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YOUTH BULGE AND CONFLICT RISK IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

Ufuoma Winifred Erighe[1]
246130001@nileuniversity.edu.ng & eufuoma16@gmail.com
&
Dimas Garba, PhD.[2]
garba.dimas@nileuniversity.edu.ng & dimasgarba@gmail.com
[1&2]Department of Political Science & International Relations, Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja.

Abstract

Nigeria is undergoing significant demographic transitions, with a notable higher proportion of its population comprised of young individuals. This demographic shift presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's security. Over 60% of Nigeria's workforce is under the age of 34 but the country grapples with persistently high youth unemployment, which exacerbates social and political tensions. The Niger Delta, a region rich in oil resources yet burdened by poverty, environmental degradation, and insufficient infrastructure, has witnessed increasing frustration among its youth, which has manifested in growing militancy and unrest. This paper examines the relationship between the youth bulge and the risk of violence in Nigeria by focusing on the Niger Delta. Using the Youth Bulge Theory and Frustration Aggression Theory, the study explores how the gap between local expectations and the realities of marginalization, coupled with limited economic opportunities, contributes to the intensification of conflict in the region. Using secondary sources of data, the research analyzes the socio-economic dynamics and psychological factors driving this unrest. The study finds that there is a high risk of militancy resurgence in the Niger Delta region due to the youth bulge, coupled with the growing rate of unemployment and poor socio-economic conditions among the youth, which will intensify frustration that will spark conflict. It concludes that, the conflict risk can be mitigated, and it recommends for the government to embark on long and short term strategic interventions, emphasizing youth empowerment, educational reform, job creation, and sustainable economic development, aimed at empowering the youth.

Keywords: Conflict Risk, Demography, Militancy, Niger Delta Region, Youth Bulge.

Introduction

Nigeria's population was estimated by the World Bank to be at 227.9 million as of 2023. This quick development emphasizes Nigeria's position as Africa's most populated country and the notable demographic shifts that are expected to occur over the next several decades (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).According to Umanah (2023), there was an increase in youth unemployment in the Niger delta region from 32% in the third quarter of 2018 to 37% in 2020. Furthermore, the unemployment rate among young people experienced a notable increase from 40.8% in the second quarter of 2020 to 53.4% in the fourth quarter of the same year. This surge in youth unemployment positions Nigeria as the second highest country in the global ranking (Olurounbi, 2021).

The connection between youth unemployment and conflict is a notable problem. This is particularly evident in Nigeria's Niger Delta region over the last two decades, where the "youth bulge" has long been associated with militancy. One of the prominent reasons for militancy in the region has to do with high level of youth unemployment (Inyang, 2009; Akpakan, Bariledum & Lucky, 2015; Garba, 2017; Edeh &Udoika 2018; Ubong, Udom &

Badey, 2023). Despite the Niger Delta being a center of immense oil wealth and a critical source of national income, it remains plagued by poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, and systematic neglect. These entrenched issues have created cycles of frustration and resentment among young people in the region. Faced with limited opportunities and stark economic disparities between local communities and the elites and multinational corporations benefiting from the region's wealth, many disillusioned youth have resorted to militancy as a form of resistance and self-determination. Prominent groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), have harnessed the grievances of these marginalized youth, turning their discontent into organized opposition.

Nigeria's problems are a microcosm of those of other countries dealing with youth bulges and inadequate economic infrastructure in the larger global environment. High rates of youth unemployment and social exclusion have worldwide repercussions, including economic stagnation, migration pressures, and instability. Therefore, it is crucial to handle these dynamics in a way that is both national and global in scope.

Although there are many studies on the connection between youth population and violent militancy in the Niger Delta region, there is hardly any emphasis on the risk of conflict resurgence due to the rising youth population. Therefore, this particular study seeks to fill the a gap by focusing on the connection between Nigeria's youth bulge and the risk of future conflict resurgence in the region. This is based ion the fact that unemployment has the tendency to create psychological conditions due to relative deprivation and frustration in triggering violence in the region. So this the study argues that the persistent increase in the youth bulge, coupled with rising rate of unemployment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria represents a latent conflict risk.

Nigeria's youth population is marked by rapid growth, high unemployment, and systemic marginalization. This is especially true in areas like the Niger Delta, where poverty and a lack of opportunities aggravates socioeconomic disparities and environmental degradation. Without appropriate intervention, the youth bulge (a demographic challenge) could intensify societal grievances and fuel cycles of violence and militancy.

