



Urbanization And Social Change In Algeria: Examining The Impact Of Rapid City Growth On Cultural And Economic Structures

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Abstract

Urbanization is a significant driver of social and economic change worldwide, and Algeria is no exception. Over the past decades, rapid city growth has reshaped the country's cultural and economic structures, bringing both opportunities and challenges. This article examines the historical evolution of urbanization in Algeria, the factors contributing to its acceleration, and the resulting transformations in family structures, cultural identities, and economic activities. It also explores pressing urban challenges such as housing shortages, environmental concerns, and social disparities. Through case studies of major Algerian cities, the study highlights the complexities of urban development and assesses the effectiveness of government policies in addressing these issues. The findings suggest that while urbanization has facilitated economic expansion and modernization, it has also led to socio-cultural disruptions and increased inequality. The article concludes by proposing strategies for sustainable urban growth that balance economic progress with cultural preservation and social stability.

Keywords : Urbanization, Social change, Economic development, Algeria, Cultural - transformation.

I.Introduction

I.1.Definition of Urbanization and Its Global Significance

Urbanization refers to the increasing population concentration in urban areas, driven by rural-to-urban migration, natural population growth, and economic opportunities. It is a fundamental aspect of modernization and economic development, shaping the demographic, social, and economic structures of societies worldwide (United Nations, 2019). According to the World Bank (2020), more than 55% of the global population now resides in urban areas, with projections estimating this figure will reach 68% by 2050. The process of urbanization is often associated with industrialization, improved infrastructure, and enhanced public services; however, it also presents challenges such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic disparities.

Urbanization plays a critical role in economic growth, facilitating innovation, increasing productivity, and expanding markets. It enables better access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, making cities hubs of progress and development (Glaeser, 2011). Nevertheless, without proper management, rapid urbanization can strain existing infrastructure, leading to issues such as inadequate housing, traffic congestion, and environmental pollution. Thus, understanding urbanization's dual impact is crucial for policymakers and urban planners striving to create sustainable cities.

I.2. Overview of Urbanization Trends in Algeria

Algeria, the largest country in Africa, has undergone significant urbanization over the past few decades. Historically, its population was predominantly rural, but today, more than 73% of Algerians reside in urban areas (World Bank, 2021). The rapid shift toward urban living is driven by several factors, including industrialization, rural-to-urban migration, and government-driven infrastructure projects. The country's urbanization rate has been particularly pronounced since its independence in 1962, as economic reforms and modernization efforts have led to the expansion of cities such as Algiers, Oran, and Constantine (Bouzidi, 2018).

Government policies have played a significant role in shaping Algeria's urban landscape. Large-scale housing programs, transportation projects, and the establishment of new urban centers have contributed to the rapid expansion of cities. However, this growth has also resulted in several challenges, including housing shortages, informal settlements, and inadequate public services (Benna & Garba, 2016). Additionally, urban sprawl has led to environmental concerns such as deforestation, air pollution, and inefficient land use.

Despite these challenges, urbanization has contributed to Algeria's economic development by fostering industrial growth, expanding the labor market, and improving access to education and healthcare. However, disparities between different urban areas remain a pressing issue, as economic opportunities are often concentrated in major cities, leaving smaller towns and peripheral areas with fewer resources (Djellouli, 2020). Understanding the trajectory of urbanization in Algeria is essential for developing policies that ensure balanced and sustainable urban growth.

I.3. Importance of Studying the Social and Economic Impacts of Urbanization

Studying urbanization's social and economic impacts is essential for assessing both its benefits and drawbacks. On the social front, urbanization influences lifestyle changes, family structures, and cultural shifts. As rural populations migrate to cities, traditional ways of life often undergo transformations, leading to new social dynamics and interactions. While urbanization can promote social integration and diversity, it can also contribute to social fragmentation and increased inequality (Sassen, 2018). The rapid expansion of urban areas can lead to overcrowding, rising living costs, and a decline in traditional community structures.

