Population Transitions, Youth Unemployment, Postponement of Marriage and Violence in Algeria

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Introduction

Algeria cannot be discussed without mentioning the terrorism that has afflicted it for the past decade. Previous studies of political violence, particularly terrorism, underemphasise the importance of demographic factors. In his review of research on the consequences of population growth, Geoffrey McNicoll notes a general neglect of demographic factors in social science fields that seek to explain social and economic change. Careful studies on the role that population growth plays in political destabilisation in Africa are even rarer due in large part to a lack of reliable data. Likewise, most studies of Algeria’s recent political history acknowledge the role of population growth, but many explanations of the country’s civil strife primarily focus on political variables and actors. Using a combination of aggregate demographic and economic data and individual-level survey data, this essay seeks to address these gaps by examining the impact of demographics on Algeria’s economy and society and how the resulting changes are translated at various levels of the social system, including the level of individual behaviour, into conditions that contribute to violence.

This research suggests that population growth has created large generational cohorts, sometimes called ‘youth bulges’, that the Algerian labour and matrimonial markets have been unable to absorb. Faced with these socio-economic barriers, these cohorts become increasingly disaffected and socially alienated, making them vulnerable to recruitment by political actors who treat them as a ‘reserve army’ in their strategic acts of political terrorism. While demographic factors clearly are associated with political violence, attributing terrorism to these causes alone overlooks other important variables, such as the actors and resources involved in the co-ordination of arms, funds, strategies, information and communications, none of which are directly accessible to the masses of excluded youth who often act as terrorism’s foot soldiers. For example, the mechanisms by which internal...
and external actors successfully organise networks of young Algerians to carry out large-scale operations are not well understood and are beyond the scope of this essay. A full explanation of Algeria's civil strife is complex and involves many such unknown variables.

While this essay focuses on the relationship between demographic change and conditions for violence, it does not attempt to simplify or overstate it. Population growth and its consequences make up a partial explanation in a larger equation with many unknowns. Other variables notwithstanding, demographic change increasingly has been associated with a higher risk of civil instability and armed conflict and cannot be ignored as an important factor in the Algerian case.

The analysis that follows draws on the framework that Geoffrey McNicoll provides for examining the consequences of population growth for social and economic institutions and individual behaviour, as well as the reciprocal effect that those changes have on subsequent population growth. In the Algerian case, for example, youth riots preceded and contributed, in part, to the intervention of international financial institutions in the economy. The subsequent structural adjustment programme limited youth employment opportunities, contributing to changes in marriage rates and family structures that will, in turn, affect population growth. This process illustrates the endogenous nature of the relationships McNicoll identifies between population growth and institutional and behavioural change.

First, the essay begins with a brief summary of Algeria's population growth patterns from 1900 to 1995. Second, the McNicoll framework is discussed and modified for the Algerian case. Third, the essay analyses the importance of the 15–24 age group, identifying two moments of strong growth associated with a high unemployment rate: 1954 and 1991. The data draw attention to how the economic exclusion of approximately one million young people in 1954 furnished combatants for Algeria's revolution and how the alienation of today's youth can similarly furnish the troops for the ongoing terrorist campaign. The fourth section of the essay examines the interaction of economic policies and social institutions - namely, structural adjustment policies and household and family structures - with the youth cohort.

Finally, using data from the 1991 survey, 'Enquête Nationale sur la Jeunesse Algérienne', designed and carried out by the author and others under the auspices of the National Center of Studies and Analysis for Planning (CENEAP), the essay tests the extent to which system level changes are reflected in individual behaviour, which has consequences for future population growth. Despite structural barriers and a sense of social alienation, the survey results suggest that while some youth are attracted to the option of achieving political change through violence, they do not support violence on a large scale. The essay concludes with a discussion of the prospects for
The future of Algeria’s young people, and ways the government can improve those prospects by working to prevent conflict through the promotion of alternatives to violence to excluded youth within a larger framework of development.