Literature Review

The bulging youth population in Africa characteristically presents a mixture of threats and opportunities for the continent. It is widely presumed that in contexts of unemployment and hopelessness, young people are readily driven into participating in violent conflict (Azeng, 2018).

Young people make up the bulk of the population in Africa and are crucial to social interactions and changes. However, children and young people are frequently marginalized in public life and significant socioeconomic, political, and cultural activities. Stated differently, "youth ordinarily is a category of early adulthood, emerging in activity and involvement in society but somewhat limited by societal values and some levels of dependency and perhaps agency" (Ikelegbe, 2006, p. 88).Youth are a demographic and social group that is marked by significant tensions and conflicts that arise from the process of social and physical growth as well as from adjusting to the reality of society. In a nutshell, young people are fighting for their lives, their identities, and their inclusion, and this fight influences how they "as a social group respond to or more broadly relate to state and society in terms of engagement or disengagement, incorporation or alienation, rapprochement or resistance, integration or deviance" (Ikelegbe, 2006, p. 88-89)It is a common phenomenon in many developing countries. It is used to describe a situation where there is an increase in the proportion of the youth population relative to other age groups (Omoju& Abrahma, 2014)

The concept of the **"youth bulge"** refers to a demographic pattern where a significant proportion of a population is comprised of young people, typically between the ages of 15 and 29. While a large youth population can be an asset for economic development and innovation if opportunities are available, it can also create challenges, particularly when there is widespread unemployment, poverty, or lack of political representation. According to (Lin, 2012) youth bulge means a demographic pattern where majority of the population is composed of young adults and children. The term is often utilized in explaining a state of affairs where there is a raising number of youths in relation to other age groups.

Nigeria, for instance, has large youth populations that are politically excluded coupled with negative socio-economic that serve as a driver of insecurity. Therefore, a youth bulge occurs when a nation's young population far exceeds that of other age groups as a result of either an unregulated birth rate, a rise in births, a decrease in infant mortality, or general improvements in health. An increased likelihood of civil war is frequently linked to the existence of an abnormally large young population, or "youth bulge." When young adults in a nation with a youth bulge reach working age, the dependence ratio—that is, the proportion of those not in the workforce to those in the workforce—will decrease. If the proportion of people of working age rises may be fully utilized in productive endeavors, the average income per capita ought to rise as a consequence, assuming all other factors remain constant. A demographic dividend will result from the youth boom. The youth bulge will turn into a demographic bomb, though, if a sizable portion of the population is unable to find work and make a living wage. This is because a significant number of disgruntled young people might potentially become a source of social and political instability.

According to (Alanana, 2013) research, the absence of job might have detrimental effects as it conveys a negative message to individuals at large. As a result of these factors, there is a potential for an increase in activities such as prostitution, political thuggery, violence, restlessness, vandalism, and petroleum bunkering. Additionally, there may be a rise in poverty, rural-urban migration, low productivity, loss of government revenue, and other illicit activities (Abomaye-Nimenibo, 2018)

Militancy in the Niger Delta has had a number of social and economic repercussions. For instance, young militants engage in intra- and inter-gang conflicts, oil theft, the destruction and vandalism of government infrastructures and oil multinational corporations, and hostage-taking and kidnapping. Numerous incidents of young people attacking and demolishing oil infrastructures under the aegis of militant organizations have been documented over time(Olawale, 2020)**.**

As the USAID CAF and ICAF posit, grievances alone do not produce conflict; key actors, trends, triggers and context all play interrelated roles. Indeed, it has been duly noted that youth bulges may not only make conflict more desirable to some, but also more feasible (Collier, 2007). Beyond simply fermenting discontent, widespread unemployment lowers the “cost” of recruitment, as many young men have nowhere to turn for income. Militias and terrorist groups, however, can offer immediate economic benefits in the form of looting, patronage or payment. Even in extremist groups, where the leadership is typically well-off and educated, the vast majority of new recruits are low-to-middle class young men between the ages of 15 and 29 (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2005). On the issue of feasibility, young people may simply be more impressionable; this implicit logic underwrites many conflict resolution programs that hope to instill positive values and attitudes in youth “before it is too late.” Unfortunately, if this is true, it also suggests that extremist groups may also be able to catch recruits while they’re young. Peer influence

appears to exert a strong influence on young people who join terrorist groups, for instance (USAID, 2005).

