the causal mechanism of the DRC having a conflictual legacy remains in place in the causal chain.[322]

4.4.3. Fear of new conflict (f3.2)

The second expected causal factor that is investigated as part of the analysis of H3, is whether there is evidence to be found of fear of a new conflict among actors prior to engaging in conflict. In other words, the theoretical expectation is that a biased fear of a new conflict will lead ethnic groups to mobilize for protective measures which instead will lead to an escalation of violence.[323] As previously mentioned, this will be investigated by searching for observable indications that groups are mobilizing as a protective measure. This type of evidence is considered necessary since mobilization is expected for groups who are fearing attacks, while it is not sufficient, since mobilization can be triggered

[320] Ibid.
[321] UNICEF DRC, "Inter-community violence in Kwamouth territory, DRC," *ReliefWeb* (UNICEF, 2023), accessed August 30, 2024, https://reliefweb.int/attachments/48492fbd-52ca-49ea-a8d5-5b098e7125b9/UNICEF%20Democratic%20Republic%20of%20the%20Congo%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%201%20%28Inter-community%20violence%20in%20Kwamouth%20territory%29%20-%20April%202023.pdf; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Dimitra Clubs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: improving the prospects for local peace: A community-driven model reinforcing conflict prevention and resilience in the Tanganyika Province" (FAO, 2020), accessed August 30, 2024, http://www.fao.org/3/ca7711en/ca7711en.pdf.
[322] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-828; Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105.
[323] Rydgren, "The Power of the Past: A Contribution to a Cognitive Sociology of Ethnic Conflict", 239-240.

by other factors than defensive measures caused by fear.[324] The evidence is therefore subject to a hoop test, which reaffirms the relevance of the causal mechanism if passed, while eliminating it if it fails.[325]

A poll in the DRC specifically found that the combination between banditry and the fear of bandits is the primary driver in creating insecurity leading to war and conflict.[326] This, however, does not appear to distinguish between ethnic and non-ethnic forms of violence. As previously mentioned, the conflict between the Lendu and Hema ethnic groups in Ituri is one of the more prevalent ones in the contemporary DRC, and there are indications that fears of future violence in fact did impact the re-escalation of ethnic tensions between the two groups in 2017.[327] When a Lendu priest died in 2017, certain Lendu accused Hema of causing the priest's death and alleged that Hema were planning on assassinating a range of the Lendu leaders, which led to a resurface of hate speech between the two groups eventually intensifying the conflict and the following lethal attacks.[328] Thus, the allegations that Hema were planning to assassinate more Lendu leaders eventually led to an actual expansion of violence according to the International Crisis Group.[329]

Even though the above-mentioned evidence indicates that fear of a new conflict among actors prior to engaging in conflict can in fact lead to an escalation of tensions and thus also violence and conflict, it is nonetheless difficult to consider the evidence sufficient for the hoop test to be passed. However, difficulties in identifying relevant evidence regarding the investigated argument also means that there is not found evidence pointing *against* the expected causal mechanism, but that it would nonetheless have been essential to identify more evidence *supporting* the theoretical expectations in order for the evidence to pass the hoop test. Consequently, the theoretically grounded causal mechanism regarding fear of a new conflict cannot meaningfully be supported as a part of the investigated causal chain.[330]

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[324] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-827; Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105.
[325] Ibid.
[326] Vinck et al., "Voices from Congo", as cited in Verweijen, "Violent Cities, Violent Society: Analyzing Urban Violence in the Eastern Congo", 15.
[327] International Crisis Group, "DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri", 5.
[328] Ibid., 5-6.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-827; Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105.

4.4.4. Diverging perceptions of past behavior (f3.3)

The third and last causal factor investigated in the analysis of H3 and the thesis in general, is that of diverging perceptions of past behavior among different parties to a conflict. The expected causal mechanism is, that different parties to a conflict can have different perceptions of past actions, and if one ethnic group glorifies their own past actions or makes allegations of alleged acts of other groups, collisions with other groups perceiving said actions differently, can potentially lead to increased tensions between the involved groups in question.[331] This causal mechanism expects to find empirical evidence showing disagreement over past actions which is very closely aligned with the causal mechanism, leading the evidence to be high in both uniqueness and certainty.[332] The evidence is therefore subject to the doubly decisive test.[333]