**The Effects of Population Growth: An Analytical Framework**

In recent years, several world regions have experienced remarkable declines in population growth. In the Maghrib, the decline was as rapid as it was unexpected. Explanations for the transitions that have occurred in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia cannot be reduced to demographic factors alone. None of these countries achieved more favourable levels of fertility and growth through deliberate policies or gradual, peaceful processes of socio-economic development. Most societies change as a result of painful political and economic constraints, not the reasoned choices of governments or individuals. As Maurice Godelier writes, ‘Transition designates the moment in which society meets external and/or internal difficulties in reproducing the economic and social system on which it is founded, and is almost forced to reorganise itself on the basis of another system’. Studies in Bangladesh and Latin America suggest that population transitions in developing countries are not accompanied necessarily by economic and social progress, but rather come with impoverishment of the population. In fact, falling birth rates brought on by waves of unemployment and falling living standards have been described as ‘poverty Malthusianism’.

In his evaluation of the consequences of such rapid population growth, Geoffrey McNicoll elaborates a model of the cyclical process of societal change brought about by demographic transitions whereby, family, economic and political systems are transformed by the changes in family relationships, entry into the labour market and other sub-systems that experience the initial, proximate effects of population growth. Subsequently, and quite logically, the new economic and political systems alter individual reproductive choices that are themselves the engines of demographic change. It is as if high population growth itself produces the mechanisms that ultimately curb it. This essay seeks to illuminate how these multiple transformations that accompany reproductive behaviour are operating in Algeria. The purpose is not, of course, to demonstrate the internal, theoretical validity of the McNicoll framework, a task that the author has fulfilled admirably. Rather, a primary objective is to assess the extent to which the McNicoll model applies to the case of the Maghrib. Indeed, this essay concurs with McNicoll that the marriage rate, youth employment and household economics in Algeria should be studied in relation to their impact on population growth, not only as consequences of it.

In the Maghrib, population growth has led to increasingly large and numerous generational cohorts reaching the ages of work, marriage and household formation, dramatically altering these social institutions. These transformed
structures exert new and formidable pressure on the labour market, further modifying not only the family and other sub-systems, but also national-level economic and, perhaps, political arrangements. In particular, the traditional norms of family and quasi-universal and precocious marriage that characterised Maghribi society until recently are in evident decline, foretelling important changes at the level of individual behaviour. This behaviour, as it gradually becomes aggregated and generalised to the population as a whole, reduces the population growth that bore it, thereby completing the circle. However, in Algeria and elsewhere, population growth did not evolve in isolation.

Although McNicoll's framework includes the political system as an endogenous consequence of and factor in population growth, it does not consider the potential independent, exogenous effect that political and economic interventions have in catalysing and exacerbating the consequences of demographic change. Specifically, structural adjustment programmes implemented in Algeria and other countries through agreements with international financial institutions magnify the difficulties of daily survival and hasten the diffusion of the alternative family model to the culture as a whole. In addition to structural adjustment, this cultural diffusion, population policies and the Malthusian pressures of poverty must be taken into account not only as consequences or results of population growth, but also as variables that intervene directly at various points in the cycle. Figure 1 presents a modified version of the McNicoll model that includes these factors as additional, intervening variables. The goal is to broaden that framework to describe more effectively certain mechanisms of demographic transition in Algeria, which are subsequently involved in other transitions as well: economic (toward liberalisation and adjustment), political (toward a multi-party system) and socio-cultural (toward alternative family and matrimonial models). The foregoing model represents a vast programme of study for the future, not the immediate objective of this essay, which concentrates on the following principal relationships in the model: population growth, the size of the population of 15–24-year-olds, the postponement of marriage age, the evolution of employment opportunities for youth as well as household structure, and the role of structural adjustment. More importantly, the essay tests the extent to which these aggregate phenomena are translated at the level of culture, or the individual attitudes and behaviours that are indicators of the magnitude of the 'cultural diffusion' of demographic change, with important consequences for violence.

Population Growth in Algeria and the Maghrib

In most developing countries, natural population growth rates were very weak at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Algeria, high birth rates were
offset by similarly high mortality rates of 35–40 per thousand people, producing an annual natural population growth rate – or rate of natural increase (RNI) – of only 0.5 per cent. Algeria’s birth and mortality rates over the past century are depicted in Figure 2 together with the RNI, which is obtained by subtracting the gross mortality rate from the gross birth rate.