Although, many studies link the causes of Niger Delta militancy to youth unemployment (Inyang, 2009; Akpakan, Bariledum, & Lucky, 2015; Garba, 2017; Edeh &Udoika 2018; Ubong, Udom & Badey, 2023). However, most of these studies focus on the causes, effects, implications and solutions to the militancy. However, this particular study is different because it focuses on examining potential conflict risks associated with the youth bulge and raising unemployment among the youth. The region has experienced relative peace due to the amnesty programme introduced during President Umaru Musa Yar'adua regime (Garba, 2017), but with the growing population of the youth, coupled with increasing youth unemployment, this studies argues that there is a high risk of conflict resurgence in the region if the Nigerian government fails to take the appropriate steps to address the situation promptly.

Theoretical Framework

Youth Bulge Theory

To analyse demographic factors, Youth Bulge Theory (YBT) will be employed, a theory that has made connections between a high relative population of unemployed or underemployed youth, generally agreed upon to be between the ages of 15 and 24, and violent conflict (Urdal, 2006). The social scientist Gunnar Heinsohhn first developed the youth bulge idea in the middle of the 1990s. Heinsohhn understood that in the history of many nations, there have been multiple instances of social upheaval and violence during times when the general population was exceptionally young. Prominent scholars on the youth bulge theory, Gary Fuller and Jack Goldstone, have connected this particular stage of the demographic shift to periods of political unrest and civil wars (Cincota, Angelman, &Anastasion, 2003).The majority of youth bulge theories emphasize that the primary cause of youth discontent is the labour markets' inability to accommodate the growing number of young people.

Urdal (2006), further argues that if young people are to be kept out of employment this is likely to breed dissatisfaction and grievance. This dissatisfaction and grievances result in what Urdal calls deprivation in conflicts. Youth bulges become a threat to peace under conditions of economic downturn and stagnation as those who will be entering the labor market are most likely to find themselves out of employment. The "youth bulge" theory suggests that large cohorts of young people, particularly when left unemployed or underemployed, are more prone to social unrest and conflict.

This vulnerability is amplified by the "resource curse" in regions like the Niger Delta, where the wealth generated by oil has brought both economic and environmental harm to local communities rather than widespread development and inclusion. Addressing these dynamics requires a nuanced understanding of how demographic pressures, economic marginalization, and environmental degradation combine to fuel conflict. Large youth populations can exert pressure on economies and social systems, and unmet expectations can lead to frustration and rebellion.In the Niger Delta, the youth bulge intensifies frustrations with limited job prospects and inadequate government support, making young people more susceptible to joining militant groups.The theory provides a demographic-based explanation that aligns with Nigeria's young population and high unemployment rates.

Frustration Aggression Theory

To analyse the relationship between the youth bulge and conflict risk in the Niger Delta region, the Frustration Aggression Theory was adopted. The theory was developed by

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939). It offers a convincing psychological framework for comprehending the causes of violence in the Niger Delta (Garba, 2017). According to the hypothesis, people become aggressive when they are frustrated by barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals. Aggression is frequently the result of this dissatisfaction as people look for a way to express their psychological and emotional pain. The implementation of this idea is especially pertinent to the Niger Delta because of the region's severe youth bulge and ongoing socioeconomic problems. Internal processes, such the attribution of the frustration, were now seen to be important for comprehending the frustration–aggression link in addition to environmental factors, the degree to which frustrations are viewed as arbitrary is one of the factors that contribute to this, as it is thought to be a predictor of the likelihood and severity of possible aggressive reactions (Breuer & Elson, 2017). Garba, (2017) opined that individuals or organizations become frustrated when they believe they are being prevented from reaching their goals, either directly or indirectly, and they typically act aggressively against those they believe are to blame.

In the Niger Delta, frustration is caused by a number of interconnected issues, such as environmental degradation, a lack of employment opportunities, and broken promises. Since young people make up a sizable section of the population in the Niger Delta, these issues are especially severe among them. A disproportionately high concentration of young people in the area is known as the "youth bulge," which exacerbates competition for limited opportunities and resources and adds to dissatisfaction. The reason why so many young people in the Niger Delta turn to violent acts like sabotage, vandalism, and militancy is explained by the frustration-aggression theory. In a system that marginalizes them, these actions are a way for individuals to express their displeasure and show their authority. Militancy, sabotage, and vandalism are some of the main symptoms.

