



للدراستات المستقبلية

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Special Issue on

“The Futures and Repercussions of Demographic Transformations in the Arab World”

The demographic question, in the broad sense, is at the heart of many key modern social issues: resources, environment, conflict, migration, urbanization, development, education, employment, retirement, health, democratization, etc.

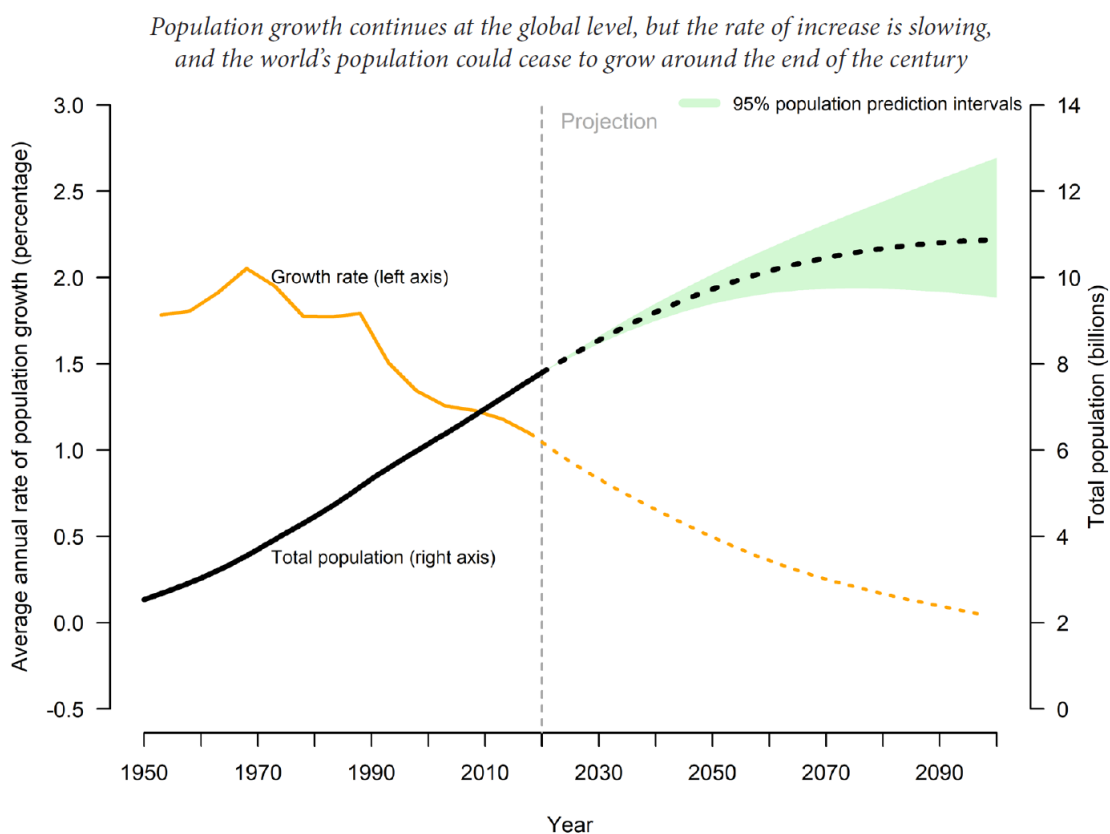
The question gains even more urgency given the huge demographic changes that the world has witnessed in the last few decades and which are likely to continue for the foreseeable future. In 1800 the total human population was approximately 954 million people, in 1900 1.612 billion and in 1950 2.519 billion. But the last seventy years have seen a major shift: in mid-2019 the population stood at 7.7 billion, one billion more than in 2007 and two billion more than 1994¹. The growth rate reached its peak within the 1965-1970 period, when it was rising by 2.1% per year before falling by a

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* (New York: United Nations, 2019), p. 5.

half to less than 1.1% per year between 2015–2020. This slowdown is expected to continue until the end of this century².

According to the average projection UN estimates assume a fall in fertility in countries in which large families are still predominant, a small rise in fertility in those countries in which women typically have less than two surviving children, and a continuing decline in deaths in all age groups³. These projections conclude that the global population will stand at 8.5–8.6 billion in 2030, 9.4–10.1 billion in 2050 and 9.4–12.7 billion in 2100⁴.

Figure 1. Population size and annual growth rate for the world: estimates, 1950–2020, and medium-variant projection with 95 per cent prediction intervals, 2020–2100.



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights* (New York: United Nations, 2019), p. 5.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

This global demographic scene disguises major variations between two distinct categories of country: the old powers on the one hand and younger countries on the other. The latter category includes the Arab countries, which have begun to see major demographic changes in recent decades. Having long been distinguished from the rest of the world (except sub-Saharan Africa) by one of the highest growth and fertility rates globally, these countries are now entering – at different times and speeds – the “demographic shift” stage, characterized by control and limitation of both deaths and fertility.

