

The Political Demography of the Arab World at the Beginning of the 21st Century: The Socio-Economic Implications

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Abstract

During the second half of the 20th century, world population increased rapidly, more than ever before, reaching 6.1 billion in 2000 as compared with 2.5 billion in 1950. The major contributors to this rapid growth have been the developing countries, currently representing more than 80% of the world's total population. This rapid population growth in the developing countries, including the Arab countries, is the outcome of rising natural increase rates, which climbed during the 1970s and have since started to decline. In most of the Arab countries, the third stage of the Demographic Transition, namely, the reduction in fertility rates, started only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The end result has been the creation of wide-based age pyramids, with almost half of the Arab populations under the age of 20.

The aim of this paper is four-fold: The first is to represent the current major demographic characteristics of the Arab populations, including size, fertility rates, and age structure. The second aim is to describe the politics of the family planning programs operated by most of the Arab regimes, either directly or indirectly. The third aim is to describe the socio-economic consequences and political implications of rapid population growth in the Arab region, including the extensive unemployment among university graduates and the concentration of millions of poor rural migrants in the capitals. The final part of the paper will deal with the projections of the demographic characteristics of the Arab populations in the first half of the 21st century and their implications for the Arab economies as well as the political establishments.

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