The youth bulge exacerbates the frustration-aggression dynamic, adding a crucial component when a sizable group of disgruntled young people fosters a climate that is conducive to group activities motivated by a common sense of injustice, militant organizations take advantage of the general dissatisfaction by providing young people with financial incentives, a sense of community, and a purpose, when a group of irate people are concentrated in one area, it can result in coordinated, protracted violence that is accepted locally as a cycle of violence. This approach, which employs the frustration-aggression theory, emphasizes the psychological foundations of conflict in the Niger Delta and stresses the need to address the youth bulge as a crucial component in reducing violence.

Methodology

This paper examinesthe relationship between the youth bulge and conflict risk in Nigeria, with a special focus on militancy resurgence in the Niger-Delta Region**.** The study used the qualitative research method to achieve its objective. The data used were mainly sourced from secondary sources of data, which include extensive and thorough library research and examination of existing publications i.e. journal articles and books, official reports, including reports from government agencies, international organizations; and unpublished articles and websites resources. Through these sources, data on the rising proportion of the youth population, increasing rate of unemployment, and the poor level of socio-economic-conditions in the Niger Delta region were generated and analyzed to establish the relationship between youth bulge and conflict risk in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The method of data analysis used was the content analysis method.

The Niger Delta Region

Nigeria's Niger Delta takes pride in its abundant crude oil reserves. Along with beingthe world's largest wetland, after the Patanal in South America and the Mississippi inNorth America, it is also a region rich in solid minerals, agriculture, and aquaculture.In addition to having a roughly 90% contribution to the GDP, its crude oil providesover 95% of the anticipated revenue used to create the national budget (Ofozoba,Ezeamama &Okeke, 2023) . According to the 2006 national census, it is home tomore than 31 million of Nigeria's 140 million people, representing roughly 140different ethnic groups, including as the Ijaw, Ogoni, Kalabari, Efik, Esan, Igbo,Oron, Bini, Uhrobo, Ikwere, Ukwuani, Isoko, Annang, Yoruba, Itsekiri, and Urhobo,among others (Garba, 2017) .

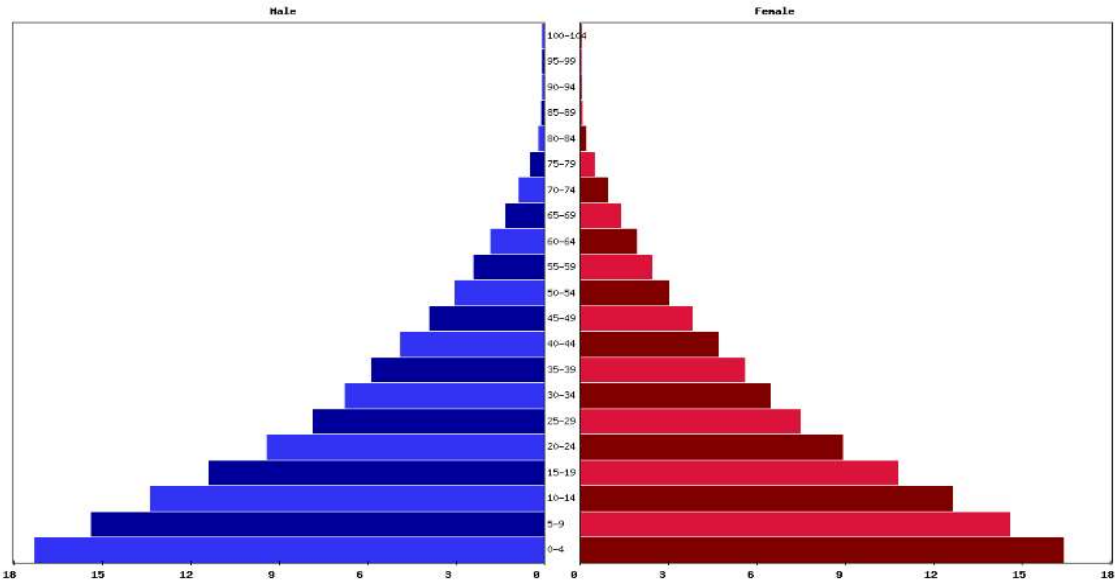
Results and Discussions

In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the youth bulge has been a major driver of militancy and unrest over the years. Despite being rich in oil resources, the Niger Delta has long faced underdevelopment and environmental degradation (Bisina, 2021). Many young people in the region find themselves unemployed or underemployed, the lack of economic opportunities can lead to frustration and make youth more susceptible to joining militant groups or engaging in criminal activities as a means of survival and economic gain.