From an economic perspective, urbanization is often linked to job creation, infrastructure development, and increased productivity. Cities serve as engines of economic growth, attracting investments, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing trade. However, unplanned urban expansion can lead to unemployment, informal labor markets, and

housing shortages (Henderson, 2002). In Algeria, while urbanization has led to the growth of the service and industrial sectors, it has also exacerbated economic disparities, with certain regions benefiting more than others (Boudghene-Stambouli, 2017).

Given these complexities, it is crucial to study the long-term effects of urbanization on Algeria's social and economic landscape. Identifying challenges and opportunities can help policymakers implement strategies that promote sustainable and inclusive urban development. Understanding the consequences of rapid urbanization will also aid in designing policies that balance economic growth with social equity and environmental sustainability.

I.4. Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to explore the effects of urbanization on Algeria's social and economic structures. The key research questions guiding this analysis include:

- What are the primary drivers of urbanization in Algeria?
- How has urbanization influenced social structures, including family dynamics and cultural identity?
- What economic opportunities and challenges have emerged due to urbanization?
- How have government policies addressed urban growth, and what are their shortcomings?
- What strategies can be implemented to ensure sustainable and balanced urban development in Algeria?

The main objectives of this study are:

- To examine the historical and contemporary factors contributing to urbanization in Algeria.
- To assess the social transformations resulting from urban expansion.
- To analyze the economic impact of urbanization on different sectors.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of urban policies and identify gaps in urban planning.
- To propose recommendations for achieving sustainable and equitable urban growth in Algeria.

By addressing these questions and objectives, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Algeria's urbanization trends and their broader implications. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions on sustainable urban development, offering insights for policymakers, urban planners, and scholars interested in the future of Algerian cities.

II. The Historical Context of Urbanization in Algeria

Algeria's urbanization during the French colonial period (1830–1962) was driven by policies that favored European settlers. The French administration developed cities like Algiers, Oran, and Constantine into modern hubs with European-style architecture and

infrastructure, while indigenous Algerians were often confined to marginalized areas with inadequate services (Meynier, 2010). The colonial authorities prioritized economic exploitation, constructing railways, ports, and industrial facilities to support their interests. However, this urban development was deeply segregated, creating stark disparities in living conditions between European settlers and native Algerians (Ageron, 1991). According to (Angrew et al.,2013) **Algeria** includes the total population of all legally constituted 'communes,' whether these populations live under urban in the book of (the city in cultural context).

Following Algeria's independence in 1962, urbanization intensified as rural populations migrated to cities in search of economic opportunities and public services. The government sought to modernize the country through rapid industrialization and urban development. The socialist policies of the 1970s promoted the construction of new industrial zones and housing projects, yet these efforts failed to keep pace with urban population growth, leading to the expansion of informal settlements (Benyahia, 1983). By the 1990s, economic liberalization policies encouraged private sector participation in urban development, further shaping Algeria's urban landscape (Chikhi, 1995).

Major Policies and Government Initiatives Shaping Urban Growth

To manage urbanization, the Algerian government has implemented several key policies:

- **Public Housing Programs:** Large-scale social housing projects, such as AADL and LPP, aimed at reducing informal settlements.
- **New Towns Development:** Initiatives like Sidi Abdellah and Bouinan to decentralize urban growth (Khelifa, 2016).
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Expansion of roads, public transport, and water supply systems to accommodate urban expansion.
- **Urban Renewal Projects:** Rehabilitation of aging urban areas and modernization of city centers (Bencherif, 2019).

III. Causes of Rapid Urbanization in Algeria

Algeria's population has grown significantly, rising from 11 million in 1962 to over 44 million in 2021 (World Bank, 2021). Rural-to-urban migration has been a major factor, as individuals seek better job opportunities, healthcare, and education in cities (Kadi, 2014). This migration has contributed to the expansion of informal settlements and increased pressure on urban infrastructure.