If looking at e.g. the re-escalation of attacks by M23 in late 2021, it is clear that diverging perceptions between M23 and the Congolese government are focal when trying to understand the increased tensions.[334] Verweijen and Vogel claim that the conflict has kept going due to, inter alia, blame games, with the current impasse being prompted by radically different narratives of the origins of the conflict spread by both the M23, the Rwandan government who is accused of backing M23, and the Congolese government.[335] M23 claimed that the attacks in late 2021 were initiated by the Congolese army after martial law had been declared in North Kivu and Ituri. Moreover, the M23 was angry that they had not been received by government officials when being hosted in Kinshasa since 2020 with the aim of resolving issues with the Congolese government.[336] The Congolese government, on the other hand, blames Rwanda for the M23 revival.[337]

As with the second causal mechanism investigated in section 4.4.3, the investigation of diverging perceptions of past behavior in the DRC is challenged by difficulty identifying evidence where groups or actors comment on past behavior of other actors in opinionized or evaluating manners. Thus, even if disagreements are expected among different parties to a conflict, challenges

[331] Rydgren, "The Power of the Past: A Contribution to a Cognitive Sociology of Ethnic Conflict", 239-240.
[332] Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 825-828; Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 100-105.
[333] Ibid.
[334] Judith Verweijen and Christoph Vogel, "Why Congo's M23 Crisis Lingers On," IPI Global Observatory, May 30, 2023, accessed August 31, 2024, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/05/why-congos-m23-crisis-lingers-on/; United Nations, "Military Group's Expansion in Democratic Republic of Congo 'Carries Very Real Risk of Provoking Wider Regional Conflict', Mission Head Tells Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," press.un.org, July 8, 2024, accessed August 31, 2024, https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15760.doc.htm.
[335] Verweijen and Vogel, "Why Congo's M23 Crisis Lingers On."
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.

showed when attempting to find evidence for diverging perceptions of *past* actions. Even if it proved feasible to detect evidence of this causal mechanism in terms of the M23 and the Congolese government, which is nonetheless one of the most prominent contemporary armed groups in the eastern DRC, more evidence is necessary to pass the test which, in this case, is doubly decisive. Again, however, it is important to note that this does not mean that there is more evidence pointing *against* the expected causal mechanism, but simply that more evidence *supporting* the mechanism is missing. Consequently, this causal link should also not be considered part of the third causal chain investigating H3.

4.4.5. Result of analysis 3

The third and final analysis investigates whether the high degree of multi-ethnicity inherent in the DRC (X3) has had a causal effect on the increase in political violence in the DRC (Y) in 2021 (cf. H3). The analysis found that the first expected causal mechanism regarding the existence of conflictual legacies in the DRC passed the doubly decisive test, meaning that its place in the causal chain is confirmed. The evidence found when investigating the second expected causal mechanism regarding fear of a new conflict, however, did not pass the hoop test due to empirical deficiencies. The second expected causal mechanism should therefore not be considered part of the causal chain. The evidence investigating the third and final expected causal link was subject to the doubly decisive test and expected to find disagreement over past actions between different ethnic groups. Due to deficiencies in empirical evidence, more evidence would be needed in order to be able to pass the test. Therefore, the third and final expected causal mechanism in the analysis of H3 cannot be considered part of the associated causal chain. H3 which expected the high degree of multi-ethnicity in the DRC to be influencing the re-escalation of political violence in the DRC in 2021 has therefore been substantially weakened. However, given that this is another case of evidence *being* absent and not evidence *of* absence, the hypothesis cannot meaningfully be rejected completely as it suggests further research and data collection.

5. Discussion

The following chapter will discuss the findings of the analysis. As previously mentioned, the aim of the thesis has been to investigate how demographic factors may or may not be causally linked to why the conflict in the DRC continues to rage, which can potentially also contribute with insights into how the DRC may improve the social stability within. More specifically, the thesis wanted to investigate the research question that asked what role demography plays in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the DRC. This has been investigated through three separate hypotheses which expected that the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the DRC has been influenced by the DRC's young age-structure, high urbanization rate, and high degree of multi-ethnicity, respectively. The following discussion will thus initiate with a summary of the key findings followed by a more thorough interpretation of these results and their implications for the situation in the DRC. Next, the methodological limitations will be discussed, whereafter a section with recommendations for future research will follow.

