

The Demographic Gift in the Arab World: a Blessing or a Time Bomb for Morocco?⁽¹⁾

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this study investigates population growth in Morocco and its relationship with what is termed the demographic gift. It aims to understand the effects of this exceptional phenomenon on some economic and social indicators including the spatial mobility of the population. Adopting the approach used by the UN, the study concludes that Morocco – in theory – entered the phase of the demographic gift in 2003. The paper discusses the co-occurrence of the opening of the demographic window in Morocco and the growth of youth and labor emigration, accompanied by unplanned urbanization, increasing unemployment rates for educated youth, and a weakened societal value system. This new reality has been a main motivation for the repeated popular protests seen in Morocco over recent years..

Demographic Gift

Dependency Rate

Economic Growth

Migration

Morocco

The demographic shift is considered one of the most important phenomena to engage—and continues to engage—the attention of many scholars in the humanities. Despite heated academic debate, no consensus has been reached regarding the extent of the influence of this phenomenon on socioeconomic development. The scholar Robert Malthus (1766-1834), for one, held a pessimistic view of demographic growth, considering it responsible for excessive consumption and the emergence of new demands that were increasingly difficult for the state to meet, due to the limitation of resources. Jean Bodin (1530-1596) on the other hand was optimistic. He considered demographic growth a fundamental catalyst of development through the creation of a larger workforce and the opportunities for creativity, talent, and capability that followed. It was him who coined the phrase “*Il n’est de richesse ni de force que d’hommes*”, or loosely, that there is no wealth nor power - only men.

As a developing country Morocco has been characterized in recent years by a deep demographic shift that represents the foundation for the undoing of components of population regeneration. As a result, the early stages of the demographic shift ended in

record time compared to some European countries. A decline in birth and death rates led to a radical change in the age structure of the population, represented by a decline in the segment of the population of dependency (those less than 15 years or more than 64 years old), and a rise in the productive segment (those between 15 and 64 years old). In this way, the middle of the population pyramid became wider than both the base and the peak.

This demographic transition presents a real opportunity to accelerate growth and improve economic performance, thus it is termed “the demographic gift”. With the decline of the birth rate and rise in the proportion of the adult population, the ratio of the working population rises quickly, which helps to create favorable conditions for economic take-off. From one perspective, the labor force increase leads to a rise in production capacity. From another, the decline in the dependency ratio minimizes the pressure caused by household and government expenditures, thereby raising the level of domestic savings necessary to accumulate capital.

This study aims to analyze the population dynamic in Morocco and its effect on the emergence of

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the demographic gift at the beginning of the third millennium. It also seeks to understand the extent to which various economic and social indicators respond to this exceptional phenomenon. On this basis, the study will attempt to answer the pivotal question: Should the demographic gift in Morocco be considered a blessing or a curse?

In answering this question, the study will be organized in four parts. The first section deals with

definitions and characteristics of the emergence of “the demographic gift” and its various stages. The second section presents the most important related literature on the potential effects of the demographic gift across societies. The third section of the study is an overview of the most important demographic shifts that have occurred in Morocco since its independence. Finally, the fourth section will present the findings of the study using a descriptive analytical approach.

The “Demographic Gift”: What is it exactly?

The demographic gift—also known as the “demographic dividend”—is defined by a set of positive changes that produce and are associated with demographic shifts in a specific country. A steady rise in the pace of economic growth and an improvement in various measures of standard of living for individuals are considered among the most important of these changes. This phenomenon happens on an exceptional basis when the growth of the working portion of society (adults between the ages 15 and 65) clearly exceeds that of the dependent part (that is, children and the elderly). According to the definition adopted by the UN, classification as a “demographic dividend” requires that the proportion of the population under 15 be 30% or that the number of elderly (over 65 years) should not exceed 15% of the total population.

According to Hussein Ahmed Saad al-Shedidi, the demographic gift can take two forms: the simple gift or the compound gift. The former is defined by the difference in the rate of population growth between dependent and working sections of the population. Theoretically, the larger the difference, the greater the contribution of this demographic gift to the GDP. The compound “demographic gift,” on the other hand, is calculated based on the difference between overall population growth and the rate of labor force growth. It is compound because it involves the growth of the working population in addition to shrinking of the rate of non-working people by half.⁽³⁾

Reaching the phase of demographic gift requires the emergence of a continuous population dynamic that leads to a tangible decrease in reproductive rates,

so that the population transforms from one that is majority dependents to one in which the economically active portion of the population is dominant. This shift in the age structure of the population would lead to the opening of a demographic window.⁽⁴⁾ This results in the emergence of what is termed the “first demographic gift”. Improved economic and social conditions contribute to an increase in life expectancy for a large section of the elderly, which will inevitably lead to an accumulation of savings and a rise in asset revenue over the lifespan, toward the goal of financing the period after retirement (the aging years). If the government manages to establish a basic framework for wealth accumulation, then the investment capacity will improve noticeably. This is the scenario referred to as “the demographic gift”.

According to Bloom et al., indicators of the first demographic gift manifest through three basic channels: the labor market, savings, and human capital. On the one hand, the shift that leads to the demographic gift begins with a drop in fertility and mortality rates, which contributes automatically and directly to a rise in the workforce either through a natural increase in the size of the labor force or increased participation of women in the labor market. In addition, the expansion of the productive age group leads to a drop in the rate of dependency and family spending, which encourages saving and guarantees opportunities to finance productive investment. Moreover, the rise in average life expectancy leads to a significant shift in individual behavioral patterns

3 Hussein Ahmed Saad al-Shedidi, “Optimal Recruitment for the Opportunity of Demographic Shift (The Demographic Gift),” *Journal of Planning and Development* 30, (2014): 139-46.

4 Lee and Mason define the demographic window as the period in which a country can achieve the greatest possible social and economic advantages based on the advantageous development of the age structure of its population. See: Ronald Lee and Andrew Mason, “The Dividends of Demographic Evolution,” *Finance and Development* 43, no. 3 (September 2006): 16-17.

toward children in terms of education and family planning.⁽⁵⁾

Stages of the Emergence of the Demographic Gift

The demographic gift is considered a natural and inevitable result of population development for society, which undergoes several stages.⁽⁶⁾ In the first stage, the fertility rate reaches unprecedented and uncontrollable levels. Meanwhile, the mortality rate increases across all age groups. The gap between these two rates is minimal and the rate of population growth is very low. These two features are prevalent in agrarian societies whose social structure is tribal or traditional and unstructured. They are characterized by an absence of family planning, low household income levels, a low standard of living, the spread of disease and a lack of sufficient health services, and an otherwise weak basic infrastructure.

The second stage is characterized by the emergence of a type of conflict or imbalance between the mortality rate and the birth rate. While the birth rate continues to rise gradually, the mortality rate experiences a kind of stability, the consequences of which are a rise in the natural growth rate of the population or what is termed a “population explosion”. Usually, this conflict traces back to a positive change in the population’s living conditions, especially advances in health or nutritional conditions or other fundamental services, like sewage, education, electricity, and potable water.

The third stage is distinguished by a tangible drop in fertility and mortality rates compared with the previous stage. Consequently, population growth begins to decline gradually, until it reaches a balance. Usually, this stage is referred to as a transitional stage, given the change in people’s behavior - particularly the developing awareness in rural communities of the need to control the birth rate. In addition to the

improved social status of individuals—especially with women and the spread of contraceptives, high levels of urbanization, industrial development, and popularization of the use of agricultural tools – contribute to a drop in the fertility rate, the consequences of which are a gradual disappearance of traditional values and disintegration of the extended family.