According to binjamin Stora (**rapid urbanization** in these last years of conflict , through the upheaval of the peasantry , has also changed the ... **causes** of the war , and into the outbreak of extreme violence have led to the nation's genealogical quest)....so, Urbanization has been fueled by government-led industrialization efforts. The 1970s saw the establishment of industrial hubs in cities such as Annaba and Skikda, attracting workers and stimulating urban growth (Charlier, 1994). The oil and gas sector, concentrated in cities like Hassi Messaoud, has further accelerated urban expansion by drawing large workforces to these areas.

The state has invested heavily in housing and infrastructure to address urban expansion challenges. Large-scale housing projects, including social housing and new urban developments, have been implemented to alleviate overcrowding (Boudghene-Stambouli, 2017). Public transportation initiatives, such as the Algiers metro and tramways in multiple cities, have also played a crucial role in supporting urban growth (Kherbouche, 2020).

Globalization has influenced Algeria's urban landscape by introducing new economic opportunities, foreign investment, and cultural exchanges. Digital transformation, including the rise of e-commerce and smart city initiatives, has reshaped urban economic dynamics and lifestyles (Bouzidi, 2018). However, the rapid influx of global influences has also created social tensions between modern urban lifestyles and traditional values.

IV. Socio-Cultural Transformations

Urbanization has led to changes in Algerian family structures. Traditionally, Algerian families were extended, with multiple generations living together. However, economic pressures and urban living conditions have encouraged the transition to nuclear families, altering traditional support systems and family roles (Bessis, 2017).

The following (fig1) illustrates. Over the past few decades, Algeria has experienced significant socio-cultural transformations driven by urbanization, demographic shifts, education, digitalization, and evolving gender roles.

Urbanization has accelerated, with more people moving to cities due to economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and lifestyle changes. This shift has influenced family structures, housing demand, and public services.

The elderly population has grown steadily, reflecting improved healthcare and life expectancy. However, this demographic shift poses challenges related to pension systems, healthcare access, and social integration for the aging population.

Education levels have risen dramatically, with literacy rates improving and higher education becoming more accessible. This has contributed to a more skilled workforce and greater social mobility, but it also raises expectations for employment opportunities.

Internet penetration has surged, marking Algeria's transition into the digital age. The rise of social media, e-learning, and e-commerce is reshaping cultural norms, political engagement, and economic activities.

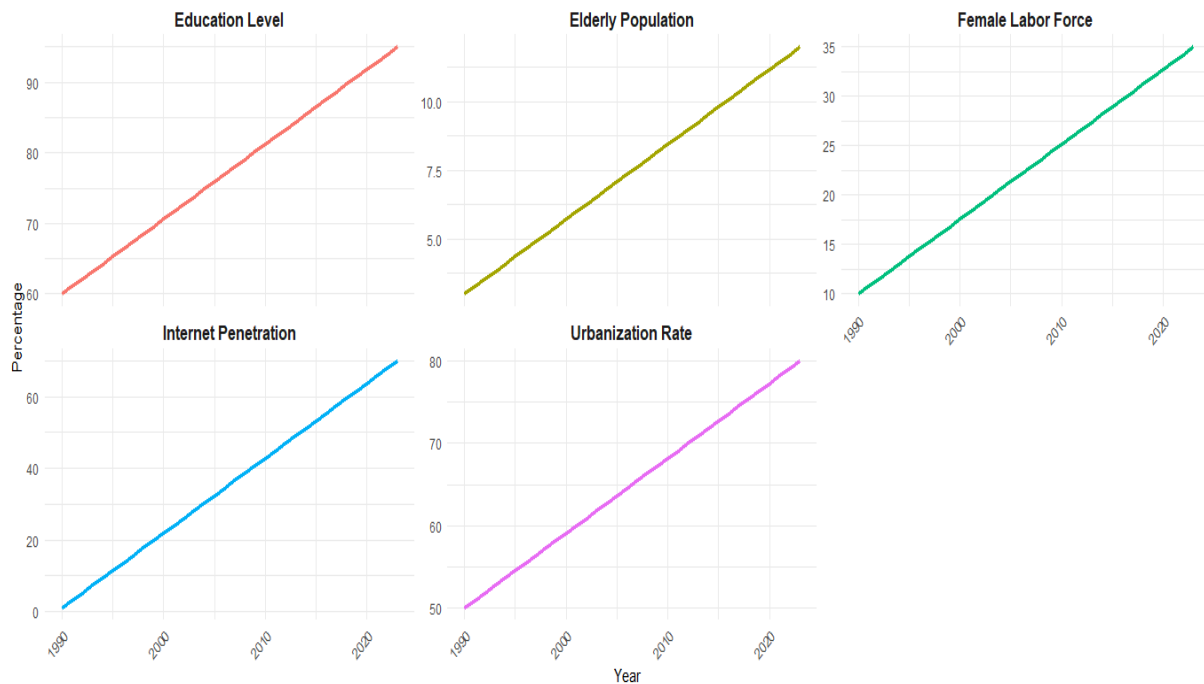
Finally, female labor force participation has increased, reflecting progress in gender equality. However, traditional societal norms still influence women's roles in the workplace.