The youth in the Niger Delta often feel marginalized and excluded from the benefits derived from their region's oil wealth. Historical grievances include limited access to education, healthcare, and clean water (Ejumudo, 2014). These feelings of injustice are further aggravated by environmental pollution from oil extraction activities, which undermine traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing. Militancy has, therefore, been used by some groups as a means to voice their demands for a greater share of resources and improved living conditions. The large pool of young, disillusioned, and unemployed youth has served as a fertile ground for militant groups in the Niger Delta. These groups, such as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (Ebiede, 2017), have often been able to recruit youths by appealing to their socio-economic grievances or through financial incentives.

The youth bulge, combined with high levels of poverty and limited opportunities, has contributed to the cycles of violence and instability in the region. Militant activities, such as attacks on oil installations and kidnappings, have not only caused economic losses but have also drawn attention to the underlying issues affecting the youth.

Nigeria Age Structure and Population Pyramid



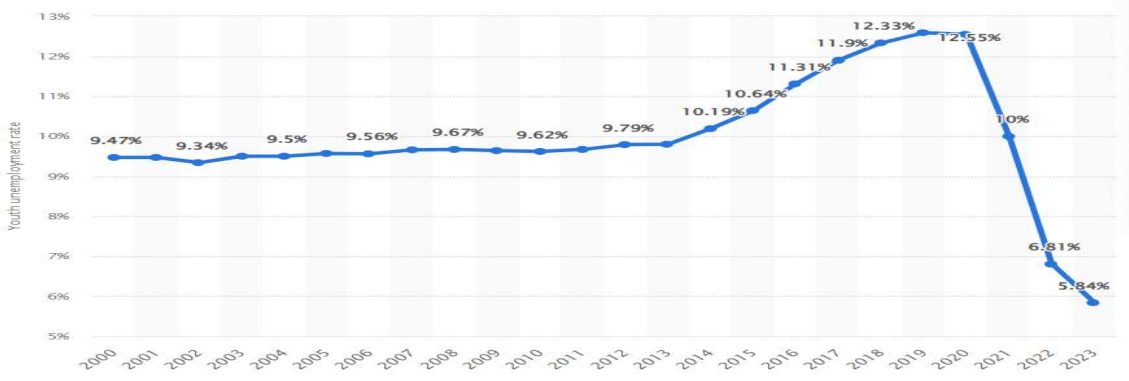
Source: Population of the World (2024).

Fig 1: Showing Nigeria Age Structure and Population Pyramid

The population pyramid shown reflects a broad base, indicating a significant proportion of the population consists of young people, tapering off with smaller proportions in older age groups. This is characteristic of many developing regions, including Nigeria's Niger Delta. The demographic pattern depicted by such pyramids can have significant implications for societal dynamics, particularly concerning a "youth bulge."

In regions like the Niger Delta, this demographic pattern is associated with high rates of unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and constrained access to economic resources. These socioeconomic stressors, coupled with the marginalized political landscape in the region, can lead to heightened frustration among youth, creating fertile ground for militancy and conflict. In the Niger Delta, historical grievances over resource control, environmental degradation due to oil exploitation, and perceived neglect by the central government have fueled unrest.

Nigeria Youth Unemployment Rate from 1999-2023



Source: O'Neill, A. (Youth Unemployment Rate in Nigeria (2024, July 15)

Fig 1: Showing Nigeria Youth Unemployment rate from 1999-2023

Youth unemployment projections can significantly influence the socio-economic and security landscape of a country. Historically, elevated youth unemployment rates have been correlated with higher risks of social unrest, political instability, and conflict. Prolonged unemployment among youth can lead to disenchantment, frustration, and vulnerability to exploitation by insurgent groups, criminal networks, or political factions. Periods of high unemployment, as depicted in the graph around 2018-2020, reflect a critical risk window where marginalized youth may become more susceptible to extremist ideologies or criminal activities. Conversely, the dramatic decline in youth unemployment between 2020 and 2023 may reduce conflict risks if it translates to improved economic opportunities and social stability for young people. However, abrupt declines, as shown, should be interpreted cautiously—potential factors such as statistical adjustments or temporary employment initiatives may not provide sustainable solutions. Addressing root causes through policy-driven efforts is crucial to reducing both unemployment and conflict risks over the long term.