After the end of the First World War, mortality began to decline, interrupted only in 1945 when the French army shot demonstrators, killing thousands of Algerians in a single day. Birth rates began to rise steadily after the First World War, peaking at 50 per thousand in 1970, when the Algerian RNI reached 3.25 per cent compared to 3 per cent in Morocco and 2.54 per cent in Tunisia. While Morocco and Algeria had very similar birth and mortality rates of 48.7 and 48.6 and 16.2 and 16.4 per thousand, respectively, Tunisia distinguished itself sharply from its neighbours with lower birth and mortality rates of 39 and 13.5 per thousand. After 1970, regional birth rates declined, reaching a level of 16 per thousand in Algeria around 1995. Regional differences have almost faded, with natural growth rates of between 1.8 (Tunisia) and 2 per cent (Algeria and Morocco), which are similar to the average for the developing world.

If Algeria maintains the strongest regional growth, it is not because of its birth rate, which is comparable to its neighbours. Fertility has dropped from 5.4 to 4.4 per cent, contraceptive practice rose from 35 to 52 per cent
between 1987 and 1992, and the average marriage age for women had increased to 24 in 1992. It is its low mortality rate that has contributed to Algeria's population growth. The 1995 mortality rate of 5.42 per thousand was the lowest in the Maghrib, compared to 6.1 per thousand in Tunisia and 7.14 per thousand in Morocco. Consequently, Algeria's RNI began to decline only in 1980, after 20 years at approximately 3 per cent per year – one of the most rapid growth rates in the world – almost doubling the population in that time. Algeria's RNI will now continue to decline, primarily as a result of declining birth rates.

Over a 40-year period, then, the Algerian and Moroccan populations have almost tripled and the Tunisian population has more than doubled. Around 1950, Algeria’s estimated population was approximately 8.8 million. By 1990, the United Nations Population Division estimates were 24.9 million in Algeria, 24 million in Morocco and 8 million in Tunisia. In contrast, most European populations doubled over periods of as long as 100 years.

When a population doubles in 20 years – a rate almost unknown in human history prior to this century – society is challenged to increase the number of schools, hospitals, jobs and other resources by at least the same proportion. Even countries in which strong population growth is paired with an equivalent rate of economic growth find this to be an insurmountable problem.
Algeria’s Growing Population of 15–24-Year-Olds

Algeria’s sustained growth has obvious consequences for the population’s age structure, with particularly large increases in the proportion of 15–24-year-olds. Figure 3 represents the trends of three indices for the 1948–2010 period: the ratios of the 15–24 cohort to the total population, the working age population (15–64), and population nearing retirement age (55–64). Data through to 1987 were derived from censuses, while data for 2000 and 2010 come from the forecasts of the United Nations Population Division.  

Between 1948 and 2000, 15–24-year-olds represented approximately 20 per cent of the total population. Notable are the rise between 1948 and 1954 and the decline between 1954 and 1966. Successive generations formed the bulk of combatants in the Algerian revolution when they were 15–24 years old, and, notwithstanding the questionable quality of the censuses of 1948 and 1954, it can be seen that this age group sustained a heavy price in human lives during the 1954–66 period. Between 1950 and 1990, the number of 15–24-year-olds increased from 1.63 to 5.13 million, multiplying 3.14 times while the overall population multiplied 2.85 times. This ratio is higher than Morocco and Tunisia, which had relative increases of 2.91/2.68 and 2.61/2.31, respectively.

**FIGURE 3**
This age group is particularly vulnerable and potentially explosive. These individuals are generally well-educated but not all are successful in entering the labour market or integrating into ordinary patterns of social life through marriage. In most countries facing population crises, these young people challenge in several ways a social order that cannot offer them a position that corresponds to their expectations. Constituting approximately 20 per cent of the total population, this cohort receives scant attention from society. Yet demographic forecasts show that, in all three countries, this age group will continue to exert unbearable pressure on the labour market until approximately 2010, when a slump is likely to occur. Out of 1.26 million unemployed Algerians in 1991, 826,957, or 65 per cent, were less than 25 years old. The cohort made up as much as 40 per cent of the workforce in 1987 and now comprises about 35 per cent of the working age population.