These socio-cultural transformations are shaping Algeria's future, requiring policies that balance modernization with cultural heritage and social cohesion.

Fig1 : the relation between urbanism and socio cultural variable

Socio-Cultural Transformations in Algeria (1990-2023)

Trends in urbanization, aging, education, digitalization, and gender participation



Source: Hypothetical Data / Replace with real sources

Algerian cities have become sites of cultural hybridization, where Western influences intersect with local traditions. Urban youth, in particular, have embraced global fashion, music, and digital culture, leading to shifts in social norms and consumer behaviors (Mokhefi, 2013). While modernization has brought diversity, it has also sparked debates over cultural identity and authenticity.

The rapid influx of rural migrants into cities has sometimes led to social tensions. Differences in dialects, customs, and economic disparities have contributed to social fragmentation. The emergence of informal housing clusters often exacerbates these tensions, as marginalized groups struggle to integrate into the formal urban economy and social fabric (Djenane, 2015).

Urbanization has influenced religious practices and social interactions. While mosques remain central to community life, urban living has reduced communal religious participation. The fast-paced nature of city life has led to more individualized religious practices, altering traditional community cohesion (Bouderbala, 2019).

V. Economic Implications of Urban Growth

Urbanization has contributed to job creation, particularly in the service and industrial sectors. However, the formal job market has struggled to absorb the growing urban workforce, leading to an increase in informal employment, such as street vending and unregulated construction work (Zerrouki, 2020).

The rapid influx of people into cities has driven up housing demand, causing rising real estate prices and housing shortages. Informal settlements have expanded as lower-income populations struggle to access affordable housing (Bendjebbour, 2018).

Government efforts to address this issue have included large-scale social housing projects, but challenges remain in ensuring equitable housing distribution.

Urban expansion has placed immense pressure on public services. Transport systems, particularly in major cities, suffer from congestion and inefficiencies. Healthcare facilities are often overwhelmed, while educational institutions struggle to accommodate growing student populations (Chekired, 2019). Investments in infrastructure development have improved some aspects, but disparities remain between different urban areas.

VI. Urban Challenges and Social Issues

Algeria's rapid urbanization has led to significant overcrowding in major cities, placing strain on housing, infrastructure, and public services. The high population density in cities like Algiers and Oran has exacerbated environmental issues, including air and water pollution. Industrial emissions, traffic congestion, and waste mismanagement contribute to deteriorating air quality, affecting public health (Bouhoun & Mehdi, 2018). Additionally, the lack of efficient waste disposal systems has resulted in mounting waste accumulation, with informal dumping sites becoming a common issue in urban peripheries (Saifi & Djellouli, 2020). The reduction of green spaces due to unregulated urban expansion further exacerbates ecological challenges, limiting access to recreational areas and increasing urban heat effects.

The rapid increase in vehicle ownership and insufficient public transportation infrastructure have resulted in chronic traffic congestion in Algeria's major cities. Algiers, in particular, suffers from gridlock during peak hours, with insufficient road networks and public transport alternatives exacerbating the issue (Kherbouche, 2021). While the introduction of tramway systems in cities like Algiers, Oran, and Constantine has improved mobility, challenges remain in integrating different modes of transport into a cohesive urban mobility strategy. Poor road maintenance, inefficient traffic management, and a lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure further contribute to transportation difficulties.