5.1. Implications of the findings for the Democratic Republic of Congo

The evidence found in the analysis suggests that the youthful age-structure in the DRC has in fact had a causal effect on the increase in political violence in the DRC in 2021 as expected in H1. H1 can therefore not be rejected. For what regards both H2 and H3, which expected the high urbanization rate and high degree of multi-ethnicity in the DRC, respectively, to have influenced the re-escalation of political violence in 2021, the results were less conclusive due to a shortage of empirical evidence. The analysis therefore identified the young age-structure in the DRC as a possible key factor in the increase of political violence. The implications of the results of the three separate analyses will be discussed in the subsequent sections followed by a brief discussion on the prospects for stability in the DRC.

The empirical findings of the analysis investigating the first hypothesis align well with the existing research and theory in the field of demography on how youthful age-structures may affect the prevalence of violence. The expectation of the age-structural theory of state behavior, that youthful states with a median age lower than 25.5 years are more likely to have an elevated risk of social instability and political violence caused by institutional incapacity, is reflected in the findings of the

case-study of the DRC.[338] The DRC saw a rapid increase in political violence in late 2021 while the median age was 15.8, well below the threshold employed in the age-structural theory of state behavior.[339] Most of the existing literature identified on how youthful age-structures can affect social instability and political violence focus on institutional bottlenecks such as lack of employment opportunities.[340] The effect of particularly employment opportunities appeared to be of high relevance in the DRC where the large influx of young people does not seem to be accommodated by an increase in job opportunities.[341] Moreover, there is a general high level of poverty within the DRC which is multidimensional and therefore has been affected by the country's both health, education and living standards in general - again emphasizing the poor institutional capacity in the DRC.[342] In addition, the lack of both employment opportunities and access to education for youths reaffirm several scholars' expectations of how younger age-structures in general can cause youths to have a lower opportunity cost of engaging in political violence.[343] The findings of the analysis of the first causal chain investigating H1 therefore largely supports the already existing literature on how youthful age-structures can contribute to violence in the case of the DRC.

While the evidence found for the expected causal mechanisms in the causal chains investigating both H2 and H3 did indicate support for both hypotheses, there was not found sufficient evidence for several of the expected causal links, wherefore the conclusions regarding both H2 and H3 are subject to reservations regarding the confidence in their absolute validity. In the investigation of H2, only the first causal link, which expected there to be insufficient resources and capacities in the DRC following the large urban influx, was in fact suggested to be the case of the DRC through sufficient evidence. This can potentially align with the theory by Patel and Burke which argues that these deficiencies can create the basic preconditions for conflict in less-developed societies, such as the

[338] Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 5.
[339] Ibid.; Raleigh et al., "Political Instability Patterns Are Obscured by Conflict Dataset Scope Conditions, Sources, and Coding Choices", United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion and Country, Annually for 1950-2100."
[340] E.g. see Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 5; Flückiger and Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa", 1935; Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective", as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610-611.
[341] International Labour Organization, "State of Skills: The Democratic Republic of the Congo", 7-9.
[342] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, 298-300.
[343] E.g. see Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective", as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610-611

DRC.[344] However, since it was not possible to find enough evidence for the remainder of the expected causal chain, H2 cannot be endorsed based on the findings in this thesis.

This is also the case for H3 where the associated causal chain is likewise subject to empirical deficiencies. The only causal link that the investigation of H3 found enough evidence for, and which also passed the empirical test, was the fact that the DRC has a conflictual legacy between ethnic groups. While this follows Rydgren's argument that a history of past conflicts increases the likelihood of a new conflict erupting, the analysis did not find enough evidence for two underlying mechanisms in Rydgren's theory which were reflected in the subsequent two expected causal links in the causal chain.[345] Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, the evidence that was found for both H2 and H3, did indicate support for both causal chains, which means that they provisionally seem to align with the theoretical expectations presented in the literature review, even if there is a lack of evidence.

Consequently, when considering the research question regarding what role demography plays in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the DRC, the findings of this thesis suggest that the youthful age-structure in the DRC is causally related to the country's state of political violence. The findings investigating the influence of the high urbanization rate and high degree of multi-ethnicity in the DRC, respectively, remain somewhat inconclusive.

5.1.1. Practical consequences and prospects for the Democratic Republic of Congo

But what do these findings then actually mean for the Congolese population and the prospects of a more stable and peaceful society? Since H1 is the only investigated hypothesis in which the support and confidence has been strengthened by the analysis, the youthful age-structure in the DRC will be the point of departure for the remainder of the discussion.