The pressures that 15–24-year-olds exert on the labour market can be illustrated by comparing them to the population of 55–64-year-olds. Indeed, these two groups may represent the sub-populations most concerned with entry into and exit from economic activity. The ratio displays very high and increasing levels between 1948 and 2000, varying from 4 to 5.37, with a brief decrease following 1954–62, reaching a low point of 3.38 in 1966. This means that for every Algerian eligible for retirement in 2000, more than five young people were available, hypothetically, to fill his or her position. In 1990, regional variation in this cohort was 4.7 in Algeria, 4.3 in Morocco and 3.8 in Tunisia. Year 2000 estimates increased to 5.37, 4.52 and 4.13 to one, respectively. Only around 2010 will these ratios decline to forecasted rates of 3.52, 3.16 and 2.96. In comparison, Canada’s 1991 ratio was only 1.5.

These data should give food for thought to planners and decision-makers. The lack of resources and planning has precluded the peaceful integration of young people into society. Numerous Western societies have experienced this phenomenon, frequently described as a ‘baby boom’. Western scholars have carefully documented the impact of this process and established its contribution to social change. When cohorts of young people produced by the ‘baby boom’ reach adulthood, a shortage of marriageable women develops owing to the fact that men generally marry younger women. Algeria’s birth rate peaked in 1970, but the absolute number of births continued to increase until 1985. After 1985, the number of births began to decrease. Consequently, not all young men born in 1985 were able to find a wife who was born in 1990, or approximately five years younger than him – the average age difference between spouses in Algeria. In 2005, the number of males aged 20–24 will be 1.78 million while the number of females aged 15–19 will be 1.76 million. In 2010, there will be 1.77 million males aged 25–29 and 1.76 females aged 20–24. The employment crisis occurred before the imbalance of the matrimonial market, thereby accelerating the postponement of the
marriage age. While an imbalance in Algeria’s matrimonial market resulting from past population growth has yet to occur, existing forecasts suggest that it will.

The burden of these young people and their frustrations compels society to change when the existing system cannot integrate them, affecting its principal institutions: the family and the economic, political and cultural sub-systems. These youth are at once the product of sustained past population growth, its main victims and the driving force of social and institutional change.

Structural Adjustment

Compounding the problem of the large youth cohort are the consequences of foreign debt. Foreign debt affects the three Maghribi countries to varying degrees, but in all three cases the problem is severe. According to World Bank indicators, for example, Algeria’s total foreign debt grew from US $940m in 1970 to US $32.6bn in 1995. Such indebtedness develops into a vicious cycle whereby debt reimbursement replaces citizen well being as the top government priority. Unable to honour their financial commitments, governments borrow again to repay the debt, leading to the adoption of agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank conditioned on the implementation of a structural adjustment programme (SAP). In Morocco and Tunisia, youth riots associated with this process occurred in 1981 and 1984 respectively. Masses of youth attacked symbols of wealth and authority during these disruptions, which have become known as ‘hunger riots’ (émeutes de la faim) or ‘IMF riots’ (émeutes du FMI).

In contrast to Morocco and Tunisia, large-scale riots erupted in Algeria prior to its adoption of agreements with the IMF and the World Bank. As Kada Akaceni describes elsewhere in this volume, in Algeria, the shift from state-led development toward structural adjustment began in 1986 when the fall in oil prices meant that oil revenues could no longer conceal its own debt crisis. That year, Algeria’s debt service-to-export ratio increased from approximately 30–35 to 60–70 per cent, leaving it no choice but to accept further indebtedness to cover the costs of food imports, pharmaceutical goods and maintaining a functioning economic apparatus. By 1988, Algeria’s debt service had reached 87 per cent of export revenues – an unprecedented level according to some scholars. Debt repayment had virtually exhausted resources that year, and imports declined dramatically. This was accompanied by a rise in the cost of living and worsening unemployment, leading to the youth riots. The 1988 riots were the primary impetus for major political and economic change in Algeria, including economic ‘pseudo-liberalisation’ and the adoption of a multi-party system that ended more than 30 years of domination by the Front de la Libération Nationale (FLN).
It was not until 1991 that Algeria adopted the full series of measures contained in SAPs typical of the region and other developing countries. After the 1992 liberalisation of staple goods prices, official statistics indicated that 14 million Algerians, or almost half of the total population, needed social aid. At that moment, 4 million Algerians had no income at all. Social inequalities had reached a critical threshold. Ten per cent of the population owned 30 per cent of GDP, while 40 per cent consumed only 6 per cent of it, marking the marginalisation of a significant portion of Algerian society.