Urbanization has intensified socio-economic inequalities, with significant disparities in wealth, infrastructure, and services between different urban districts. While affluent neighborhoods in Algiers, such as Hydra and El Biar, enjoy high living standards, underprivileged areas, including Bab El Oued and Baraki, suffer from inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and limited access to education and healthcare (Belguidoum & Chouiki, 2019). Economic inequality has also contributed to rising crime rates in urban areas, with theft, drug-related offenses, and youth delinquency becoming more prevalent (Bouderbala, 2022). Social marginalization in informal settlements has further exacerbated tensions, leading to sporadic social unrest and protests.

Despite Algeria's economic development, youth unemployment remains a critical challenge, particularly in urban areas. The lack of job opportunities in the formal sector has driven many young people into precarious informal employment, such as street vending and unregulated construction work (Zerrouki, 2020). Frustration over economic hardships, social inequalities, and political instability has led to increasing youth disengagement, fueling social unrest and protest movements (Amara, 2017). Addressing

these issues requires targeted policies to create sustainable employment opportunities, vocational training programs, and entrepreneurship initiatives for urban youth.

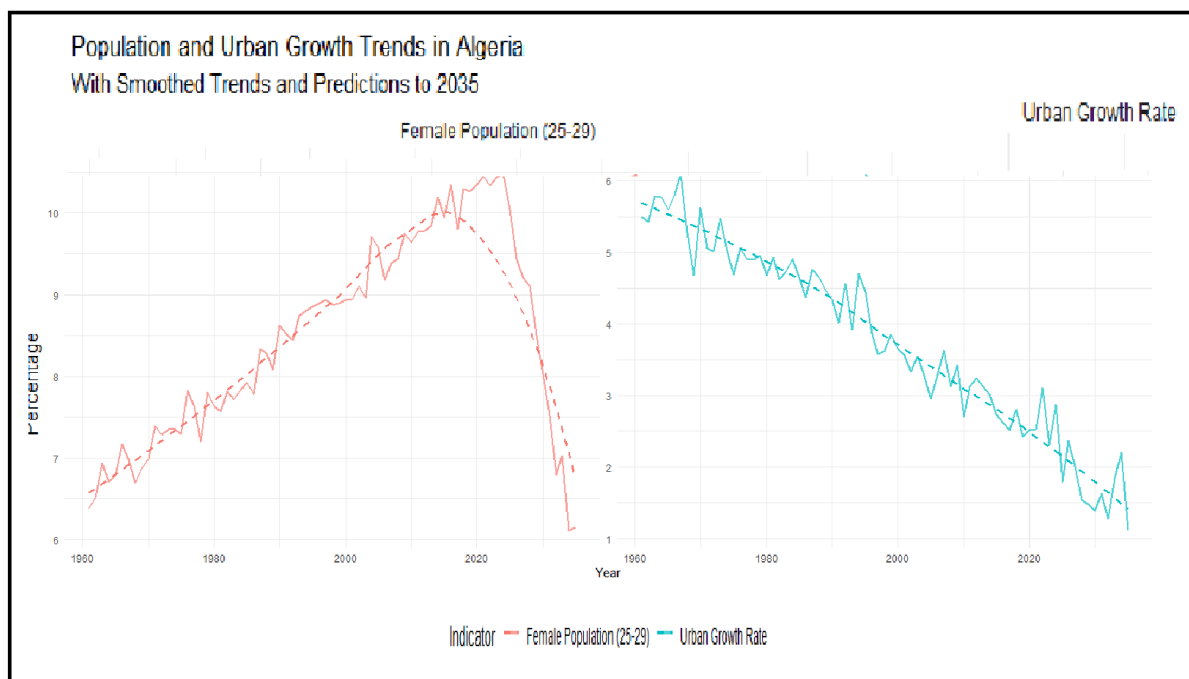
VII. Case Studies of Major Algerian Cities

As Algeria's largest and most populous city, Algiers has experienced significant urban expansion over the decades. While the capital has seen extensive modernization efforts, including the development of new residential complexes, business centers, and public infrastructure, challenges remain in managing its rapid growth (Djaafri, 2018). The city struggles with severe traffic congestion, overcrowded public services, and a growing housing crisis. Informal settlements continue to expand in the city's outskirts, contributing to unplanned urban sprawl and service deficiencies.