Since the mid-20th century, the death rate has been in general decline across all Arab societies. The average life expectancy has risen dramatically in the last 40-50 years, and so has fertility, falling from some 7.5 children per woman to around 3 and approaching, in many countries, the population replacement rate (2.1 children/woman)⁵. Some countries, such as Tunisia, Lebanon and the UAE, have even fallen beneath the population replacement rate. Other Arab countries are likely to join the list of low-fertility countries in future.

Many have connected these developments in Arab countries with the modernization of education, reproductive health and marriage and the shrinking gap between the sexes, believing that they are hastening political transformations in these countries (the fall of authoritarian regimes and the establishment of democracy)⁶. Others contend, without suggesting a mechanistic relationship between demographic changes and political results, that demographic makeup is a precondition or driver of political change without being entirely determinative of it⁷.

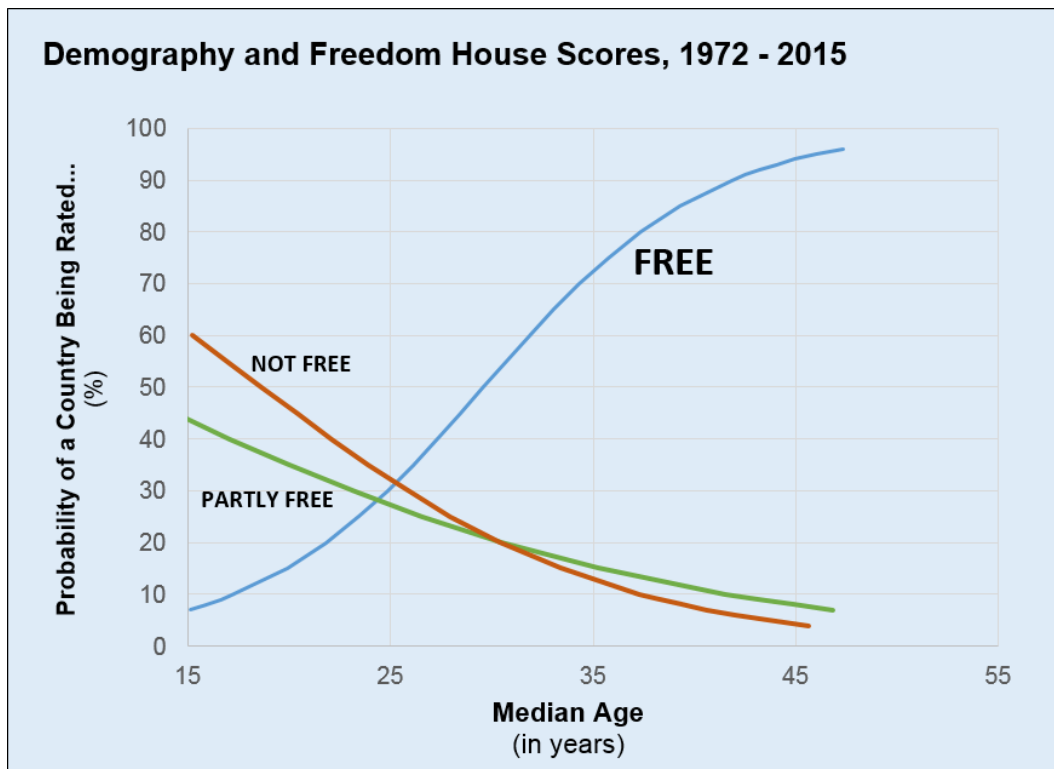
⁵ Youssef Courbage, “Hal Tu’addi ath-Thawra ad-Dimughrafiyya ila Thawra Dimuqratiyya? Namudhajan ash-Sharq al-Awsat wa-Shamal Afriqiya”, *Umrān* 3 (Winter 2013), pp. 9-10.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 21.

⁷ David Reher & Miguel Requena, “Un profil démographique du monde arabe,” *Idées* (Été 2011), p. 28. Youssef Courbage makes the same point in: Youssef Courbage, “Où en est la transition démographique dans le monde

This view is supported by many of the contemporary Arab uprisings (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt). The key point in these treatments is the role of the so-called “youth bulge” in these political developments and the growth of demand for political change.⁸ Some studies suggest that the median age is the most important index of political development in a given country, with the state in which the median age is less than 25.5 has only limited opportunities to become a liberal democracy:⁹

Figure 2. Demographic Transformations and Opportunities for Democratization.



Source: Richard Cincotta, “8 Rules of Political Demography That Help Forecast Tomorrow’s World”, *New Security Beat*, 21 June 2017, accessed on 11/10/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/347aF1d>

arabe?,” iReMMO - Analyses (s.d.), accessed on 9/4/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/2ISJHcR>), where he says that “demographic transition was the harbinger of democratic transition”.