Factors Influencing the Youth Bulge's Contribution to Conflict Risk

The Niger Delta region, rich in oil resources, has been a flashpoint for conflict, partly fueled by the frustrations of a young population facing limited economic opportunities, environmental degradation, and perceived injustices The youth bulge in Nigeria, particularly in the context of the Niger Delta militancy, highlights the ways in which a large, young, and often marginalized population can influence conflict dynamic below;

Demographic Stress and Limited Resources: The Niger Delta has a fast-growing youth population, with over 60% of its residents under 30 years old (Edeh &Udoikah, 2018). This "youth bulge" puts strain on social services, infrastructure, and scarce resources. The increasing number of students is difficult for educational institutions to handle, which frequently results in overcrowded classrooms, underfunded schools, and a high dropout rate. The absence of diverse labour markets exacerbates economic hardship for young people in the Niger Delta, where economic reliance on oil has not resulted in broad riches basic needs are frequently unmet because public services like healthcare are overburdened and underfunded. This lack of access feeds the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment and exacerbates societal discontent. For instance, during the height of militancy from 2005-2009, economic grievances and a lack of opportunity were major drivers of violence (Bisina, 2021). Failure to address these issues increases the risk of a return to unrest and instability.

Radicalization and Vulnerability: In the past, militant organizations such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have taken advantage of the complaints of young people without jobs. Disenfranchised youth are successfully recruited by these organizations by providing financial incentives, assurances of improved prospects, or a feeling of purpose via their cause, youths are particularly vulnerable to radical ideas due to high unemployment rates and a lack of educational and career prospects. This is made worse by the idea that the government disregards the needs of the area, which feeds the marginalization narrative. In the 2000s, there were major disruptions in oil production, kidnappings, and violence against both locals and government troops (Ofozoba, Ezeamama& Okeke, 2023). The continued recruitment of disillusioned youths into militancy runs the risk of rekindling these cycles of violence. History suggests that without intervention, militant activity is likely to resurface, posing a threat to regional and national stability.

Youth Empowerment as a Preventive Measure: Sustainable job programs targeting young people can provide a meaningful alternative to militancy; efforts must include economic diversification beyond the oil industry, promoting entrepreneurship, and supporting small and

medium enterprises. Expanding access to quality education and providing vocational training programs tailored to market needs can equip youth with employable skills. Such initiatives would help break cycles of poverty and reduce the pool of vulnerable youth available for militant recruitment. When youth perceive viable opportunities for social mobility and economic empowerment, their motivation to participate in violence or organized crime diminishes. Thus, investing in empowerment initiatives serves as a critical conflict-prevention measure. However, the inconsistency and lack of long-term planning in the program demonstrated that partial measures would not sustain peace; addressing youth issues comprehensively is vital.

Cultural and Regional Identity: The Niger Delta is home to various ethnic groups, including the Ijaw, Ogoni, and Itsekiri peoples (Garba, 2017). Historically, these groups have been marginalized, with limited political representation and minimal economic benefits derived from the region's vast oil wealth. For the Delta's indigenous communities, the land is not merely a resource but a critical part of their cultural identity and heritage. The environment, including rivers and mangrove swamps, sustains traditional livelihoods like fishing and farming, however, decades of oil exploration have caused widespread environmental degradationoil spills, gas flaring, and pollution have decimated these ecosystems, leading to severe economic and social consequences, reports estimate that over 13 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the Delta over the past five decades, contaminating water sources, destroying arable land, and causing health crises (Nriagu, Udofia &Ebuk, 2016). This has exacerbated the perception among locals that their homeland is being exploited with little regard for their welfare or traditions. The perception of exploitation is deepened by the minimal share of oil revenues allocated to the region compared to the economic value extracted. Indigenous rights groups have highlighted this imbalance, arguing for greater resource control and environmental justice. When such demands go unmet, they feed into the broader narrative of external exploitation by the government and oil companies. The cultural and emotional connection to the land, combined with a sense of historical and ongoing injustice, can act as powerful motivators for conflict. Previous movements, like the Ogoni-led protests in the 1990s led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, highlighted environmental and cultural grievances, resulting in violent suppression and increased tensions (Kukah, 2011). Failure to address these underlying cultural and environmental issues risks reigniting similar struggles, as communities seek to defend their rights, identity, and environment from further harm.