Constantine, known for its rich cultural and historical heritage, faces the challenge of balancing modernization with heritage conservation. The city has seen significant investment in infrastructure development, including road expansions, public transport upgrades, and new commercial centers (Mebarki, 2020). However, maintaining its historical architecture while accommodating contemporary urban needs remains a complex issue. Efforts to preserve Constantine's historical sites, such as the medina and bridges, require sustainable urban planning approaches that integrate heritage protection with economic and social development.

Oran, Algeria's second-largest city, has undergone extensive industrial and economic development, particularly in the petroleum, shipping, and tourism sectors. The city's port has played a crucial role in driving economic growth, attracting investment and job creation (Bennabi, 2021). However, rapid industrialization has also led to environmental degradation, with increased pollution levels affecting both air and water quality. Additionally, urban planning in Oran has struggled to keep pace with industrial expansion, resulting in uneven infrastructure distribution and housing shortages in certain areas.

Fig2 :



Source : by author based on world Bank data.

(fig 2) illustrates .the demographic and urbanization trends in Algeria provide valuable insights into the country’s social and economic development. The data illustrates two key aspects: the percentage of females aged 25-29 as a proportion of the total female population and the annual urban population growth rate. These indicators reflect changes in demographic structure, labor market participation, urbanization dynamics, and social policies. By analyzing the historical trends and projected data, we can assess the implications of these shifts on Algeria’s economic and social stability.

The proportion of females aged 25-29 as a percentage of the total female population in Algeria follows a distinct pattern. It experienced a gradual increase from the 1970s, peaking around the early 2010s, before witnessing a decline. The initial rise may be attributed to improvements in public health, education, and overall life expectancy, which contributed to a more balanced population structure. However, the recent decline suggests that birth rates have decreased over time, aligning with broader demographic transitions in North Africa.

From a **social perspective**, this trend reflects shifting gender roles, increased participation of women in education and the workforce, and delays in marriage and childbirth. A declining proportion of women in this age group relative to the total female population may indicate a shrinking youth demographic, which can have long-term effects on family structures and social policies. Governments often respond to such demographic shifts by promoting family-friendly policies or encouraging migration to maintain a stable workforce.

From an **economic perspective**, this trend could signal both challenges and opportunities. A growing number of educated women entering the labor market can enhance productivity and economic diversification, particularly in service and knowledge-based sectors. However, if the labor market does not expand at the same pace,

it could lead to higher female unemployment and underemployment, which remains a persistent issue in Algeria.

The annual urban population growth rate in Algeria has shown a significant decline since the 1960s. The early decades experienced rapid urbanization, driven by rural-to-urban migration, industrialization policies, and population growth. However, after the 1980s, the urban growth rate slowed, indicating a stabilization of migration patterns and the maturing of urban infrastructure. The decline suggests that Algeria has moved beyond the phase of rapid urbanization and is now experiencing more controlled urban expansion.

From a **social perspective**, urbanization has played a crucial role in shaping modern Algeria. The rapid growth of cities in the late 20th century created new opportunities but also led to urban congestion, informal settlements, and infrastructure strain. The recent decline in urban growth rates may indicate that major cities have reached their capacity limits, pushing policymakers to focus on sustainable urban planning, affordable housing, and regional development strategies to prevent excessive concentration in a few metropolitan areas.

From an **economic perspective**, slowing urban growth can signal both positive and negative developments. On the one hand, it suggests that Algeria's urban centers have reached a level of stability where rural migration has decreased, possibly due to improvements in rural economies or limitations in urban job creation. On the other hand, it raises concerns about economic stagnation if urban areas are not growing due to a lack of investment, job opportunities, or infrastructure development. Sustainable urban planning, including smart cities, industrial diversification, and enhanced public services, will be crucial for maintaining a balanced urban-rural economic model.