In the fourth and final stage, the harbingers of the demographic gift begin to emerge: the growth rate of the productive population gradually increases and eventually surpasses that of the dependent population, which is composed of children (under age 15) and elderly (above age 65). Societies entering this phase are characterized by the rapid spread of the nuclear family model and the opening of the “demographic window,” that is, conditions favorable to benefiting from the demographic gift. It is noteworthy that this window opens only once in a matter of decades for a limited period of around 25 years. It quickly closes with the return of the increased dependency ratio caused by the rapid growth of society’s elderly population.

These four stages amount to a landmark process that human societies at various economic, social, and urban levels go through. A number of empirical studies have shown that most advanced industrial nations have exhausted their demographic gift and are now in the aging phase. In contrast, emerging countries have just passed through the third stage and are, to varying degrees, in the process of taking advantage of the opportunities made available to them in the fourth stage. Finally, there are still many developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, that are in the second stage, as indicated by a rise in the natural growth rate caused by a drop in the mortality rate along with the persistence of a high fertility rate.

Potential Effects of the Demographic Gift

The majority of scholars agree that the demographic gift is limited in time and, therefore, it reflects an

exceptional opportunity for economic take-off, available only once in an extended period. If it is

5 David E. Bloom et al., “Realizing the Demographic Dividend: Is Africa any Different?” Program on the Global Demography of Aging, Harvard University, May 2007.

6 *Age-Structural Transition: Challenges for Development*. Ian Pool, Laura R. Wong, and Éric Vilquin (eds.), (Paris: CIRCED, Committee for International Cooperation in National Research in Demography, 2006): 8.

not anticipated and reasonably planned for, the opportunity for wealth creation and rapid economic growth will be lost. Negligence in the preparation period could easily transform this blessing into a curse with inescapable disadvantages.

The Role of the Demographic Gift in Support of Economic Growth

It is well-known that a sustained decrease in the fertility rate of a given society or country will contribute to a reduction in the dependency ratio - that is, the proportion of the those less than 15 years and over 65 years per 100 people (the number of non-productive individuals supported by one productive individual).

Many scholars⁽⁷⁾ have gathered examples that the “demographic dividend” is a landmark opportunity to raise the standard of current economic growth and to stimulate the economy in times of stagnation. In an empirical study that included countries in East and Southeast Asia, Bloom and Williamson (1998) arrived at the conclusion that demographic growth has a fleeting but concrete impact on economic growth. As the proportion of the productive population rose by one percentage point, the average GDP per capita increased by 64.1%, though the effect is dependent upon the disparity between the growth rate of the dependent population and that of the adult working population.⁽⁸⁾ Bloom et al. and Mason consider the “economic miracle”⁽⁹⁾ achieved by East Asian countries to have a strong connection to the change

in age structure of the population, caused by a swift drop in fertility rates. Indeed, this region saw one of the fastest and most exciting demographic transitions of the 20th century.

In the same context, Bloom et al. view the demographic gift in Southeast Asian societies as having led to economic and social changes that positively and tangibly impacted the level of economic development.⁽¹⁰⁾ Among the most important of these changes are an increased labor force and efficiency due to the growth of the active population and the rise in household savings as a result of decreased reproduction rates, smaller family size, and improved health of children. These societal effects came about as a result of improved educational, nutritional, and overall living standards, as well as the enhanced status of women in society owing to increased educational opportunities, a delayed marriage age, lower reproduction rates and a rise in urbanization. This in turn was a result of the influx of workers from rural areas, searching for employment opportunities in the growing industrial and service sectors.

For his part, Navaneetham carried out an empirical study which consisted of annual time series data from 1950 and 1992.⁽¹¹⁾ The study aimed to evaluate the relationship between the demographic gift (the increased ratio of the productive population versus the reduced dependency ratio) and economic development in Southeast Asian countries. His results were generally consistent with those of previous studies, confirming that the demographic gift had a

7 See: Ester Boserup. *The conditions of agricultural growth: the economics of agrarian change under population pressure*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965); Simon, Julian L. *The ultimate resource*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Mason, Andrew. *Population Change and Economic Development In East Asia: Challenges Met, Opportunities Seized*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Andrew Mason, "Demographic Transition and Demographic Dividends in Developed and Developing Countries", *United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Social and Economic Implications of Changing Population Age Structure*, Mexico City, August 31-September 2, 2005; David E. Bloom, D. Canning, and P. Malaney, "Demographic change and economic growth in Asia." *Population and Development Review* 26 (2000): 257-1990; David E. Bloom, David Canning, and Jaypee Sevilla. *The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change*. Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation, 2003; Kannan Navaneetham, *Age Structural Transition and Economic Growth: Evidences from South and Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Asian Metacentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis, 2002); and Nancy Birdsall, John Williamson, Brian Deese (eds.). *Delivering on Debt Relief: From IMF Gold to a New Aid Architecture*, (Washington: Center for Global Development Institute for International Economics, 2002).

8 David E. Bloom and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Demographic Transitions and Economic Miracles in Emerging Asia," *World Bank Economic Review* 12, no. 3 (September 1998): 419-55.

9 Bloom, David E., David Canning, and Jaypee Sevilla. *The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change*. Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation, 2003, 34.

Mason, Andrew. *Population Change and Economic Development In East Asia: Challenges Met, Opportunities Seized*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), chapter 13.

10 Bloom et al., *The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective*.

11 Kanaan Navaneetham, "Age Structural Transition and Economic Growth." *Asian Metacentre Research Series* 2002; 7: 1-26.

positive effect on economic performance for nations that made up the study's sample, except for the Philippines. Batoul (2004) took the study one step further, confirming that in East Asia—particularly in Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore—the demographic gift was solely responsible for approximately half of national wealth creation between 1970 and 1990. As the productive population in these countries increased by one percentage point, the growth rate of GDP per capita increased by 46.1%.⁽¹²⁾ Wang and Mason confirmed that China took full advantage of the demographic gift in the last two decades of the 20th century, enhanced by the birth reduction policy; the contribution of this phenomenon to China's GDP is 15% annually.⁽¹³⁾

Using Growth Accounting Methods, Mason (2005) reached a number of important conclusions, the most prominent among them being that the demographic gift contributed 67.0 percentage points to economic growth in the United States between 1985 and 1990. Meanwhile, this contribution was estimated at 25.1 percentage points in Mexico between 1995 and 2000. In Africa, the positive effects of the demographic gift have just begun to appear, in various forms, at the start of the third millennium, but they will last for decades. In any case, Mason believes that the demographic gift could contribute to a rise in the level of economic growth at a rate ranging between 1 and 2 percentage points in countries of East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Pacific Islands.⁽¹⁴⁾

Presenting his study on demographic challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, Ndulu et al. emphasized the role of demographic factors in interpreting the difference between the growth rate of this part of the continent

and the recorded growth rate of some countries in East and South Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Using time series data for the period between 1960 and 2004, this group of researchers used a multiple regression model to determine the relationship between the growth rate and a set of variables across five categories: primary conditions, demographic factors, geographic factors, political factors, and economic shocks. The results showed that poor growth rates in sub-Saharan Africa trace back to two demographic factors: a high level of dependency and a low life expectancy.⁽¹⁵⁾

