

Population Policy in Algeria: Between Planning and the Reality of Achieving the Goal of Birth Spacing

- An Applied Study Based on Population Data of Algeria-

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Abstract

Algeria did not initially prioritize its population growth rate when it gained independence, because focusing on compensating for the victims of the war of liberation. It did not adopt a specific Family planning until 1982, within the framework of the five-point plan 1980-1984. During this plan, a committee was formed to study the country's demographic situation, aiming to control the long-term and medium-term birth rate in Algeria.

In recent years, there has been much discussion about the demographic issue, as numerous economic, social, and demographic studies have addressed this highly sensitive matter, which fundamentally affects the society, which is influenced by the age of first marriage and the educational level of women.

Based on these considerations, we will attempt to understand the key areas the government emphasized in pursuit of its demographic goals, which undoubtedly had economic, social, and political implications.

السياسة السكانية في الجزائر، بين التخطيط وواق تحقيق هدف المباعدا بين الولادات - دراسة تطبيقية اعتمادا على معطيات متعلقة بسكان الجزائر -

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الكلمات المفتاحية	الملخص
تنظيم الأسرة، وسائل منع الحمل، المستوى التعليمي للمرأة، سن الزواج الأول.	لم تول الجزائر حسابا لارتفاع معدل نموها السكاني بداية استقلالها، وذلك تعويضا لضحايا الحرب التحريرية، فلم تلجأ إلى السياسة السكانية الخاصة بتنظيم الأسرة إلا في سنة 1982 في إطار المخطط الخماسي 1980-1984، حيث كوّنت لجنة لدراسة الوضع الديمغرافي للبلاد، إذ كان هذا المخطط يرمي إلى السيطرة على التطور البعيد والمتوسط للولادات بالجزائر، والذي يتأثر بسنّ الزواج الأول والمستوى التعليمي للمرأة.
	ففي السنوات الأخيرة كثر الحديث عن المشكل الديمغرافي، إذ أنّ جلّ الدراسات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية وكذا الديمغرافية تناولت هذه المسألة الحساسة جدا، والتي تمسّ المجتمع في بنيته الأولى.
	وانطلاقا من هذه الاعتبارات سنحاول الوقوف على أهمّ ما ركّزت عليه الدولة بغية تحقيق هذا الهدف الديمغرافي، والذي كانت له حتما تداعيات اقتصادية واجتماعية وسياسية.

1. The problem of the study

The concept of birth spacing in the modern era emerged as a result of the increasing population growth, taking a prominent place in research and studies worldwide. Its purpose is to extend the time between births, aiming to curb population growth and control human reproduction. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) reached 4.97 children per woman in 1950.

Population growth results from an increase in births compared to deaths. This demographic increase poses various challenges to economic and social development. Consequently, it has become a population dilemma addressed by major international organizations, governments, and authorities. Countries struggling with demographic growth have implemented population control policies or birth spacing policies to achieve a balance between living standards and population size.

For instance, in 1962, one-third of developing countries approved family planning policies primarily for economic reasons. Algeria, having experienced demographic growth after gaining independence, attributed this growth to the availability of free services, including healthcare, family planning, child vaccination, free education, and employment opportunities for those capable. The population in Algeria increased significantly: 10.459 million in 1962, 13.095 million in 1970, 18.666 million in 1980, and 24.409 million in 1989.

The Algerian government attempted to control this rapid increase by indirectly implementing measures to monitor fertility, similar to approaches seen in countries experiencing population explosions like China. This involved establishing indirect methods for family planning without openly declaring them. In this context, we will explore the indirect methods adopted by the state to monitor fertility.

How did the state work to supervise family planning within Algerian households?

This question include the following:

- has the educational level of women been among the focal points that the state has emphasized on to achieve its demographic goals?*
- Does the age of a woman's first marriage have a relationship with family planning?*
- Does the prevalence of contraceptive methods have a connection to family planning?*

2. Hypothesis

These are all possibilities or causative factors for the problem that illustrate various possible interpretations and proposed relationships between two variables. One is the independent variable (the cause), and the other is the dependent variable (the result) that occurred due to all the independent or causative factors.