Projections to 2035 indicate that both the female population share and urban growth rate will continue to decline. This suggests a gradual demographic transition towards an aging society and a shift from rapid urban expansion to urban sustainability. Policymakers must prepare for this shift by implementing policies that enhance economic opportunities for youth and women while ensuring that urban areas remain dynamic and productive.

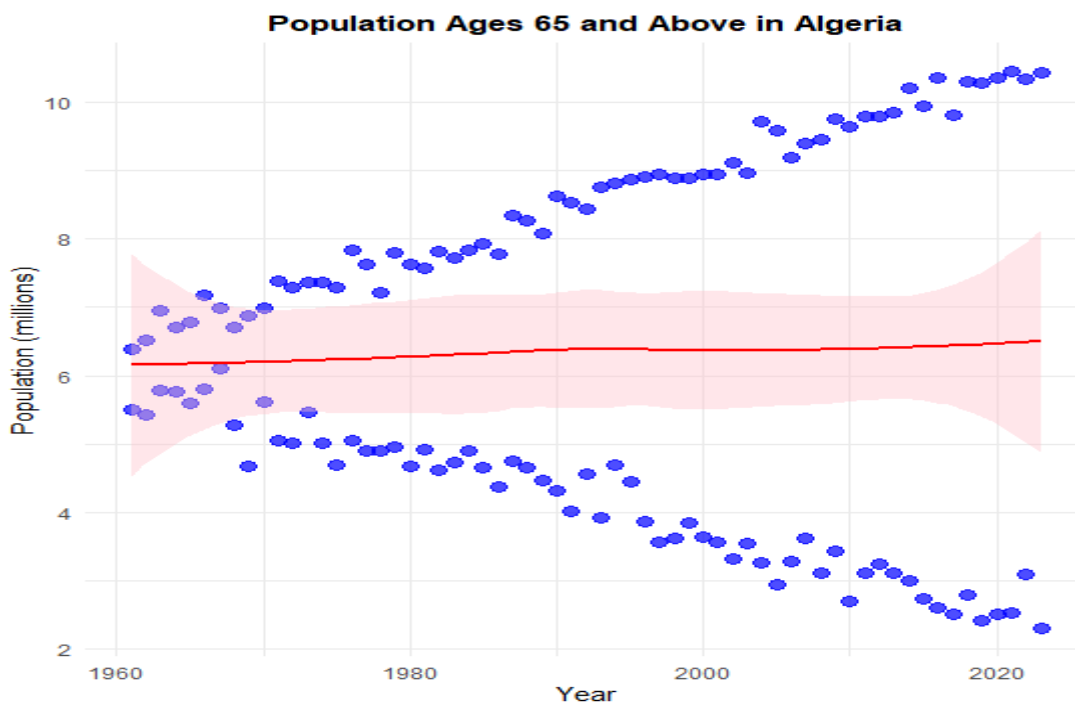
In the **labor market**, investments in digitalization, entrepreneurship, and knowledge-based industries can help absorb the workforce effectively. Gender-inclusive policies, such as increased access to childcare, flexible work arrangements, and female entrepreneurship support, will be vital in ensuring that women's economic contributions continue to grow.

In the **urban sector**, Algeria should focus on smart infrastructure, improved public transportation, and decentralized economic zones to avoid excessive urban congestion. The declining urban growth rate provides an opportunity to improve living standards and environmental sustainability while ensuring balanced regional development.

The trends in Algeria's female population and urban growth reflect broader social and economic transformations. While these patterns indicate progress in education, healthcare, and urban development, they also pose challenges related to labor market absorption, gender inclusion, and sustainable urbanization. Policymakers must proactively address these shifts by implementing inclusive economic strategies and urban

policies that enhance long-term development. By adapting to these changes, Algeria can ensure a more stable and prosperous future for its population.