Notably, the demographic gift does not automatically guarantee economic gains; the adoption of effective structural economic policies is a necessary condition in order to profit from this exceptional yet fleeting opportunity. This is evidenced by the cases of countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Between 1975 and 1995, these two regions experienced these exact demographic conditions—a continuous drop in fertility rates—but their economic results were very much mixed. The GDP per capita in Southeast Asian countries rose by 8.6% annually as opposed to only 7.0% in Latin American countries.⁽¹⁶⁾

In any case, these studies serve to prove the hypothesis supported by many optimistic classical theorists that economic outcomes are positively affected by the age structure of a population, in addition to other determinants (in particular, good governance). Shakouri (2004) confirmed that the “nature of the relationship between demographic variables and economic growth is causal with a feedback effect. It falls under the systems concept in that there are inputs and outputs whose roles change over time”.⁽¹⁷⁾

Risks Posed by a Lack of Preparation for the Demographic Gift

The demographic gift does not directly cause growth, but rather the opportunity for growth. Accordingly, taking

advantage of the demographic gift requires significant preparation and special arrangements that involve the

12 Shakouri Batoul, “Population-Development Linkages in Macroeconomics - Millennium Development Opportunity,” Social and Economic Council of West Asia. (presentation, Regional Arab Population Forum, Beirut, November 19, 2004): 30.

13 Wang Feng and Andrew Mason, “The Demographic Factor in China's Transitions,” in: Loren Brandt, Thomas G. Rawski (eds.), *China's Great Economic Transformation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

14 Andrew Mason, “Demographic Transition and Demographic Dividends in Developed and Developing Countries”, *United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Social and Economic Implications of Changing Population Age Structure*, Mexico City, August 31-September 2, 2005.

15 Benno Ndulu et al., *Challenges of African Growth: Opportunities, Constraints and Strategic Directions* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007).

16 World Bank Report, 2008.

17 Batool, “Population-Development Linkages,” 12.

entire society. These arrangements involve consolidating political commitment in the interest of human capital valuation, through raising the quality of educational services, as well as expanding the supply and quality of health services, including reproductive health. Other preparations include formulating and implementing public policies for wealth creation, reducing unemployment, and creating a stimulating environment for creativity and innovation in order to establish new projects and cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit. In order to fulfill the conditions necessary to tap into the potential of the demographic gift, institutional mechanisms for coordination must be improved, and awareness must be drawn to information related to the demographic gift. Doing so would increase the capacity of those overseeing relevant programs to integrate the population dimension into local and national development.

Without the fulfillment of these and other conditions, it would be impossible for a steady increase in the adult population to enhance growth and development. On the contrary, it would be likely to produce the opposite results, particularly in societies that lack justice and equality in rights and obligations. The most significant of these effects is the growing frustration and despair among disadvantaged groups who are denied basic services and opportunities for entry into the labor market. This feeling creates a breeding ground for negative migration of both internal and external varieties—rural migration and informal immigration abroad—and the outbreak of forms of violence and extremism, spurring opposition to state institutions.

The roots of this pessimistic demographic view trace back to the end of the 18th century with the appearance of an essay by Thomas Malthus (1776-1834). This placed the responsibility for underdevelopment on the continuous population increase in line with increasing subsistence means. The economic philosopher confirmed that the population's growth is carried out according to a geometric progression, whereas subsistence resources multiply arithmetically. Therefore, the population can double every 25 years and will continue to increase indefinitely as long as there is no obstacle to its growth, which could be man-made itself, such as the spread of disease or the outbreak of war between peoples.

The neo-Malthusian school of thought reinforced this pessimistic view of population pressure. In 1968, Paul Ehrlich wrote a book entitled *The Population Bomb*, which predicted a massive population explosion that would lead to widespread famine within 10 years, within the second half of the 1970s. Despite this prediction not materializing, pessimistic thinking in the field of demography has not disappeared but merely taken on new forms. In 2010, American writer Jack Goldstone published a venturous article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine entitled "The New Population Bomb: The Four Megatrends that Will Change the World" in which he exposed prospective changes to the world's population structure over the next four decades, that is, by the year 2050. Among the changes impressed upon by the writer was an increase in the urban population ratio. It is expected that around 70% of the world's population will move to cities throughout impoverished areas characterized by poor services and widespread pollution, which could lead to the spread of chaos and various forms of violence and extremism. The writer adds that urban expansion in developing countries in the coming years could cause a tragedy similar to that which Europeans endured in the 19th century, resulting mainly from ill-considered urban expansion. This tragedy would manifest in the increase and intensification of unrest, which could create fertile ground for social revolutions.⁽¹⁸⁾

A 1986 study carried out in the United States by the National Research Council came to the conclusion that population growth does not have any meaningful effect on macroeconomic performance despite its positive impact at the microeconomic level - that is, through household behavior. In another study that looked at West African countries, Guengant (2011) noted an inverse relationship between demographic growth and economic growth. Assuming an annual increase in economic growth and in demographic growth by 2% and 5% respectively, it would take 24 years for the per capita GDP to double. However, if demographic growth rose by a large ratio (3% annually) and the economic growth rate remained at a reasonable level (4% annually), then the per capita GDP would not double for 50 years.⁽¹⁹⁾

18 Jack A. Goldstone, "The New Population Bomb: The Four Megatrends that Will Change the World," *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2010).

19 Jean-Pierre Guengant, *How to Benefit from the Demographic Dividend?: Demography at the Center of Development Trajectory: How to benefit from the demographic dividend*. A savoir, no. 9. Paris: French Agency for Development (AFD); [Marseille]: Institute of Development Research (IRD), 2011. [in French]

In a 2015 study, Laurent Chalard linked birth rate with geopolitical events, in particular, popular uprisings. In this respect, the researcher explained that the reason for the outbreak of revolutions in some Arab countries in 2011, especially in Egypt and Tunisia, primarily traces back to uncontrolled demographic growth combined with deteriorating political and economic conditions.⁽²⁰⁾ Thus, when the demographic window (the start of the decline in the dependency ratio and the growth of the working-age adult population) is opened in a country suffering from poverty, under-development, and corruption, a fertile environment for the emergence of such opposition movements is created. Usually, such a situation causes marginalized groups to seek migration through any possible means. When prevented from doing so, these groups will engage in various forms of protest including sit-ins, food strikes, and daily demonstrations. This situation is a catalyst for the outbreak of revolution.

Youssef Courbage (2013, 2015) sees a strong link between demographic revolution in the Arab world and democratic revolution,⁽²¹⁾ arguing that demographic transitions in some Arab countries are

what made the revolutions “an inevitable fate”.⁽²²⁾ On the one hand, states like Tunisia and Morocco entered into a series of modernizations by raising the rate of childhood education, especially for girls, as well as family planning involving a birth reduction policy and the use of contraceptives. Among the results of these policies was a decline in the fertility rate, and subsequently, a gradual shift from the extended family to the nuclear family. This shift consequently destabilized traditional patriarchal values and brought modernist ideas to maturity within society. Furthermore, the decline of endogamy contributed to the openness of societies and made individuals more likely to rebel against forms of oppression and tyranny.