"The hypothesis consists of one or several sentences expressing the possibility of a relationship between an independent factor and another dependent factor" (Obeidat, 1999, p. 27)



Partial hypothesis

- the educational level of females is one of the aspects that the state focused on to achieve its demographic goals, related to reducing the population size.
- the age of first marriage for women have a relationship with family planning.
- the state focus on promoting contraceptive methods as an indirect means of family planning.

3. Concept Definitions related to study

3.1. Family Planning

Signifies the will of married couples to space their births using a legitimate and secure method to delay pregnancy, according to their health, social, and economic circumstances, within the framework of responsibility towards their children and themselves (**This definition was unanimously agreed upon at the Rabat Conference in Morocco in 1971.** (Jalabi, 1984, p. 196)

3.2. Birth Spacing

It refers to the couple's intention to leave a specific period between the births of their children.

3.3. Contraceptive Methods

This term encompasses a set of methods that lead to preventing births. These methods are categorized into material and non-material methods. This concept was adopted from English in 1960, serving as a way to prevent pregnancy by defining a range of methods aimed at avoiding conception. (Drid, 2006, p. 26)

So, it is a set of methods and techniques used by married women to prevent pregnancy or used to space births, often by mutual agreement between the spouses.

3.4 Educational Level of Women

The educational level generally refers to the level of academic achievement, in addition to cultural interests in various subjects. (p. 212)

As for the term "educational level of women," it is specifically determined by a set of variables, most importantly educational attainment. However, this concept goes beyond the academic level that a woman has reached, considering that it influences the acquisition of various perceptions and concepts". (Al-Eid, 2023, p. 113)

This helps women maintain themselves, such as the choice of spacing between births and organizing their family planning for physical, economic, and social well-being.

3.5 Age at First Marriage

The term "marriage" is generally used to label the event, while the phenomenon refers to marital status. Here, the researcher focused on marriage as a legal contract for matrimony or union between a male and a female in the manner prescribed by society's laws and customs. This entails rights, duties, and a marriage ceremony commonly known



as a marriage celebration, supervised by law or tradition. The union between a man and a woman, the married couple, is sometimes collectively referred to as the married pair or the married couple. (Sharif, 2015, p. 67)

As for the average age at first marriage, it is an individual transitions from a single status to a married status. (Ismail, 2019, p. 75)

4. The Methodology Used

The curriculum has multiple definitions, as defined by the philosophical lexicon, is "a specific means to achieve a particular goal". (Philosopher, p. 195), and "Bittle " defines the methodology in general as "the correct arrangement of mental processes that we undertake to discover the truth and prove it" (Bittle, p. 270), and The methodology may vary from one another depending on the nature of the phenomenon under study and the purpose of conducting it.

This research paper aims to study a demographic phenomenon, namely the phenomenon of family planning, is primarily a demographic study with economic and social dimensions. It is considered that the descriptive methodology suitable for it, through which we analyze the collected data and subsequently draw conclusions.

5. Results and Discussion

Before examining the methods and means that Algeria employed in family planning and reducing the number of births, it is necessary to take a look at the evolution of the population since independence.

Table N°1

The population of Algeria has evolved (the number in thousands)

Year	1962	1966	1977	1987	1998	2008	2014	*2018	**2020
Population	10459	11908	16948	23051	29272	34080	39500	42600	43900

*N° 871. THE MAIN INDICATORS OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SECTOR. 2019.

**ONS. ALGERIAN DEMOGRAPHICS. 2019.

Source: (Amira, 2017, p.p 58-104)

The data from (**Table 01**) indicates a continuous increase in the population since independence until today. In 1962, the population exceeded 10 million (**10459000 individuals**), it has doubled more after the third census conducted by the state in 1987, reaching precisely 23051000 individuals. The eighties (1980s) witnessed a demographic explosion in Algeria for various reasons. The population continued to increase, albeit at a slower pace than in the previous decades, approaching the previous mentioned size after more than 36 years. In 2020, the population recorded an estimated size of 43,900,000 individuals.

