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ANALYSIS

## Demographic dynamics upending the world



A street vendor carries bouquets of flowers for sale in Hanoi, Vietnam, on Oct. 22. Countries with “demographic dividends” such as Vietnam, with 70% of the population ages 15-64, have the opportunity for impressive growth rates. NHAC NGUYEN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

### ‘Youth bulges,’ graying societies shift economic, political balance

John Rennie Short

University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
THE CONVERSATION

Government-shaking protests in Bangladesh, Iran, Nepal and Sri Lanka – to name a few – have all in recent years been linked to what demographers call a “youth bulge.” Meanwhile, the economic slowdown in China and ballooning public debt in the United States are in part due to the two powers’ aging populations. In contrast, recent economic growth in Brazil, India and Vietnam reflects a “demographic dividend” of the economically active.

Demographic trends are fueling some of the events reshaping the world. But what exactly are these age-related phenomena, and why are they having such an impact now? I explored these issues in depth in my 2024 book “Demography and the Making of the Modern World.”

Below is a rundown on some of the main demographic dynamics that are changing the world.

#### Young populations

Having a high proportion of a population age 14 and under is something generally found in poorer countries, and it



In Bangladesh, which saw its government toppled by mass protests in 2024, 53% of the population is under age 30. Research has found that countries with more than 60% of their population under 30 are four times more likely to experience outbreaks of civil conflict. MEHEDI HASAN/MIDDLE EAST IMAGES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

usually means a huge demographic drag on economic performance.

We see this in Angola, Niger and Somalia, all of which have between 45% and 50% in that age group — compared to around 17% in the United States.

Having such a large proportion of society in their early childhood means fewer workers are supporting a vast number of citizens not in the

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COMMENTARY

## Gardening grows life skills alongside produce

Shelley Mitchell

Oklahoma State University  
THE CONVERSATION

I used to teach high school science in Oklahoma, and one day I brought in a stalk from a cotton plant with bolls of cotton still attached. Students asked me why I glued cotton balls to a stick.

My students and I lived in a rural town surrounded by pastures of cattle and goats and fields of wheat, soybeans and cotton. I was amazed to learn how little my students understood agriculture. After a few related incidents, I started incorporating agriculture into my science classes.

When the United States was formed, about 80% of the population lived and worked on farms. Within a century the number had fallen to 40%. Today, less than 2% of the population lives on farms.

When most Americans lived on farms, agriculture was part of daily life. Most kids did farm chores, and planting and harvest seasons dictated the schedule of the school year. Today, most Americans are several generations removed from agriculture, and agriculture is seen as a career instead of a part of daily life.

As an agricultural extension specialist focused on horticulture, I’ve found that gardens can be an excellent teaching tool. By integrating gardens into schools, students can grow up learning about agriculture and the food systems that shape their daily lives.

Many researchers have cataloged the benefits of school gardens, and they go far beyond seeing how food

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## Obama joins Texas Senate fight, supports Democrat Talarico

Mateo Rosiles

USA TODAY NETWORK

Former President Barack Obama is entering the U.S. Senate fight in Texas in hopes of flipping the seat for Democrats.

Former President Obama is backing

Texas Democratic candidate James Talarico in his bid for the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Sen. John Cornyn, The New York Times reported Tuesday, May 11.

This comes after reporters spotted the former president at a taco restaurant

in Austin, Texas, posing for a photo with Talarico and Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gina Hinajosa.

As the Times reports, when Obama introduced himself to a table, he asked them, “Do you know our outstanding next governor and senator?”

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