Lastly, in a study prepared by the Wilson Center in the United States on population in Pakistan in 2011, it was emphasized that the spread of religious extremism in the country traced back to the failure of the political class to take advantage of the demographic gift. This manifested in an absence of relevant policies and strategies in the education sector and a rise in socioeconomic disparities.⁽²³⁾

An Overview of Demographic Changes in Morocco

Like other Arab countries - such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan - Morocco started to undergo unprecedented demographic changes in the early 1960s. These changes were mainly related to the population and its structure as well as population movement at the macro level.

The Increase and Structure of Morocco's Population

Over the last six decades since gaining independence, Moroccan society has witnessed fast-paced periodic demographic changes, which have resulted in a large increase in the population, and significant changes

to its characteristics and structure. Morocco's population doubled three times since the beginning of the 1960s. The total population reached 33.8 million in 2014 as compared to 11.6 million in 1960. Figure 1 demonstrates that the population increase grows at a rate of 4 million people every ten years.

Despite this overall increase in the population, the growth rate experienced a steady decline beginning in 1982, when it moved from 2.59% between 1960 and 1971 to 1.25% between 2004 and 2014.

The two key factors in shaping the population growth rate and determining its levels are the fertility rate and the mortality rate, in addition to the limited effects

20 Laurent Chalard, “La démographie comme facteur révolutionnaire en Afrique du Nord,” *Orient XXI* (5/8/2015), accessed on 20/11/2018, at: <https://orientxxi.info>.

21 Youssef Courbage, “Does the Demographic Revolution lead to Democratic Revolution? The case of MENA” *Omran* 1, no. 3 (Winter 2013).

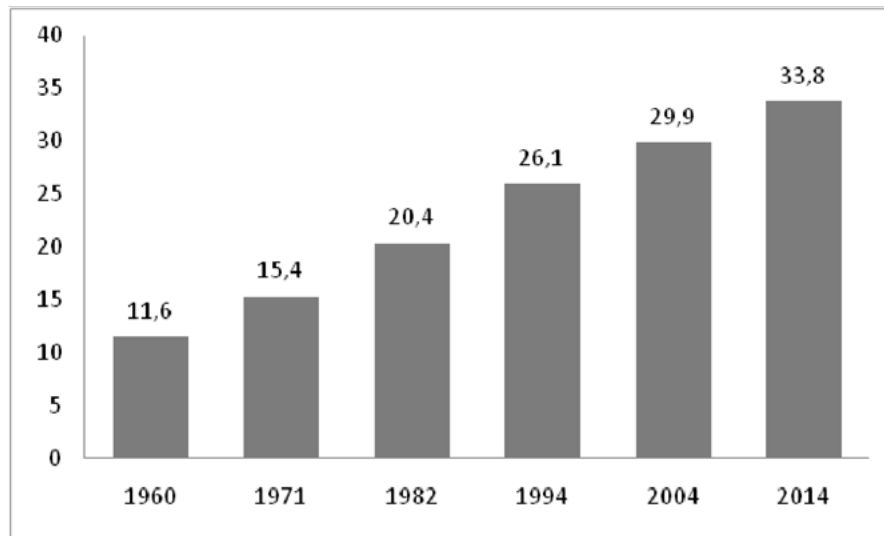
22 ———, “Demographic Variables: Were the Arab Revolts an Inevitable Fate?” Center for Mediterranean Integration, January 16, 2015, accessed on 20/11/2018, at: <https://cmimarseille.org>.

23 Michael Kugelman and Robert M. Hathaway (eds) *Reaping the Dividend: Overcoming Pakistan's Demographic Challenges* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011).

of foreign migration and emigration. Results of the most recent census in Morocco (2014 census) show that the average number of children per woman (the total fertility rate) stabilized at 2.21 compared with 2.5 in 2004 and 5.2 in 1982. These data demonstrate that the average number of births in Morocco has dropped by three children in the past 30 years. In

the coming years, this trend is expected to continue, reaching less than 2.0 children per woman within a span of 20 years. Among the results of this decrease is the shrinking size of the average family which has declined from 5.87 in 1994 to 5.24 in 2004, reaching 4.6 in 2014 as indicated in the census of the same year.

Figure 1: Morocco's Population Increase (in millions)



Source: Haut-Commissariat au Plan, "Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2004 et 2014," accessed on 2020/18/11/, at: <https://www.hcp.ma>

The decline in the fertility rate in Morocco, as in the rest of the Arab countries, can be attributed to a number of sociocultural and economic factors which led to the gradual modernization of Moroccan society: increased level of education, women's integration in all aspects of economic life, increased use of contraceptives, and a decrease in the average age at the time of the first marriage, especially between 1960 and 2004.

The mortality rate, in turn, has also been steadily declining. It moved from 19 deaths per 1,000 births in 1962⁽²⁴⁾ to 6.7 in 1994,⁽²⁵⁾ and settled at 4.79 in 2004. The origin of this decline is linked to the decline in the infant mortality rate, which dropped from 87.3 per 1,000 births in 1982 to 24.6 in 2014⁽²⁶⁾ as a result of improvements in healthcare conditions, particularly

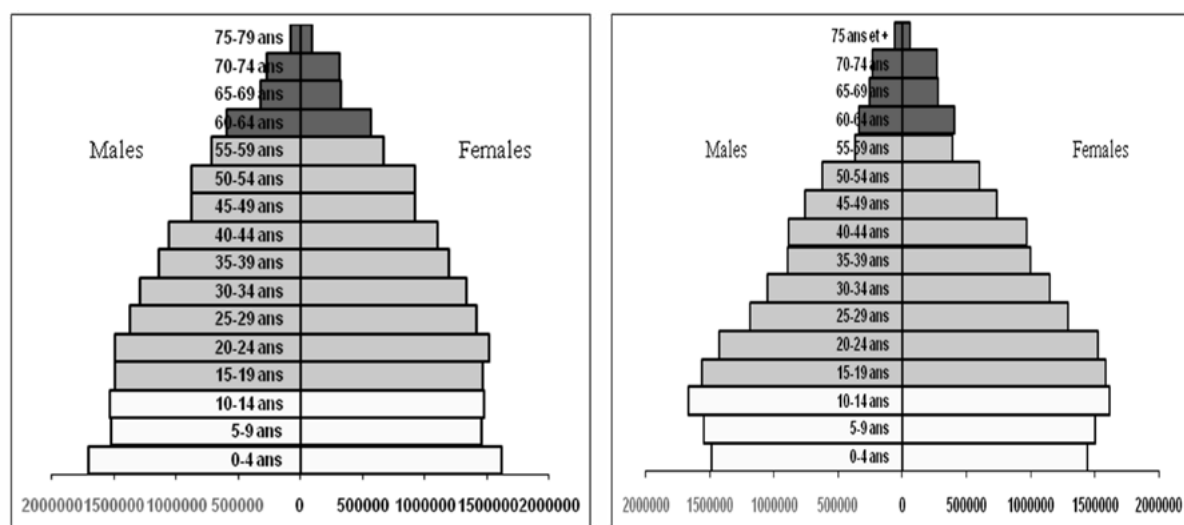
access to reproductive health services. At the same time, life expectancy at birth was steadily improving. The High Commission for Planning estimates that the value of this index reached 76.5 in 2014, whereas it did not exceed 47 in the early 1960s.