Given that the youthful age-structure in the DRC has been identified as a suggested causal influencer of the current state of political violence in the DRC, it is crucial to consider the underlying mechanisms for the causal relation. As recognized in the literature review, one of the more significant underlying mechanisms for why a younger age-structure is often expected to contribute to social instability, is the fact that the institutional capacity cannot keep up with the large influx of young people

[344] Patel and Burkle, "Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis", 194.
[345] Rydgren, "The Power of the Past: A Contribution to a Cognitive Sociology of Ethnic Conflict."

in terms of for instance job creation and access to education.[346] As found in the analysis, this often means that the opportunity costs of joining rebel groups for many Congolese children and youths are lowered to an extend where some choose recruitment to violent groups over the risk of poverty and unemployment.[347] Based on the findings of the analysis, policies focusing on job creation, e.g. support of entrepreneurship or skills development, should be of high priority in the DRC, since occupying more people with paying jobs would very likely significantly reduce the amount of youths joining rebel groups.

However, if the DRC can manage to slow down the fertility rate through policies altogether, and thereby increase the median age, this has the potential of contributing significantly to the reduction of political violence in the DRC according to the findings of the analysis. For one thing, reducing the fertility rate would slow down the excessive growth of the total population, which in turn would make it easier for the Congolese authorities to accommodate the population growth and thus also the influx of youths in terms of for instance job creation. Considering the bigger picture, however, reducing the fertility rates in the DRC also brings the country closer to reaching the demographic dividend, which is known to foster economic growth per capita.[348] As stated in the literature review, the demographic dividend is triggered by a large entry of the population into the workforce as well as a reduced share of the population consisting of children and youths.[349] As shown in the population pyramid in Figure 8, the DRC is a pre-demographic dividend country, illustrated by the expanding shape of the pyramid which reflects the large proportion of younger inhabitants. According to estimates from 2009, almost 50 percent of all pregnancies in the DRC were unwanted.[350] Moreover, modern contraceptive prevalence in 2021 was 27.3 percent in Kinshasa, and 26.3 percent in Kongo Central.[351] While these numbers are area- and year-specific, they nonetheless indicate that the fertility rate could in fact be reduced if the right policies are implemented, such as for instance improvement in family planning services and insurance that contraceptives are available to a larger extent than they are today. This

[346] E.g. see Cincotta, "The Age-Structural Theory of State Behavior", 5; Flückiger and Ludwig, "Youth Bulges and Civil Conflict: Causal Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa", 1935; Collier, "5 Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective", as cited in Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence", 610-611.
[347] MONUSCO, "'Our Strength Is In Our Youth': Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2014-2017", 26.
[348] Goldstone and May, "Contemporary Population Issues", 10-12.
[349] Ibid.
[350] United Nations Population Fund, "Funding Gaps, High Fertility and Child Marriage Thwart Efforts to Reduce Maternal Mortality in DRC," UNFPA, January 6, 2010, accessed September 11, 2024, https://www.unfpa.org/news/funding-gaps-high-fertility-and-child-marriage-thwart-efforts-reduce-maternal-mortality-drc.
[351] Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI), "Family Planning Support - DRCongo," accessed September 12, 2024, https://www.cafi.org/countries/democratic-republic-congo/scaling-family-planning#:~:text=The%20DRC%20developed%20its%20first,least%2050%20percent%20by%202050.

would give the Congolese people a choice as well as the opportunity of family planning if that is what they wish.

If the DRC succeeds in slowing down the fertility rate, they may be able to shrink the younger cohorts in the future, while the very large young cohorts today will have grown older and become part of the working-age population, thus entering the demographic dividend.[352] However, in order to actually take advantage of the demographic dividend, the DRC would have to be able to provide jobs to the larger workforce in order to ensure its productivity, which again leaves us with the need for policies fostering a higher labor market participation rate.[353] Other scholars argue that the DRC would have to improve the health of the society, invest more in health and education, as well as establishing an economic environment that fosters well-paying jobs.[354] First and foremost, however, the DRC would have to approach the demographic dividend which requires an older age-structure.

5.2. Methodological limitations

Generally, the research design is argued to have strengthened the credibility of the causality due to the tracing of causal mechanisms rather than only relying on correlation. However, although the analysis has found interesting results regarding the recent and substantial increase in political violence in the DRC, it has also been somewhat affected by certain methodological limitations. These will be discussed in the following.