The positive movement in the population after independence is attributed to historical and political factors, aiming to compensate for the demographic losses during the Algerian War of Independence, which lasted seven and a half years against the French



colonizer, resulting in over a million and a half martyrs. The improvements in living standards and healthcare services during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had a positive impact on increasing births and reducing mortality, subsequently contributing to the overall population growth.

As for the infant mortality rate, it declined from 174‰ in 1966 to 60.4‰ in 1988. This downward trend reflects significant improvements in child healthcare. (Amira, 2017, p. 122)

Regarding the number of births, which is the second element of the natural population increase, it nearly doubled in the same period mentioned earlier when discussing the mortality rate. In 1963, there were approximately 419000 live births, while in 1988, there were about 806000 live births, nearly doubling the count.

The end of the eighties witnessed a demographic explosion in Algerian society, coinciding with economic difficulties faced by the Algerian state due to various political and economic reasons. Notably, the historical collapse in oil and petroleum prices occurred as some countries from the "Ten Tigers and Lions" group began oil production. This shock prompted the Algerian state to reconsider its population policies for the first time, recognizing the need to control the increasing population by adopting various indirect methods, which we will focus on in the remaining tables.

Overall, the improvement in economic and social conditions for the population provided fertile ground for the continued increase in the number of births and a decrease in the number of deaths. As for the number of deaths, the decline continued steadily until it reached 22‰ in 2014 and then 21‰ in 2019, a figure not far from the target set by the United Nations in 2015. The first goal of the third Sustainable Development Goal aims to reduce infant mortality to 12‰ in all countries by 2030. (International, 2020)

of course, this record increase after independence is explained by the favorable living conditions that have been provided through the state's efforts since that time, in addition to the conducive health conditions for the well-being of newborns and the care of their mothers.

As for the number of births, this figure exceeded one million live births after 2014, reaching 1034000 live births in 2019. (ons, 2019)

In summary, after population growth was initially a political demand before being demographic, it became an obstacle hindering the economic and social development of the country. Calls for family planning and birth spacing began in the 1980s when it was announced that demographic growth was causing numerous social problems.

One of the key focuses of the state in promoting birth spacing and family planning, as a means to control population growth, was the age of first marriage, especially for females. The rationale behind this is that the earlier a girl gets married, the longer the

period during which she can bear children, increasing the likelihood of a higher number of births. This aspect will be further emphasized in the subsequent table.

Table N°2
Evolution of age at first marriage for females

Year	1961	1966	1977	1987	1998	2006	*2008
Age of First Marriage (Year)	19.6	18.3	20.7	23.7	27.7	29.8	29.1

*ONS. *Statistical Retrospective 1962-2020 Demographics.*

Source: (Amira, 2017, p. 59)

It is evident from the data in (Table 02) that the average age of first marriage exceeded twenty years after independence, especially for females. At the time of independence, it was recorded at 19.6 years for females, then 18.3 years (in 1966). With the second census conducted by the Algerian state in 1977, it reached 20.7 years. The reason behind this was the improvement in the living standards of Algerian families, coupled with the return of conscripts to their families following the victory of the liberation revolution. This led to increased marriage activity and a decrease in the final celibacy rate.

However, as mentioned earlier, by the end of the 1980s, a period marked by demographic explosion, the demographic calculations of the state began to change due to prevailing economic and social conditions. Consequently, there was a shift towards attempting to raise the average age of first marriage as an indirect means to reduce birth rates. This was achieved after the 1990s when this average began to rise. In 1998, it reached 27.7 years for females, then 29.8 years (in 2006), and 29.1 years (in 2008).

These rates, which the state focused on raising, aimed to delay the age at which women have their first child. By doing so, the likelihood of them having a larger number of children decreases. This is clearly illustrated in the following table:

Table N°3
Evolution of the average age of women at their first childbirth (year)

Year	1990	2005	2010	2018
Age	29.5	32.0	32	31.6

Source: (N° 871, 2019, p. 59)

It is evident from the data in Table 03 that the average age of women at their first childbirth was high at the beginning of the 1990s, specifically in 1990, reaching 29.5 years. It then continued to increase consistently, reaching 31.6 years in 2018. This average not only has biological dimensions related to a woman's ability to give birth and her decision in this regard, but it also has economic, social, and even political dimensions.