Although Moroccan society is still very young, the age structure of the population experienced unprecedented developments (Figure 2). The proportion of individuals under the age of 15 decreased from 31.2% in 2004 to 28% in 2014, which led to the erosion of the base of the pyramid and the widening of its middle. Thus, the proportion of working-age adults (between 15 and 64 years old) moved from 63.2% to 65.8% in 2014. As for the proportion of elderly people (65 years and older), it increased from 5.6% to 6.1% during the same period.

24 Center for Demographic Studies and Research, Rabat, 1986.

25 Center for Demographic Studies and Research, Rabat, 1997.

26 World Bank Statistics, 2015.

Figure 2: Development of Morocco's Population Pyramid**The 2004 Moroccan Census****The 2014 Moroccan Census**

Source: Haut-Commissariat au Plan, "Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2004 et 2014", accessed on 202018/11/, at: <https://www.hcp.ma>.

Population Mobility: Internal Migration

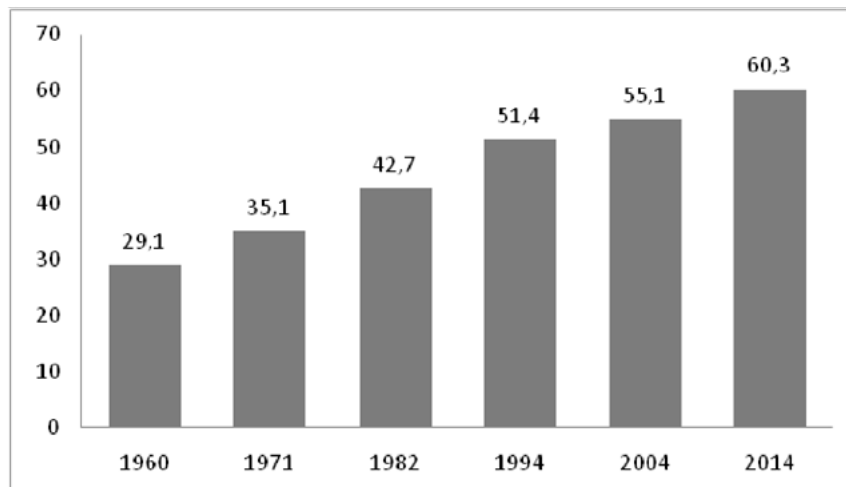
Along with the decrease in the population growth rate and the evolution of the population's age structure, internal geographic mobility soared, leading to a re-mapping of Morocco's population density. This movement took two main forms: migration from underdeveloped areas to wealthy areas (northern and central regions), and migration from rural to urban areas. Thus, according to the results of the latest population and housing census (the 2014 census), more than 70% of the population is now centered in five regions, from the total twelve. These regions, in order of significance, are: Greater Casablanca, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, Marrakesh-Safi, Fès-Meknès, and Tangier-Tétouan-Al Hoceima.

As for rural migration, a noticeable shift occurred beginning in the 1970s and 80s when a number of rural migrants to Moroccan cities annually rose from around 40,000 people in the 1950s to 150,000 people in the 1980s, reaching 200,000 migrants per year in the first decade of the 21st century. This type of migration is primarily linked to environmental factors and an imbalance in the distribution of natural and financial resources across regions, particularly in the wake of years of drought, the fragmentation of agricultural holdings, and the inability of municipal

authorities to create alternatives and present structural solutions for development in rural areas.

On another level, the level of female migration to cities also grew significantly, with women accounting for about 50% of the total number of rural migrants. This increased feminization of rural migration revealed the extent of Moroccan society's deep transformations, especially in regard to women's access to the labor market, material independence, and their ability to withstand life's pressures. The rural woman no longer suffered from restrictions of movement that were imposed upon her in the past; she has gained the ability to leave the house and to travel as an independent individual in search of a decent living.

The proportion of Morocco's rural population moved from 70.9% of the country's total population in 1960 to 48.6% in 1994, dropping even further to 39.7% according to the most recent population and housing census (1994 census). In contrast, the country's urbanization rate grew rapidly (Figure 3). The urban population, which formed 29.1% of the total population in 1960 grew to 42.7% in 1982 and was recorded at 60.3% in 2014. These statistics demonstrate that the rate of urbanization doubled in a record time of no more than five decades.

Figure 3: The Evolution of Urbanization in Morocco (in percentages)

Source: Haut-Commissariat au Plan, "Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2004 et 2014," accessed on 2020/18/11/, at: <https://rgphentableaux.hcp.ma>

Public policies that were put into place by successive governments since independence had a clear impact on the characteristics of the evolution of the population's geographic distribution. As a result, urbanization spread and urban centers developed. As was mentioned previously, the failure of development policies in rural areas contributed to the exacerbation of rural migration, the consequences of which included social, environmental, and structural problems.

Challenges of the demographic gift in Morocco Rapid transformations in the age structure of Morocco's population indicate early signs of the first demographic gift. However, data available until now does not show any signs that the socioeconomic situation will improve as a result of these transformations.

Signs of the Demographic Window in Morocco

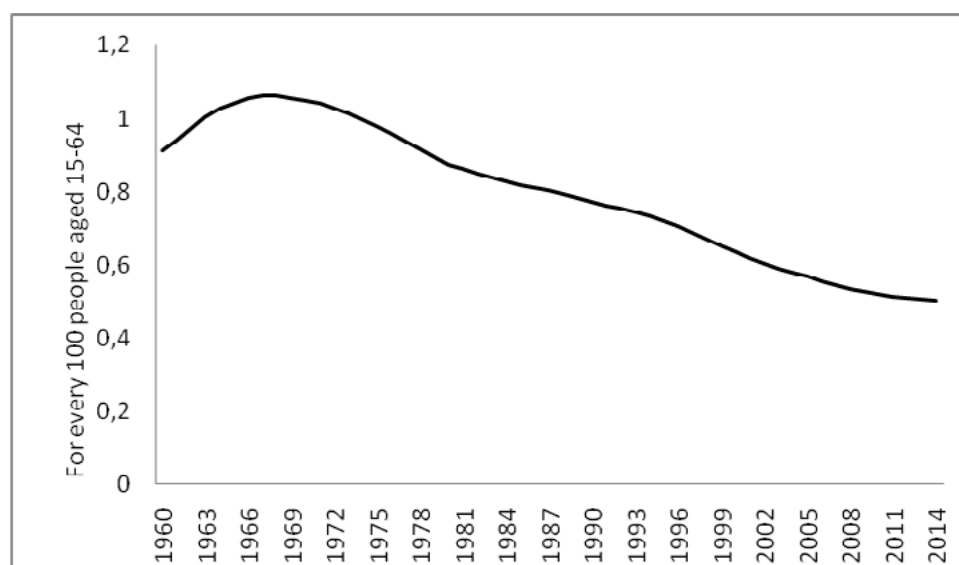
A careful reading of the evolution of demographic indicators presented above may confirm that the necessary characteristics for the opening of the demographic window in Morocco began to appear at the start of the 21st century when the population growth rate began to decline as compared to the growth rate of working-age individuals. At the same time, the dependency ratio—that is, the economic burden supported by the productive members of the population—experienced a noticeable decrease.⁽²⁷⁾

Although there is not a specific threshold to precisely define the beginning of the opening of the demographic window, the majority of relevant studies take one of two approaches. The first, used by Navaneetham (2004) and Saxena (2011), is based on the premise that the early signs of the demographic window opening appear as soon as the population growth rate of working-age people begins to exceed the overall population growth rate. The second approach, used by the UN in 2004, links the opening of the demographic window to the fluctuation of the dependency ratio between 40% and 60%.