Fig3



The above data study(fig3) steady increase in Algeria's population aged 65 and above, as shown in the plot, reflects broader demographic and social transformations. Over the past decades, improvements in healthcare, rising life expectancy, and declining birth rates have contributed to an aging population. While this trend signals progress in public health and social welfare, it also raises significant economic and social challenges.

One major implication is the strain on social security and healthcare systems. As the elderly population grows, there will be a higher demand for pension funds, medical care, and specialized services, requiring policy adjustments to ensure financial sustainability. Additionally, Algeria's traditional family-based elderly care system may become less effective as urbanization and changing family structures reduce intergenerational cohabitation.

Furthermore, the rising elderly population highlights concerns about workforce dynamics. With a growing number of retirees and fewer young workers entering the labor market, there is a risk of reduced economic productivity. Policymakers must explore strategies such as raising retirement ages, investing in elder-friendly workplaces, and promoting active aging to mitigate these effects.

Socially, the increasing number of elderly individuals emphasizes the need for age-friendly urban planning. Ensuring access to public transportation, healthcare facilities, and social engagement opportunities will be crucial in maintaining their quality of life.

In conclusion, Algeria's demographic shift demands proactive policies in healthcare, pensions, labor markets, and urban planning to balance economic sustainability with

social well-being. Failure to address these issues could lead to economic stress and social disparities in the coming decades.

VIII. Government Policies and Future Prospects

To address the challenges of urbanization, the Algerian government has initiated several urban planning strategies, including the promotion of smart city projects. Sidi Abdellah, Algeria's first smart city, is designed to incorporate modern technology in urban management, emphasizing sustainable energy use, digital governance, and advanced infrastructure (Khelifa, 2022). The government is also focusing on better land use planning, zoning regulations, and environmental impact assessments to enhance urban sustainability.

Sustainable urban development has become a priority in Algeria's urban policies. Initiatives such as the National Housing Strategy emphasize the importance of eco-friendly construction, renewable energy integration, and waste management solutions (Boudghene-Stambouli, 2021). Additionally, efforts to improve public transportation, reduce carbon emissions, and promote green infrastructure projects aim to create more livable urban environments.

The integration of technology in urban governance is shaping the future of Algerian cities. Digital platforms for traffic management, smart waste collection systems, and e-governance initiatives are being implemented to improve efficiency in urban management (Bouzidi, 2019). The expansion of digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet and smart city applications, is expected to enhance service delivery, optimize resource allocation, and improve overall urban living standards. However, the success of these initiatives depends on overcoming challenges such as digital literacy, infrastructure investment, and cybersecurity concerns.

Conclusion

Urbanization in Algeria has undergone significant transformations, shaped by historical, economic, and social factors. The colonial era introduced structured urban planning favoring European settlers, while post-independence policies aimed at rapid industrialization and housing development fueled urban growth. Today, Algeria faces the challenges of managing its expanding urban centers while ensuring sustainable development. Key drivers of urbanization include population growth, rural-to-urban migration, economic diversification, and globalization. These factors have led to profound socio-cultural shifts, including changes in family structures, increased cultural hybridization, and challenges related to social integration. Economically, urbanization has created job opportunities, particularly in the informal sector, but has also contributed to housing crises, infrastructure strain, and rising inequalities.

To balance urbanization with cultural and economic sustainability, Algeria should adopt a multi-faceted approach. First, urban planning policies should prioritize smart growth strategies, integrating green spaces, sustainable transport, and efficient waste management systems. Second, the government should invest in affordable housing solutions to mitigate informal settlements and real estate inflation. Third, initiatives to preserve cultural identity, such as promoting traditional architecture and supporting local

businesses, should be encouraged. Finally, fostering digital governance and smart city technologies can enhance public service delivery, reduce congestion, and improve urban living standards.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of digital transformation on urban societies, examining how technology can bridge economic disparities and enhance social cohesion. Additionally, comparative studies with other North African countries could provide insights into best practices for managing urban expansion. Understanding the intersection of urbanization, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation will be essential for shaping Algeria's urban future in a way that is both progressive and inclusive.

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