As we know, with the onset of the 1990s, Algeria experienced difficult conditions due to political instability, which reflected on living conditions. Additionally, this average can serve as a mirror reflecting political decisions that the state sought to implement in

reality. In other words, it is an average influenced by various factors, including political decisions aimed at reducing the population by enacting laws and regulations to raise the age of first marriage and the age of women at their first childbirth. These indicators will be further discussed in the subsequent tables.

Table N°4
Evolution of the female literacy rate

Academic Season	Enrollment Rate	Enrollment Rate	Academic Season
1965/66	32,9	1987/88	76,03
1966/67	34,2	1988/89	76,56
1967/68	37,5	1989/90	77,20
1968/69	38,8	1990/91	77,87
1969/70	41,1	1991/92	78,97
1970/71	43,9	1992/93	80,08
1971/72	47,6	1993/94	81,70
1972/73	50,6	1994/95	82,67
1973/74	53,4	1995/96	82,73
1974/75	55,0	1996/97	83,48
1975/76	61,4	1997/98	84,12
1976/77	64,7	1998/99	84,31
1977/78	64,2	1999/00	85,73
1978/79	65,6	2000/01	88,16
1979/80	65,7	2001/02	89,72
1980/81	67,3	2002/03	91,03
1981/82	67,3	2003/04	91,74
1982/83	68,3	2004/05	92,14
1983/84	71,15	2005/06	92,33
1984/85	72,01	2006/07	93,80
1985/86	72,25	2007/08	94,31
1986/87	73,55	2008	91,67

*N° 871. The main indicators of the National Education Sector. 2019.

*Mishrawi Al-Eid, *The Impact of Demographic Variables of Families on Academic Achievement*, a thesis submitted for the completion of the third-degree doctorate, specializing in Population Science, 2023.

Source: (N° 871, 2019, p. 13)

The table **number 04** indicates that the enrollment rate for females has been consistently increasing since independence. After being 32.9% in the first census year (1966), it rose to 91.67% during the census year of 2008.

The primary reason for this continuous increase over the years is attributed to the introduction of free and compulsory education following the law of April 16, 1976 . (Unesco, 2006, p. 01)

The state's preparation of the necessary infrastructure to receive students through the construction of schools and the training of teachers... These satisfactory indicators are attributed to the tremendous efforts exerted by the state in building and equipping



schools to promote widespread learning and elevate the cultural and educational levels of the population.

In addition to encouraging gender equality, the state highlights the importance of women as active contributors to development, whether socially, economically, or culturally. This is in line with achieving one of the goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2015-2030. The first and fifth goals of the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) officially adopted by UN member states emphasize "ensuring that all girls and boys enjoy education and eliminating gender disparities in education". (Unesco, p. 01)

And perhaps the change in women's goals and their pursuit of education and entering the workforce has led them to reconsider their priorities, such as delaying the goal of marriage or childbirth to focus on education and training. In order to achieve these goals and ensure the possibility of balancing personal life with studies or work, it was necessary to rely on what is known as contraceptive methods, as we will see in the following table:

Table N°5
Evolution of the Contraceptive Use Rate

Contraceptive Use	1970	1986	1992	1995	2002	2006	2013	*2019
Yes	7.6	35.3	50.8	56.9	57	61.4	57.1	78.6
No	92.4	64.7	49.2	43.1	43	38.6	42.9	21.4

*Cluster survey with multiple indicators, 2019.

Source: (Amira, 2017, p. 158)

The data from **Table 05** reveals that the majority of women did not rely on contraceptive methods, with variations. In 1970, specifically, 92.4% of women were recorded as not using these methods. Over the years, the reliance on these methods gradually increased, reaching 78.6% in 2019.

Undoubtedly, the recent increase is influenced by government efforts, as the government worked to provide various contraceptive methods. Additionally, educational and media campaigns were employed to raise awareness about the health risks associated with repeated childbirth and other aspects of women's health.