Morocco's dependency ratio saw a significant rise in the 1960s when it increased from 91.15% in 1960 to 106% in 1968, before dropping to 104.1% in 1970. This figure retreated rapidly between 1970 and 2015, plummeting from 104.74 to 50.13 dependents per 100 people. According to the UN approach, the year 2003 can be considered a pivotal year, as the dependency ratio was recorded at an estimated 59.06%, corresponding to when the demographic window opened. According to demographic projections, it is expected that the dependency ratio will rise to about 46% by the year 2020,⁽²⁸⁾ the same ratio that was recorded in South Korea at the end of the 1980s.

27 The dependency ratio is measured by dividing the number of dependents (those below the working age in addition to those who have reached retirement age) by the number of providers (the working-age population, or those between 15 and 64 years old).

28 Assuming a decrease in the dependency ratio of 1.34% annually.

Figure 4: Evolution of the Dependency Ratio in Morocco

Source: Haut-Commissariat au Plan, "Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2004 et 2014", accessed on 2020/18/11/, at: <https://www.hcp.ma>

The Opening of the Demographic Window: Various Economic Effects

In light of the above, it can be concluded that Morocco has indeed already entered the phase in which it has the potential to profit from the "demographic gift". This raises questions about the extent of the impact of this exceptional opportunity on various economic indices. Looking at gross domestic savings, it is clear that there was little improvement. On the contrary, as Figure 5 demonstrates, gross national savings took a sharp downward turn since the demographic window opened in 2003.

The savings rate moved from 25.72% in 2003 to 19.11% in 2015.⁽²⁹⁾ This is a paradoxical result. Contrary to what would be anticipated, the declining dependency ratio in Morocco corresponds to a decrease in the level of savings, which indicates that household funds are mainly being directed toward consumption in order to cope with the rising cost of living.

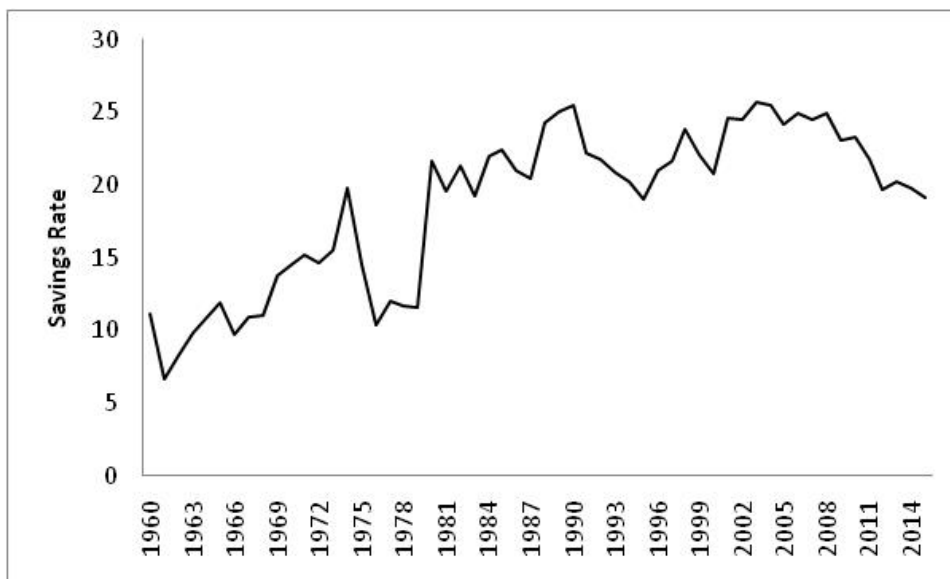
The decline in domestic savings contributed to the decline in sources of funding for the Moroccan economy, given that it represents the most important source of liquidity. This effect prompted the Central

Bank to intervene regularly to aid the banking sector by injecting more liquidity into the money market. This decline is indicative of households' eroded ability to save due to the high cost of living in addition to low wages and pensions.

Unlike the domestic savings rate, the investment rate had a slight improvement of approximately 5 points since the opening of the demographic window. As demonstrated in Figure 6, this index (gross fixed capital formation as a percent of GDP) moved from 25.9% in 2003 to 29.4% in 2014. However, this improvement was not linked to the demographic gift in any way. For one, the upward trend of the investment rate curve began in 1996, seven years before the opening of the demographic window, which can primarily be attributed to macroeconomic policies. Moreover, this rate witnessed a slight decline beginning in 2009, in the advanced phase of the opening of the demographic window. The inadequacy of domestic savings allowed for only a fraction of the financial needs of the national economy to be covered. The remainder was funded based on income received from the rest of the world, including remittances of Moroccan expatriates abroad and foreign aid, especially from the Gulf.

29 The World Bank, "World Bank Open Data - Gross domestic savings (% of GDP)," accessed on 20/11/2018, at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

Figure 5: Evolution of Gross Domestic Savings in Morocco (% of GDP)



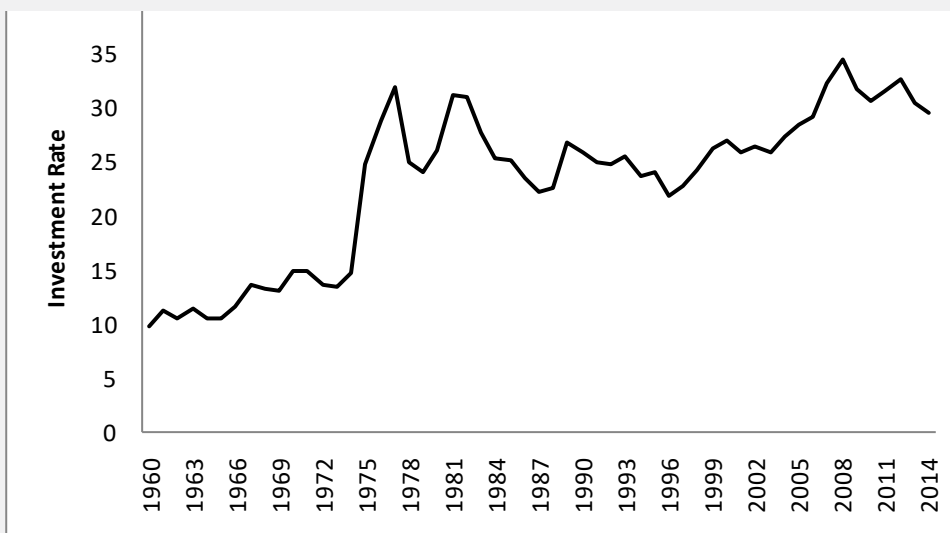
Source: The World Bank, "World Bank Open Data - Gross domestic savings (% of GDP)," accessed on 202018/11/, at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

The impact of opening the demographic window on economic growth appears very weak. An analysis of Figure 7 demonstrates that the rate of national income growth fluctuated from year to year.