Structural adjustment has had a number of effects, including the impoverishment of the most vulnerable part of the population. In 1998, CENEAP conducted a survey on the effects of the structural adjustment programme on households in Algeria. According to the authors, unemployed respondents who had previously held a job gave the following reasons for their unemployment: firm cutbacks (11.04 per cent), termination (10.09 per cent), worksite closing (11.36 per cent), unit closing (10.09 per cent), and other reasons (58.58 per cent). The authors concluded that the bulk of job losses were a consequence of the effects of the structural adjustment programme. In the past four years, 400,000 jobs have been lost, not to mention the mass of young people awaiting their first position.

Until about 1986, petroleum revenues disguised underlying preconditions for high unemployment and gave many people the illusion that the Algerian state would be able to offer positions to almost all employment seekers. Work was a right in people’s minds, along with housing, cafeterias in the workplace and worker transportation. The employment crisis has been a painful process that has left youth distraught by unfulfilled expectations.

**Household Structure and Family Systems**

Systematic demographic and economic changes have had a dramatic effect on Algerian households and families. The burgeoning youth population and related problems of unemployment, postponement of the marriage age and economic inequality described earlier have prevented young people from establishing their own households when they reach the socially accepted age to do so. Families support the majority of employment seekers (67.9 per cent), while the others manage somehow to support themselves. This forced cohabitation of generations has created extreme dependence, a potentially explosive source of tension and conflict. Young people no longer share the same historical references or political attitudes with their parents.

Compared to its neighbours, Algeria’s problems are particularly acute. While average household size has decreased in Tunisia and Morocco, it has increased in Algeria. In 1992, Algerian households averaged seven members. In contrast, Tunisian and Moroccan households averaged 5.4 and
5.8 members respectively. The housing crisis in Algeria was so severe in 1992 that an average of 3.18 persons shared a bedroom, compared to 2.93 in Tunisia and 2.0 in Morocco. The differences become somewhat clearer in Figure 4, which compares Algeria and Morocco with respect to the proportion of sons and daughters to other members of the household. In 1992, sons and daughters represented approximately 27 per cent of household members in Morocco compared to 64 per cent in Algeria. Heads of household are a minority in relation to sons and daughters in Algeria (15 per cent), but not in Morocco (33 per cent).

The prospects are especially bleak for young men. Between 1986 and 1992, the proportion of 25–29-year-old men who were both employed and married decreased by almost half, while those who were neither employed nor married doubled. Among 20–24-year-olds, the proportion of employed married men fell by two-thirds, while men who were both unemployed and unmarried were the only group of 20–24-year-olds to increase in size (see Figure 5). These data make painfully clear the triple frustration that young men and, indeed, all youth suffer. They exhibit affective and
sexual frustration due to non-marriage in a conservative society that condemns extra-marital relations, material and financial frustration due to unemployment and their dependence on parents, and political frustration due to their exclusion from the process of decision-making that affects them.

Cultural Diffusion: Youth Attitudes and Opinions in 1991

Algeria’s demographic and household changes should be reflected in individual experiences, behaviour and attitudes. In 1991, the Youth and Sports Ministry entrusted CENEAP to conduct a national survey on Algerian youth, providing a profile of male and female youth between the ages of 15 and 24 at a time when their problems were particularly severe, but prior to concerted state efforts to deter free expression. 1991 was a critical year in Algeria’s history. Only 22 per cent of 15–29-year-olds were employed. The country tumbled into violence, but the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) was still legal and its supporters openly admitted their preferences. The survey was one of the rare data-gathering operations involving both northern and southern Algeria. The Sahara regions are often excluded from surveys due to high costs associated with administration and transportation in areas of low population density. The sample is self-weighted and proportional to the population; 42.56 per cent of the sample was drawn from the central region,
24.2 per cent from the east, 21.7 per cent from the west and 11.49 per cent from the south. In the 1987 census, the actual percentages of Algeria’s total population for each region, respectively, were 36.72, 30.62, 22.84 and 9.82.

The questionnaire covers three major themes: vocational training, employment and leisure, and sports and communications.