One of the drawbacks of conducting a qualitative singe-case study is its limited generalizability.[355] Since case-studies focus on the one case, it is difficult to infer the results directly to other cases or contexts, which is often the intention in social sciences. Nonetheless there are other ways in which the findings can be used for studies of violent circumstances in other countries. For one thing, given that the findings in this thesis are found through process tracing, which has been extensively presented in chapter 3, the research design and specified expected causal mechanisms can smoothly be transferred and adjusted to studies of other countries. Moreover, the findings indicate support for particularly the age-structural theory of state behavior and to a lesser and more cautious extent the theoretical expectations of urbanization and multi-ethnicity. Thus, the findings of this thesis furthermore point

[352] Goldstone and May, "Contemporary Population Issues", 10-12.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Canning et al., *Africa's Demographic Transition: Dividend or Disaster?,* 4-5.
[355] Andersen, "4. Forskningskriterier", 105-107, 111.

to relevant areas of research when investigating conflicts in other countries, where the theoretical expectations in the case of the DRC could potentially be analytically inferred to studies of other countries with similar demographic structures as the DRC in terms of especially age-structure. However, since the aim of the thesis is case-specific and therefore limited to the DRC, the limitation regarding generalizability was a given and does not have any implications for the validity of the results. Furthermore, even if generalizability is often considered a goal in social sciences, the DRC was chosen as a case because of its substantive relevance and fitness rather than for reasons connected to analytical inference.

A second methodological drawback is that it is up to the researcher to ensure which data and pieces of evidence are important, just as it is up to the researcher to interpret the collected evidence in contrast to a - by default - unbiased mathematical statistics software. However, these potential risks of biases are recognized and given attention throughout the analysis. Moreover, although the method is qualitative, both data sources and qualitative evidence will be included in the research to cross-check and validate potential findings when possible. The historical context will also be considered in the analysis, making the findings more robust.

For what regards empirical limitations, the analysis has been somewhat constrained by the limited availability of sufficient empirical evidence and data regarding the DRC. Ideally, the analysis would have benefitted from the possibility of having primary empirical material sampled purposely for this thesis in terms of e.g. interviews with youths, urban inhabitants, members of the Congolese government, or parties to rebel groups. However, for various reasons of both financial, temporal, and lingual character as well as not having a network in the DRC to benefit from, such interviews have not been possible to conduct. Another empirical option that could have strengthened the analysis would be if more extensive data on the opinions of Congolese people was already available through public attitude surveys such as e.g. Afrobarometer, where the DRC is unfortunately not a participating country.[356]

Therefore, the thesis is subject to empirical limitations which have affected the ability to definitively conclude neither support nor opposition to the claims made in H2 and H3 regarding the effects of urbanization rate and multi-ethnicity, respectively. While the empirical evidence found does in fact indicate support for both claims made in H2 and H3, respectively, it is nonetheless crucial to

[356] Afrobarometer, "What We Do," accessed September 12, 2024, https://www.afrobarometer.org/about/what-we-do/.

acknowledge the shortcomings of the available data and thereby also acknowledge the fact that more evidence is needed in order to fully endorse H2 and H3. However, as previously mentioned, this is due to absence of evidence and not evidence of absence. Meanwhile, the evidence found suggests provisional support for both hypotheses, thereby encouraging further research which will be covered more in-depth in the following section on recommendations for future research.

5.3. Recommendations for future research

While the results of this thesis do hold clear suggestions in terms of the influence that the youthful age-structure in the DRC has had on the 2021 re-escalation of political violence and to a lesser extent also the influence of the high urbanization rate and the high degree of multi-ethnicity in the DRC, future research should nonetheless explore this further. More specifically, a research project with more resources and a larger timeframe has more potential of possibly collecting its own empirical evidence and thereby being able to tailor e.g. interviews or surveys to cover the investigated factors more specifically along with the rhetoric used by parties to the conflict. This is especially recommended considering the two hypotheses investigating the influence of the high urbanization rate and high degree of multi-ethnicity in the DRC respectively, since the investigation of these two factors were both subject to empirical deficiencies and would therefore be interesting to explore further. Moreover, the need to further explore causal mechanisms between demographic factors and political violence is reiterated by e.g. the apparent contrast between the study by Yair and Miodownik on the one hand, which found that youth bulges can explain the onset of non-ethnic armed conflicts only, and the findings of this thesis on the other, which are, however, specific to the DRC.[357] The research in this thesis nonetheless stands alone on its own merits, by providing these clear indicators of factors contributing to the state of violence currently inherent in the DRC.