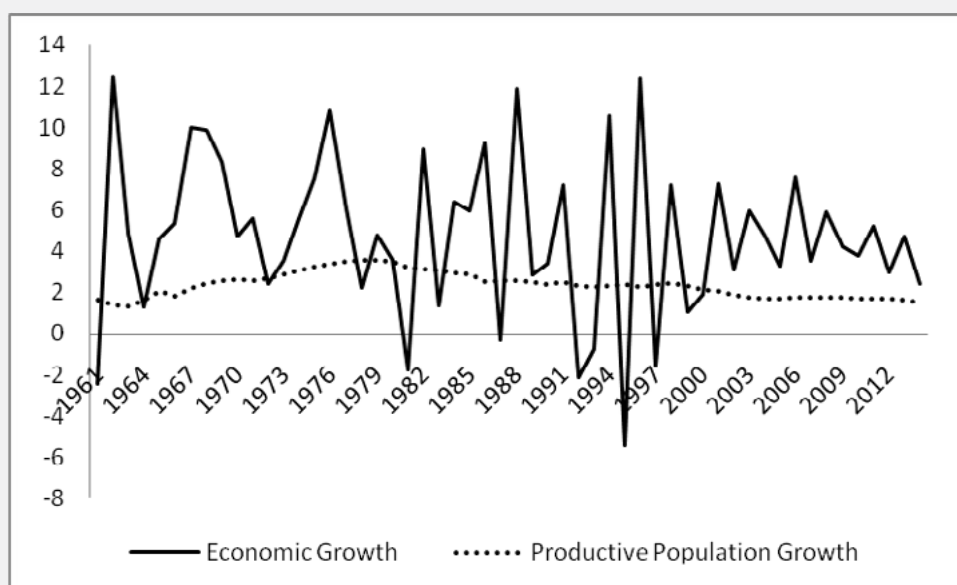
The fluctuation of the economic growth rate is evidence of its link to uncontrolled outside factors, like rainfall and performance in the tourism sector.

The rate of labor force development has declined gradually since 1974 as a result of the steady increase in the productive population ratio from year to year, which moved from 50% in 1974 to 66.6% in 2014. In light of this, these two variables do not appear to be reasonably linked, as confirmed through an estimation of the Pearson correlation coefficient, which did not exceed 5%.

Figure 6: Evolution of Gross Fixed Capital Formation in Morocco (% of total GDP)



Source: The World Bank, "World Bank Open Data - Gross fixed capital formation (% of GDP)" accessed on 202018/11/, at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

Figure 7: Economic Growth Rate and Productive Population Growth Rate in Morocco

Source: The World Bank, "World Bank Open Data - Gross fixed capital formation (% of GDP)" accessed on 2020/11/, at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

Opening the Demographic Window: Rising Unemployment Among Educated Youth

Unlike the situation in most Southeast Asian countries, the opening of the demographic window in Morocco coincided with high pressure in the labor market. It is true that the unemployment rate stabilized in the last ten years (at approximately 10%) however the phenomenon became chronic and took on new worrying forms.

Reports issued by Morocco's official census committee (The High Commission for Planning) demonstrate that jobs created by the Moroccan economy are not enough to account for the huge numbers of young people entering the labor market every year. By the numbers, the national economy produces between 100,000 and 120,000 new jobs annually, a number much smaller than the demand for new jobs, which is estimated at 180,000. As such, according to official data, the number of unemployed in Morocco exceeds 1 million people, but this number does not reflect the whole picture. In addition to the seasonal nature of employment in some vital sectors such as agriculture and tourism services, the majority of job opportunities do not guarantee a decent standard of living, as they

may be either unpaid (those assisting their families, for example) or offer an unstable employment status. The World Bank Report confirmed this, noting that unpaid workers exceeded 20% and the number of employees at risk reached approximately 50% of total workers.

Unemployment in Morocco differs from that of wealthy countries according to four basic features: youthfulness, chronicity, urbanization, and a high educational level among the unemployed. First, it is primarily youth that is affected by unemployment in Morocco; approximately 2 out of 3 unemployed persons are between ages 15 and 29. Second, unemployment in Morocco has persisted over a long period of time; a study carried out by the government in 2014 concluded that more than two-thirds of unemployed persons suffer from long-term unemployment (12 months or more).⁽³⁰⁾ Thirdly, the vast majority of unemployed people live in urban centers (4 out of 5). Therefore, according to official statistics, the unemployment rate in the urban center reached 14.3% as compared with 4.3% in the rural center.⁽³¹⁾ Fourth, unemployment remains most widespread among educated classes, especially those who have earned college degrees. While the unemployment rate is no

30 High Commission for Planning, *Report on the Labor Market*, Kingdom of Morocco. Rabat, 2016. [in Arabic].

31 Ibid.

more than 3.8% among non-degree holders, it is 22.7% among those with professional diplomas and 27.3% for university graduates.⁽³²⁾

There is no doubt that the opening of the demographic window in Morocco since 2003 did not contribute to improving various socioeconomic indices as hoped. The reason primarily goes back to the lack of valuation of human capital through effective policies in the education and employment sectors. Despite increased government spending on education (approximately 6% of GDP and 20% of total government expenditure per year for the past 20 years) and the magnitude of reform programs, the sector suffers from major structural deficiencies that render it incapable of meeting national economic demands through the creation of a skilled and productive labor force, especially in high-yielding activities. For every 100 children entering school, only 10 of them will graduate from high school. The contribution of most actors in the sector has fallen dramatically, which denotes a lack of responsibility and weak governance.

In the employment sector, public policies that the state followed since its independence revealed their limitations. For one, governments since independence lacked a clear and focused vision for the employment issue in Morocco as it relates to the educational sector. Often, they would resort to circumstantial approaches in the form of limited-time incentives of a technical nature (contractor programs, integration programs, certification programs, self-contractor programs, etc.) in order to address a structural phenomenon. In any case, despite their high cost, the shortcomings of these measures were that they were assembled to attract media attention and restore social order. It must also be acknowledged that public employment policies suffer due to weak governance and poor coordination with policies across other sectors (education, industry, services, agriculture, etc.), which leads to the squandering of financial resources for development.

Unemployment primarily affected educated Moroccan youth residing in urban centers, which contributes to the emergence of a new generation of highly-frustrated and less ambitious and less enthusiastic citizens. These young people, whose hopes had been narrowed for many years, become susceptible to depression and hatred in a society where they are

not given the appreciation they deserved. Likewise, confidence in the political class, with whom young people lay responsibility for the problems, declines. This reality manifested in one of the most prominent peaceful protest movements and repeated class sit-ins that Morocco has seen in the last several years. What is more, it was observed that the greater the unemployment and marginalization of educated youth, the more that social order was undermined by a smooth and gradual openness toward democracy.