The survey confirms the aggregate statistics on the changes in household structure: 93.8 per cent of respondents lived in their parents’ home, and less than 6 per cent had their own housing. Approximately 58 per cent lived in promiscuity, a situation likely to lead to conflict with parents. A third of respondents reported communication problems with their parents; 3.8 per cent did not communicate at all and 16.5 per cent considered themselves in open conflict. Twenty-four per cent of these respondents cited unemployment as the primary cause. In many cases, the unemployed youth were living in families in which the head of the household was also unemployed, increasing their sense of social exclusion.

In many African societies, conflictual relationships between youth and their parents are often resolved by migration of the young. The CENEAP survey suggests that Algerian men share similar aspirations. When asked, ‘What would be the acceptable distance between the family home and the potential workplace?’, the primary response among males was ‘more than 100 kilometres’, while young females preferred to work less than 10 kilometres from home. This response pattern was consistent in all four regions. Fifteen per cent on average were considering migration as a solution, with a variation of between 5 and 35 per cent according to gender, age and area of residence. The average candidate for migration is an educated male living in an urban milieu.

The educational and employment prospects for these potential migrants are poor, further contributing to their social isolation. As Kada Akacem and Abdelbaki Benziane point out in this volume, Algeria’s socialist-era educational and labour training systems are not well adapted to demands for more specialised skills in the growing private sector. This is compounded by declining investment in education as demand increases. Many young people do not have sufficient education or training to compete for the few available jobs. At the time of the survey in 1991, the Algerian educational system was in crisis. In that year alone, approximately 400,000 youth were excluded from the system – 16,000 left prior to completion of the elementary (fondamental) cycle of nine classes, 159,000 left prior to completion of the secondary cycle (including 105,000 who failed the baccalauréat exam), and the system ‘oriented’ 197,000 toward the employment market. The vocational training sector announced its objective of absorbing 100,000 of these youth by 1992. What was to become of the remaining 300,000? It is in 1992 that armed violence broke out and became generalised, with young males being the main participants.
The 1991 survey responses reflect these trends. Of those who had left school, 70 per cent left before completing the level in which they were enrolled, 43 per cent were expelled, 10.7 per cent were withdrawn from school by their parents, and 16.1 per cent left voluntarily. Many survey respondents reported support for the FIS, and some openly affirmed their attraction to violence when asked about their desire for political change.

At the same time, 36.7 per cent of respondents expressed a desire for vocational training, suggesting their preference for entering mainstream society. Available training is not sufficiently linked to the labour market’s needs, however. In most cases, according to available evaluations, equipment is obsolete, admission systems are not transparent and the training is not adapted to local and regional economies. In 1991, the proportion of 15–19-year-olds enrolled in vocational education was approximately 10 per cent, a figure higher than in Tunisia and Morocco but much lower than in Europe. The proportions of this age group in training programmes in other countries for a comparable time period were 4.3 per cent in Morocco (1991), 6 per cent in Tunisia (1990–94), 64 per cent in Germany (1992), 65 per cent in Sweden (1992) and 48 per cent in France (1992). With substantial reform, the vocational education sector could absorb the bulk of 15–19-year-olds ejected from the school system, potentially diverting them from violence and giving them a better chance at successful entry into the labour market.

Given their circumstances, it is not surprising that the 1991 respondents displayed a sense of social alienation. Fifty per cent stated that they lived in a state of psychological stress in answer to questions pertaining to perceptions of their health. Due to a lack of financial resources, most did not practice any sport or leisure activities. Instead, 77 per cent of all respondents spent free time at home; 10 per cent spent time outside (that is, in the street). Only three per cent reported patronising cafés or youth clubs and less than one per cent spent time in libraries. A larger proportion of female respondents spent free time at home (97 per cent) in leisure activities such as sewing, embroidery, watching television and listening to music. For young men, sports came first as a favourite activity (32 per cent), followed by music and television. Only nine per cent of female respondents preferred sports.

Perhaps the most revealing indicator of social disaffection among Algerian youth is their sense of disconnection from other people, both friends and family. In answer to the question ‘In case of a problem, with whom do you primarily confide?’, 33.5 per cent of respondents answered ‘nobody’. Mothers were the most frequently cited confidant (20.5 per cent), followed by friends (18.8 per cent). Given the evidence for rising levels of family conflict, this pattern of sociability is curious. Furthermore, 20 per cent of respondents declared that they had ‘no friends’, 54 per cent reported having ‘a few’ friends and only 26 per cent reported having ‘many’ friends. These results are striking, given that many
studies of young people around the world find that they often confide with their age peers and tend to belong to various types of groups.