[357] Yair and Miodownik, "Youth Bulge and Civil War: Why a Country's Share of Young Adults Explains Only Non-Ethnic Wars", 40.

6. Conclusion

The following chapter will present a conclusion on the findings of the thesis. The chapter will commence with a brief restatement of the thesis' research aim and associated research question. Next, a section will conclude on the findings of the research which will be related back to the original aim of the thesis. This is followed by an explanation of both the empirical and substantive contribution of the thesis and its findings. Finally, the concluding chapter, and thereby also the thesis, will be finalized with a closing summary.

The research presented in this thesis aimed to investigate whether the demographic composition of the DRC has contributed to the country's current state of violence. This was chosen as a topic, since it is believed that policies can be tailored to better tackle the demographic implications if found that these implications appear to be influencers of violence. Specifically, the research wished to answer the research question asking what role demography plays in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the DRC. The research question was investigated through three separate hypotheses, which claimed that the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the DRC was influenced by the DRC's youthful age-structure, high urbanization rate, and high degree of multi-ethnicity, respectively. Through theory-testing process tracing, the thesis traced the expected causal mechanisms of three separate causal chains, each reflecting one of the three hypotheses.

The results of the analysis suggest that demography is in fact affecting the prevalence of political violence within the DRC. More specifically, the analysis concludes that there are clear indications of a causal relationship between the youthful age-structure in the DRC and its significant level of political violence. This causal relationship appears to be particularly grounded in the low opportunity costs for youths of joining rebel groups caused by the poor institutional capacity that would otherwise likely result in unemployment and possibly also poverty. This finding further indicates that focusing on policies enhancing the institutional capacity in the DRC, for instance through job creation and better employment opportunities for youths, could increase said opportunity costs and thus possibly establish better preconditions for stabilizing efforts. Similarly, a greater focus on policies directly related to lowering the median age, such as family planning services, is also suggested to possibly foster stability. For what regards the high urbanization rate and the high degree of multi-ethnicity, the thesis was not able to detect sufficient empirical evidence to conclusively support the claims of either of them being causally related to political violence in the DRC. Although the evidence found

did indicate support for the hypotheses regarding both urbanization and multi-ethnicity, more evidence would have to be identified for the hypotheses to be endorsed.

The thesis attempts to address the recent increase in political violence in the DRC through the lens of demography, and thereby test whether the demographic state of the DRC aligns with the existing theory on how demography can influence the occurrence of violence. First, the empirical contributions should be highlighted since this study contributes to the field of demography research by testing the causality between three demographic factors and the very recent re-escalation of political violence in the DRC in 2021, thereby focusing on a case which is novel and thus also a case covered in very little existing research, let alone demographic research. However, although the empirical contributions are mainly specific to the current re-escalation, it reads into a larger context of violence that goes back more than two decades. Second, is therefore the substantive contribution. While the DRC already consists of more than 100 million people today, the population is estimated to grow to more than 218 million people by 2050.[358] Consequently, if the violence in the DRC persists the same number of years into the future as it has already lasted in the past, then the population size affected would likely have doubled. While this thesis alone cannot prevent that scenario, it has nonetheless shed some light on a suggested underlying causal chain leading the youthful age-structure in the DRC to have influenced the country's state of political violence, and thus also given suggestions on important policy areas of the DRC going forward.

While the influence of the DRC's high urbanization rate and high degree of multi-ethnicity could not be endorsed due to the limited availability of relevant empirical evidence, the evidence found did nonetheless indicate that they were potential influencers, wherefore this would be interesting to research further as elaborated on in the discussion chapter. Meanwhile, the thesis found strong support for the hypothesis claiming that the youthful age-structure in the DRC influenced the country's experienced 2021 re-escalation of political violence. In conclusion, the findings suggest that demography does in fact seem to play a role in the 2021 re-escalation of political violence in the DRC, considering the influence that the age-structure of the Congolese population appears to have on the current state of political violence in the DRC.

[358] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024: Demographic Indicators by Region, Subregion and Country, Annually for 1950-2100"; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "Probabilistic Population Projections Based on the World Population Prospects 2024: Probabilistic Projection of Total Population (Both Sexes Combined) by Region, Subregion, Country or Area, 2024-2100 (Thousands)."

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