On the other hand, women's decisions to use these contraceptives also play a role. With the rise in women's educational levels and their participation in the workforce, as seen in the previous table, women themselves seek to space or limit births to balance their personal lives with their academic or professional pursuits.

All these diverse reasons have been harnessed by the state to indirectly reduce the population, a trend clearly reflected in the decline of the fertility composite index in Algeria in recent years, as shown in the following table:

Table N°6
Evolution of the Fertility Composite Index in Algeria from 1966 to 2018

Year	1* The fertility rate ISF (Child/Woman)
1966*	7.1
1970*	7.8
1985*	6.4
1986	4.9
1992	4.7
2002	3.9
2006**	2.27
2017*	3.1
2018***	3.023

*Bin Zaid Reem, *Fertility in Algeria: Its Evolution and Influencing Factors from 1962 to 2017*, Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research, 2021, Algeria, p. 78.

** *Multivariate Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2006)*.

*** *World Bank, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 28.05.2020*.

Source: (Amira, 2017, p. 66)

Through the data in Table 06 related to the evolution of the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Algeria from 1966 to 2017, it is evident that this indicator has undergone significant changes. It experienced an increase in the years following independence, estimating 7.1 children per woman in the first census year (1966), then rising to 7.8 children/woman in 1970, a rate rarely reached by any country globally. However, it decreased to 6.4 children per woman in 1985 and further to 3.9 children/woman during the Multivariate Indicator Cluster Survey in 2002. In 2018, the TFR recorded 3.023 children per woman.

The increase in this indicator after independence is attributed to several societal factors summarized in the previous tables. Notable among these factors is early marriage, prevalent in society during that period, as women were married at a young age, increasing their potential number of births. Additionally, improvements in healthcare, including free medical treatment and procedures related to reproductive health and children, contributed. At that time, contraceptive methods were not widely used or prevalent (see the previous table).

The subsequent decline in this indicator to 3.1 children per woman in 2017 did not occur without social, economic, cultural, and even regulatory developments. Factors such

*The fertility rate: or ISF, represents the average number of children a woman gives birth to during her reproductive years (15-49 years). It expresses the number of births per woman of childbearing age (15-49 years) and is calculated according to the following formula: The number of women of childbearing age (15-49 years) at mid-year.

$$ISF = \frac{\text{the number of live births}}{\text{the number of women of childbearing age}(15 - 49\text{years})}$$



as women's education, their entry into the workforce, the expansion of literacy, and changes in the marriage system and its complexities in recent years played a role. This delayed the expected age of first marriage for females (see Table 02).

6. Study Results in Light of Hypotheses

- **The partial hypothesis was proven**, as one of the key focuses of the state in reducing its population is raising the educational level of females. This change in priorities influences their decisions on childbirth, prompting them to prioritize completing their educational path.

- **The second partial hypothesis was also proven**, with the increase in the age of first marriage, particularly for females, reflecting the demographic policy implemented by the state since the 1980s as a means to reduce the likelihood of childbirth.

- **The third partial hypothesis was validated**, and after successfully promoting factors that encourage birth spacing or limitation, the state continued to work on providing means to facilitate the implementation of this decision. Various methods for birth control have become more widespread and have seen increased usage recently, reaching an adoption rate of approximately 80%.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the observer of demographic changes in Algerian society notes that these quantitative changes are not mere coincidence but are the result of political decisions serving the state's agenda. The Algerian government has succeeded in implementing many laws, providing an environment that facilitated directing families towards family planning.

The end of the 1980s marks a turning point in providing a suitable educational environment for raising the educational level of females. Additionally, efforts were made to raise health awareness, disseminate contraceptive methods, and other measures that reflected changes in demographic indicators leading to the achievement of the goal related to controlling the demographic explosion that occurred in the 1980s. This is evident in indicators such as the increase in the age of first marriage, the decrease in the Total Fertility Rate, which, as mentioned earlier, dropped to less than half of what society knew in 1970.

Overall, through this quantitative analysis in this research paper, it can be said that the Algerian state has succeeded in achieving its demographic goals, albeit indirectly.

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