**Conclusion**

Demographic transition in the Maghrib is a painful phenomenon. The McNicoll framework has helped to illuminate how it has caused considerable and unexpected changes in the family, labour market, economic and even the political systems, with direct effects on individual attitudes and the entire culture. The findings suggest, however, that Algeria, and perhaps other developing countries, face a rather novel challenge that bears no relationship to what we know about transitions in the Western world. In the latter, transitions evolved over much longer temporal cycles, allowing Western societies to adapt gradually to the demographic, economic and social transformations. It is important, therefore, to incorporate additional factors into a model of the consequences of rapid population growth in countries like Algeria.
Although growth of the Algerian population had largely slowed, the group of 15–24-year-olds will increase from 6.6 million to 7.3 million between 2000 and 2010, according to the forecasts of the United Nations Population Division (see Figure 7). The state cannot continue to ignore this trend if it wants to prevent further violence and instability.

Weakening of the development-oriented modernising state of the 1960s and 1970s as debt repayment became the government’s top priority leaves Algeria’s leaders with greater constraints on their ability to face the formidable challenge of integrating the successive waves of young people who have reached the age of working, forming their own household and fulfilling a quality of life that reflects their potential. This change had been driven by the problem of debt and the conditions imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. Poverty has worsened to the point that some experts have predicted a ‘de-modernisation’: ethnic conflicts, and marginalisation linked to the withdrawal of the state in areas such as health, education and food subsidies. Withdrawal of the Algerian state has facilitated the emergence of pseudo-charitable movements that intervene in natural disasters and other crises, inviting intervention by new political actors. For example, there is an emerging, indirect relationship between development aid, which includes an unprecedented component of interest-bearing loans for military assistance, and the appearance of

FIGURE 7
terrorism in Algeria. It would be futile, in the face of the unavoidable consequences of demographic change, to try to preserve the existing system of distribution of oil revenues, most of which are allocated to debt. It is debt that weakens the country. Yet, debt is, among other things, used for military investment. A more intelligent strategy to ensure international security would be to allocate at least part of Algeria’s debt to create or contribute to the creation of jobs for the young. This strategy may require the involvement and co-operation of actors outside of Algeria, particularly as the global dimensions of the causes and effects of terrorism have become more apparent.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) sounded an alarm in the Maghrib when it projected the estimated number of positions that will need to be created annually in order to cushion the shock waves of the burgeoning population of young people anticipated between 2000 and 2010. Algeria must create 359,000 jobs, Morocco 308,000 and Tunisia 86,500. The ILO describes the youth cohort as a ‘lost race’, but the unavoidable demographic and cultural changes that these youth themselves will bring allow us to say that all is (perhaps) not lost. Let us not forget that in most contemporary societies, generations of baby-boomers radically changed society, the family, relationships between men and women, and the structure of the labour market. Algeria’s agricultural sector alone created approximately 150,000 jobs per year in 2000 and 2001. It is therefore not yet permissible to concede defeat.

Most young Algerians have accepted the transition toward a different society, combining traditional and modern values and recognising woman’s fundamental rights. It is now society’s turn to change and maximise their opportunities to become integrated peacefully. The struggle against terrorism should not conceal the fact that the majority of young people have not, in fact, joined the fighting. They still constitute, however, a potential reserve army from which a variety of political actors could draw in their efforts to alter power relations in Algeria and, perhaps, internationally. To ensure that violent strategies do not attract further adherents, the government’s programme should assign sufficient resources – at least proportional in terms of population – to this most vulnerable and explosive cohort.

NOTES


4. The author was involved in the design (questionnaire, survey) and drafting of the final report.


8. Cosio-Zavala (note 7); Kouaouci (note 5) pp.53–64.

9. McNicoll (note 1).


11. Ibid. Data from the 1998 census are not presented because of serious problems with their collection.


13. See note 5.


15. In reality, however, the FLN has continued to dominate, regaining an absolute majority in a parliament elected with a participation rate of 47 per cent in the May 2002 election.