⁸ Cf. Sohail Inayatullah, “Youth Bulge: Demographic Dividend, Time Bomb, and other Futures,” *Journal of Futures Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2016), pp. 21–34.

⁹ Richard Cincotta, “8 Rules of Political Demography That Help Forecast Tomorrow’s World,” *New Security Beat* (21 June 2017), accessed on 11/10/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/347aF1d>. Note that the relationship is more ambiguous in smaller countries (those with a population of less than 5 million).

These developments have been among the underlying reasons for the contemporary Arab revolutions, alongside changes to the traditional model of the family, which have shaken and continue to shake the foundations of authoritarian rule (based on a patriarchal model of society¹⁰). Hence the importance of looking at these demographic developments and predicting their future prospects for Arab countries.

Historically, discussions on demographic change focused on resource scarcity and sustainability and the planet's capacity to feed humanity in the 21st century. This framing began to change at the beginning of the new millennium. Although there are still a billion people unable to find enough food to eat, famine no longer regulates demographics as Malthus predicted in the 18th century. It seems plausible today that if food were well distributed globally, world agricultural production could provide a balanced diet of 3000 calories daily to every individual in the world. Although in order to feed the total projected population in 2050, crop yields will have to increase 1.85 times, the world will still be capable of doing so by using non-intensive agriculture, limiting waste, increasing the area under cultivation, increasing technological innovation and growing productivity¹¹.

The same applies to water. Although droughts are real tragedies today, they are also a problem which it is possible to solve without radical changes to lifestyle. Even if continuous demographic growth represents a growing pressure on water resources, humanity's water will not "run out". Water shortages are a matter of distribution, not of scarcity. Water is available worldwide and is renewable, but is badly distributed and often wasted, particularly aquifer supplies. The water problems facing many Arab countries, increasingly confronted by so-called "water stress"

¹⁰ See: Abdelkebir Khatibi, *al-Katib wa-Dhalluhu* (Ikhtilaf, 2008); Hisham Shirabi, *an-Naqd al-Hadari li'l-Mujtama' al-'Arabi fi Nihayat al-Qarn al-'Ashrin* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1990); Abdullah Hammoudi, *ash-Shaykh wa'l-Murid: an-Nasaq ath-Thaqafi li's-Sulta fi'l-Mujtama'at al-'Arabiyya al-Haditha* (Casablanca: Toubkal, 2000).

¹¹ Cf. Jonathan A. Foley et al., "Solutions for a Cultivated Planet", *Nature*, vol. 478 (2011), pp. 337–342.

(limited access to unpolluted water meeting the needs of agriculture and daily life) need easily applicable solutions to reduce consumption. For example, water waste resulting from leaks in these countries – at a rate of at least 40% – is a major problem which can be easily solved by drip irrigation, which is water-efficient and leads to increased productivity. Desalination is also growing steadily cheaper and is now affordable for all coastal countries.

Moreover, one of the thorniest problems caused by demographic transformations for Arab countries is the tide of young people they bring into the labor market, contributing – alongside national and international inequalities in development – to ever-greater tension in domestic economic, social and political affairs, and to the growing popularity of international migration as an effective means of social mobility and reducing the pressure of domestic crisis¹². These demographic conditions, characterized by an ever younger population, will increase the pressure on Arab labor markets restricted by rentierism and defective development. They will inevitably bring with them serious political conflict that may lead to truly explosive circumstances in the absence of political and institutional models capable of creating sustainable solutions to the problems of development.

There is thus an urgent need today to look through the lens of future science at many of these issues in Arab countries in order to analyze their likely effects for these countries, particularly as regards the following themes:

- **Demographic projections for Arab countries in 2030, 2050 and 2100.**
- **The demographic window/the demographic gift and future opportunities for development.**

¹² At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 260 million people had migrated internationally – three times the figure in 1975 and twice the figure at the end of the 20th century.

- Demographic transformations and prospects for Arab labor markets.
- Demographic transformations, urbanization and poverty.
- Demographic transformations and the problem of resources and sustainable development.
- Demographic and social changes in the Arab World.
- Demographic transformations and regional and international migration.

Submission guidelines

- *Istishraf* welcomes research proposals on "The Futures and Repercussions of Demographic Transformations in the Arab World", which offer new themes or add research value or novel conclusions, according to the ACRPS's specifications for research proposals.
- Papers will be subject to peer review via a specialized academic committee.
- Research papers should be anywhere between 6,000 to 8,000 words.
- Papers should be sent in Arabic or in English, in which case they will be translated once approved.
- Proposals should be submitted by **April 30, 2020** at the latest.
- Proposals should be sent to istishraf@dohainstitute.org.

N.B. *Istishraf* also accepts reviews of recently published books relevant to the topic. Book reviews should be between 1000 and 3000 words.