Violence as a Response to Marginalization: Data highlights that despite contributing over 80% of Nigeria's revenue through oil production, the Niger Delta remains one of the poorest and least developed regions (Edeh &Udoikah, 2018). High poverty rates, lack of basic services, and negligible returns from oil wealth exacerbate feelings of marginalization among locals. Militant groups like the Niger Delta Avengers have drawn upon narratives of marginalization to justify their acts of sabotage and violence against oil infrastructure. The "us vs. them" mentality pits local communities against the state and multinational corporations perceived as oppressors. This mindset has historically led to cycles of conflict, such as the insurgency that peaked in the 2000s, If cultural grievances and relative deprivation go unaddressed, a resurgence of violence is highly probable. The lack of meaningful engagement with local populations, continued environmental degradation, and the perception of exclusion are key triggers for renewed conflict. Militant groups can capitalize on these unresolved issues to recruit youth, destabilize the region, and pressure the government or corporations into concessions. The enduring lack of genuine dialogue and justice leaves a deep wound that can easily be reopened.

Addressing cultural grievances and marginalization requires more than economic incentives, it demands sincere engagement, environmental justice, and the recognition of indigenous rights. If these measures are ignored, the Niger Delta risks falling into a perpetual cycle of violence, as seen throughout its history. Genuine progress requires restoring environmental damage, empowering local communities, and integrating cultural identities and rights into development plans. Failure to do so fuels a recurring pattern of unrest, further entrenching the divide between the people, the state, and oil corporations.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Nigeria's youth bulge highlights a crucial intersection of population pressures, economic marginalization, and social upheaval, especially in the Niger Delta. Young people's dissatisfaction and disillusionment have been fueled by institutional negligence, widespread unemployment, and the extreme environmental degradation that has severely damaged traditional livelihoods, despite the region's enormous oil wealth. Due to unequal resource distribution and a lack of economic prospects, many young people have resorted to militancy as a way to voice their complaints and pursue justice. The region has experienced frequent economic upheavals and periods of instability as a result of this dynamic. There is a serious chance that conflict could worsen and militant activities may resurface if the youth bulge is not adequately addressed. A sizable, young population's unfulfilled dreams can readily befueled by violence and unrest, particularly when there are still few economic possibilities and the government ignores their valid grievances. The youth bulge will probably continue to be a significant source of instability, powered by recurring militant movements and further prolonging the cycle of conflict in the Niger Delta, even though this demographic has the potential to propel economic growth and development if comprehensive investments are not made in social inclusion, education, and job creation.There is an urgent need for a comprehensive and long-term plan to direct this group's potential and energy toward constructive endeavours. If this isn't done, tensions could rise, peace could be jeopardized, and militant activity could destabilize the area and the country once more

Recommendations

Economic Diversification and Job Creation: Investing in non-oil sectors including as agriculture, technology, and services can create jobs for young people in the Niger Delta. Incentives for private sector development and youth-oriented entrepreneurial programs should be prioritized.

Vocational Training and Education: Expanding access to quality education and vocational training will provide young people with skills for a variety of job prospects. Programs should emphasize employable skills, entrepreneurship, and technical expertise.

Environmental Remediation Efforts: Policies meant to bring the Niger Delta's deteriorated ecology back to order will not only enhance living circumstances but also help to rebuild confidence among the government, oil corporations, and local people.

Inclusion in Resource Management: Implementing methods that facilitate increased local involvement in the administration and allocation of oil profits can mitigate perceived disparities and empower the youth of the Niger Delta. Revenue-sharing initiatives, community trust funds, and transparent governance are critical.

Youth Empowerment Programs: Sustainable interventions like youth leadership development, mentorship schemes, and community-based peace-building initiatives can reduce the appeal of militancy and foster long-term social cohesion.

Continued Evaluation and Strengthening of Amnesty Programs: While the amnesty program initially reduced violence, ongoing improvements are necessary to ensure long-term rehabilitation and reintegration. Efforts should include long-term job placements, mental health support, and skills training to sustain peace.

By adopting these recommendations on a short term and long term basis, the Nigeria government can transform its youth bulge into a demographic dividend, focusing the energy and potential of young people towards economic growth, social stability, and sustainable peace. Addressing the root causes of disillusionment and providing avenues for meaningful participation will be key in reshaping the Niger Delta's conflict dynamics and securing a prosperous future for its youth

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