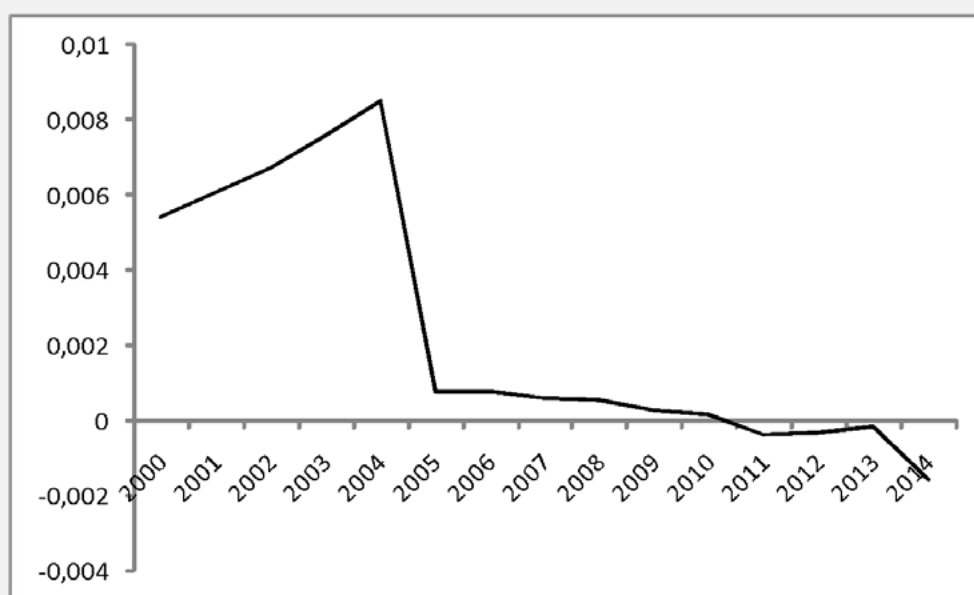
The Opening of the Demographic Window: Growing Negative Migration

In addition to the outbreak of unemployment among educated youth, the opening of the demographic window in Morocco was marked by the exacerbation of what could be called “negative migration”—in both internal and external forms (rural migration and informal migration) — that is, migration with disastrous socioeconomic consequences.

As noted above, the phenomenon of rural migration developed noticeably since the turn of the millennium. As Figure 8 demonstrates, the population of rural areas decreased rapidly beginning in 2005, during the first 2 years of the opening of the demographic window. The year 2011 was a pivotal point in the history of demographic growth in rural areas of Morocco, where the annual population growth was recorded at a negative rate for the first time in the history of the kingdom.

Based on this data, it can be said that the opening of the demographic window in Morocco led to a gradual and voluntary exodus of the population from rural areas toward urban centers. A major result of this evacuation was that rural areas were prevented from fully benefiting from their labor force since the majority of migrants were young people.

Parallel to this situation—the evacuation of a significant portion of the population from rural areas—the rate of urban growth sped up as a result of incoming rural migration, in addition to its naturally increasing growth. In exchange, reconstruction policies were unable to keep pace with growth in the absence of a clear vision for urban management that accounted for social, cultural, engineering, security, and economic aspects.

Figure 8: Rural Population Growth Rate in Morocco

Source: Haut-Commissariat au Plan, "Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2004 et 2014", accessed on 2020/18/11/, at: <https://www.hcp.ma>

In most cases, urban growth in Morocco takes a sprawling form, making it difficult for responsible entities to manage. For one, the margins of many large urban centers transformed into informal settlements of tin houses that lacked the crucial conditions needed to live decently. In an effort to put an end to these slums, the government resorted to promoting what was called “economic housing”. These buildings did not meet architectural standards and were in no way compatible with the needs of most of the families who had been residing in the tin houses. Thus, these areas were converted from substandard horizontal housing into vertical housing that was no less inadequate. Otherwise, most small urban centers transformed into semi-rural areas, where people coexisted with animals and order with chaos. Likewise, the local architectural pattern was distorted and the informal settlements spread in a frightening manner. Moreover, rural migration contributed to a rise in population density in ancient cities, leading to their suffocation, infrastructural frailty, and the deterioration of economic conditions, as traditional crafts faded and a part of cultural heritage disappeared.

On another level, rural migration increased pressure on government spending toward urban development

in light of the increasing demand for electricity and social services in cities (infrastructure, housing, potable water, transportation, education, etc). However, the economic return for this spending remains very weak given the removal of the local tax. The majority of economic activity carried out by people displaced to cities was unorganized (road side businesses, travelling salesmen, gatekeepers, shoe-shining, etc) and therefore not subject to taxation, although these individuals still benefit, at least in part, from public services offered by urban associations.

In addition, the “ruralization” of cities contributed to an organized destabilization of the values and behavior of Moroccan society. Besides disappearing inter-generational cooperation and an increasing rate of domestic violence and tension in familial relationships, youth became more vulnerable, leading them to become more engaged in various forms of rioting and violence. This was evidenced by the growing phenomenon of aggressive behavior in public places, such as markets, schools, and hospitals. Additionally, a small group of these young people has become exposed to various destructive influences, such as delinquency and radicalization.

Informal emigration has also become increasingly pervasive since the demographic window first appeared to be opening. It persists in spite of the high costs of migration due to tightened border controls in Morocco and Europe. On this basis, it might be said that the demographic factor is the primary force behind this type of migration in light of the government's inability to cultivate suitable economic circumstances to benefit from the "demographic gift," particularly investment in human capital. With the slow pace of economic growth vis-à-vis labor force growth and the difficulty of youth integration in the labor market, some people found their way to informal immigration in search of better living conditions, alienating themselves in order to escape societal pressures. Additional factors contributed to the growth of this phenomenon, most significantly,

geographic proximity to Europe, young people's fascination with European culture, and the spread of illegal immigration networks.

Tragic and unfortunate results have emerged from this phenomenon. Many immigrants have drowned in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean in extremely harsh circumstances. Furthermore, migrants are exposed to deception, theft, and various forms of persecution and the human trafficking mafia's seizure of their passports. Other unfortunate impacts include the rise in discriminatory practices against informal immigrants and forced labor, devoid of even the lowest conditions of labor rights protected by national and international law, as well as the psychological state endured by those who suffer security pursuits and forced deportation.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the third millennium, Morocco has witnessed deep demographic changes that provided a view of the demographic window for the first time in its history. The proportion of the working population grew rapidly from 48% in the early 1970s to 67% by 2015. Likewise, the dependency ratio dropped quickly, moving from 104.74 to 50.13% over the same period. Based on a UN approximation, it can be said that Morocco theoretically entered the stage of the demographic gift in 2003, the year in which the dependency ratio reached 60%.

Recent theoretical studies and the experiences of some emerging countries demonstrate that this exceptional phenomenon is a favorable opportunity for economic take-off. It represents an ambitious development project that, if utilized properly, can lead to massive savings, thereby increasing the pace of investment and accelerating growth with the potential to create new jobs, decrease the unemployment rate, and reduce negative migration.

In the case of Morocco, it is clear that this opportunity for development did not come with any real gains. Rather, it transformed into a curse. In addition to the lack of improvement among macroeconomic indices, some sensitive social indices recorded negative results. In particular, the unemployment rate among

educated youth experienced a worrisome rise and negative migration, both domestically and abroad, reached alarming numbers.

Building on that, it can be said that Morocco missed the opportunity to profit from its first demographic gift because the phase preceding the opening of the demographic window (the 1980s and 1990s) was not well-managed through investment in human capital. This mismanagement turned the opportunity into a heavy socioeconomic burden intensified by a completely inadequate development model. This situation created an incubation environment for various forms of popular protest.

Indeed, the greatest challenge facing Morocco is the battle of integrating youth into working life by considering them an important human resource and immunizing them against various forms of delinquency. In order to achieve this goal, the country should consolidate effective and coordinated development programs that can correct the setback in keeping pace with the demographic transition process and at the same time revive hope among young people regardless of concerns around macroeconomic balances. At any rate, society, including the political class, is required to take care of its youth, not the other way around.

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