



## [The Demographic Challenge: Myths and Realities](#)

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Paris, 9 July 2018 - We have reached a turning point in human history. Parts of Europe are emptying. In 2015, the continent entered a phase of depopulation. 10 out of the 11 countries in the world expected to lose more than 15% of their populations by 2050 are European. Moreover, humanity is increasingly mobile: the number of emigrants living outside their country of origin today has tripled since the 1970s. Demographic changes are redesigning the world map with an increasingly urban and aging population, which will end up gathering in ever larger coastal cities.

Bruno Tertrais, Deputy Director of the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) and author of the policy paper [The Demographic Challenge: Myths and Realities](#) for Institut Montaigne, sees demography at the heart of all major contemporary societal issues: resources, climate, conflicts, migration, urbanization, growth, education, employment, pensions, health, rising populations, etc.

*"We live in an exceptional period from the perspective of world demography. It is now a question of looking at the facts in a dispassionate way in order to best prepare ourselves for both the current and coming demographic upheavals. However, we must remain rational: the general aging of the world population and its stabilization by the end of the century ought to foster more optimism than catastrophism,"* emphasizes Bruno Tertrais.

### 1. Demographic changes with serious consequences

**The youth of some states can partly explain episodes of collective violence.** There is indeed a correlation between the share of young people in a population and the probability that a society will experience episodes of collective violence. By 2030, the African continent is thus likely to show structurally belligerent demographic trends. On the contrary, an aging society tends to become increasingly peaceful and democratic. We can therefore take the completion of the demographic transition in progress in the vast majority of countries as the long-run promise of a pacification of the

world. Yet in the regions of some countries, the coming century is likely to be marked by a form of instability that we must anticipate.

**Demographic changes will inevitably affect the hierarchy of global powers.** Admittedly, the economic growth of countries or their military strength are not exclusively conditioned by their demographic characteristics. Yet the size of their population has a mechanical effect on the political weight of states on the world stage. In 2015, Europe entered a phase of natural depopulation (more deaths than births). Its population growth is now solely caused by immigration.

Outside the Old Continent, demographic changes in other regions of the world are shaping a new global hierarchy of world powers:

- North America's leadership will continue to benefit from a favorable demography, with a forecast of up to 447 million inhabitants in 2100 for the United States, against 329 million today.
- African fertility rates will remain high - while Africa represents only 17% of the world population today, it could account for 40% by the end of the century, thus suggesting increased intercontinental populations flows. Lagos, in Nigeria, is likely to become the world's largest city.
- India could have one and a half billion inhabitants by 2100.

## 2. Facts versus fantasies

**No, just because there are more of us does not mean that we will starve.** The idea that the Earth has a finite amount of resources is often assumed in public debates. However, discoveries, technological progress, agricultural productivity gains, changes in consumption habits, or adjustments of behaviors according to price-mechanisms incite us to adopt a more rational approach to the planet's capacity to welcome and feed an expanding humanity. In terms of resources, problems, like solutions, are more political (management, distribution, innovation) than they are natural.

**No, poverty and climate change alone do not explain emigration.** First, development tends to increase migration flows. Migrants are more urban and educated than rural and illiterate - development aid often does not prevent emigration. Second, climate and environmental factors trigger the decision to migrate more than they cause it. Indeed, the very notion of "climate refugees" is controversial.

**No, European societies today are not undergoing untenable cultural upheavals.** Despite the acceleration of migration flows towards Europe in the 2010s, our societies have been much less destabilized than what was initially feared. Over a longer period of time, the fertility differential between European women and women of non-European origin decreases from the second generation onwards, thus invalidating the hypothesis of an inevitable imbalance between different cultures and communities within our societies.

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