

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

COUNTRY CASE STUDY

TUNISIA

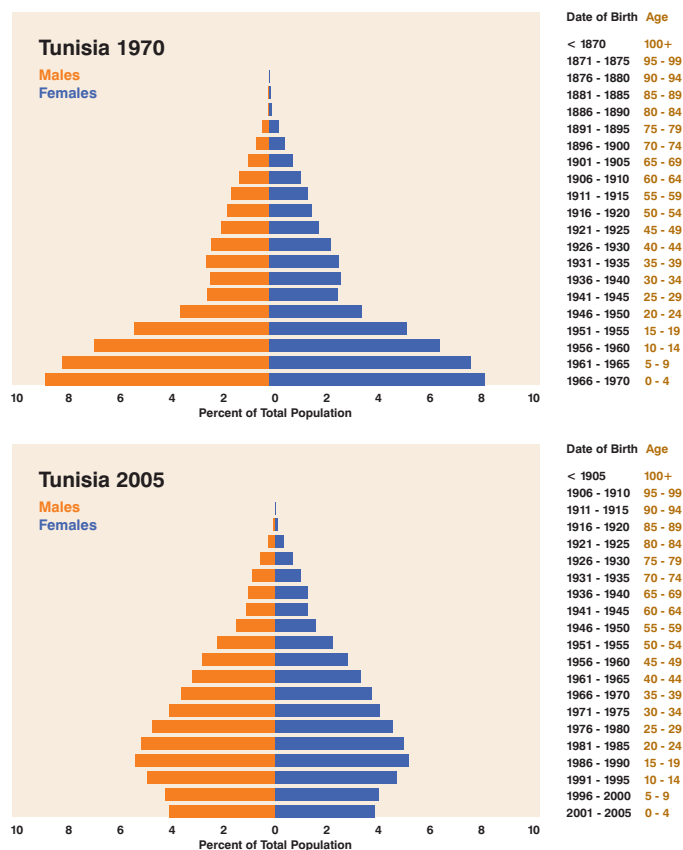
Countries in Profile: Tunisia

An Early Success Story

The Tunisian government made a forceful commitment to demographic change earlier than most other developing countries. With the full support of President Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia launched a national family planning program in the 1950s. In addition to educating the population about family planning and working to earn the support of religious leaders, the government raised the legal age for marriage and legalized abortion. As a result, Tunisia's fertility rate declined from a high of more than seven children per woman in 1960 to two children today, an extremely rapid improvement that took developed countries decades longer to achieve. Tunisia's fertility rate is lower than each of its North African neighbors – Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Morocco. The country's population growth rate has likewise dropped from 2.6 percent in the late 1970s to 1.1 percent at the beginning of this century.¹ General health has improved as well, with life expectancies climbing from less than 50 years in the 1950s and early 1960s to above 70 years today.

Figure 1
Tunisia's Age Structures, 1970 and 2005

In 1970, toward the beginning of Tunisia's national family planning program, the country had a very young age structure, with 69 percent of the population under age 30. In 2005, Tunisia had progressed across two categories into the transitional age structure group, a development that can be attributed to the success of the government's efforts to make family planning available comprehensively.



Tunisia, with a transitional age structure, continues to emphasize access to reproductive health care, even as it has made remarkable achievements in recent decades. More than half of women of reproductive age (53 percent) were using a modern contraceptive in 2001, an increase from 40 percent in 1988.² Condoms, pills and emergency contraception are available for free at clinics. The government spends \$10 million annually on the extremely comprehensive national family planning program. It includes efforts targeted at providing young people with confidential access to services, at educating men, and at reaching traditionally underserved populations in rural areas.³ Women are highly integrated into Tunisian society: Nearly 70 percent are employed in the formal sector and a greater number of women than men are enrolled in secondary and tertiary education.⁴

Figure 2
Tunisia's Progress Along the Demographic Transition

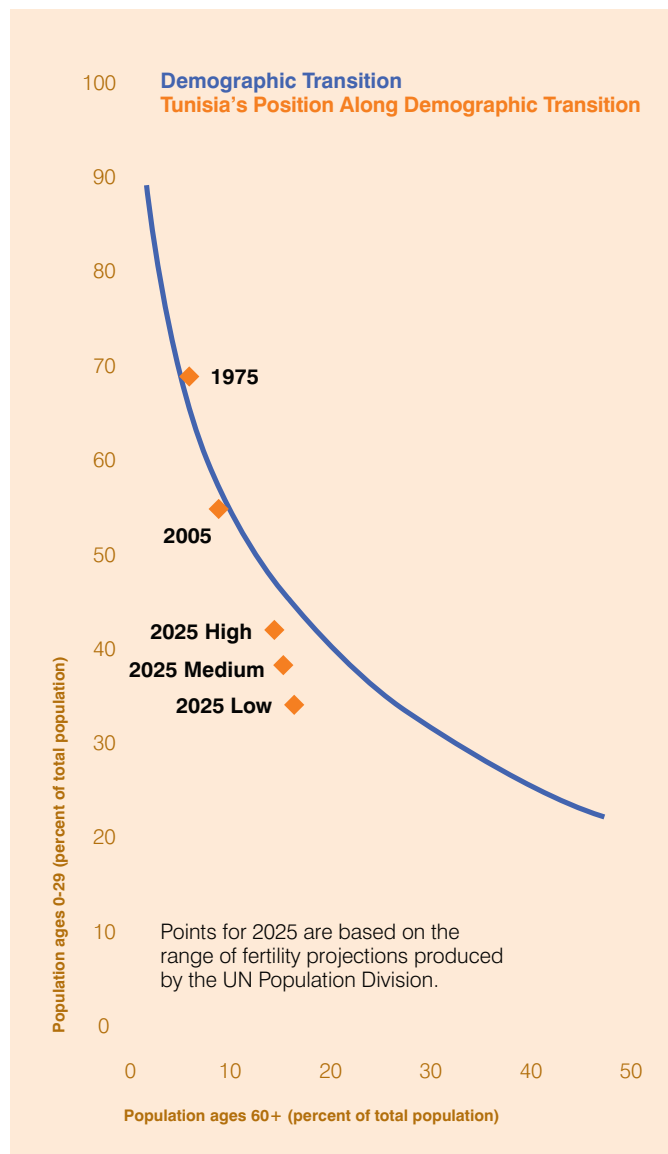


Figure 3
Current Demographic Statistics for Tunisia⁵

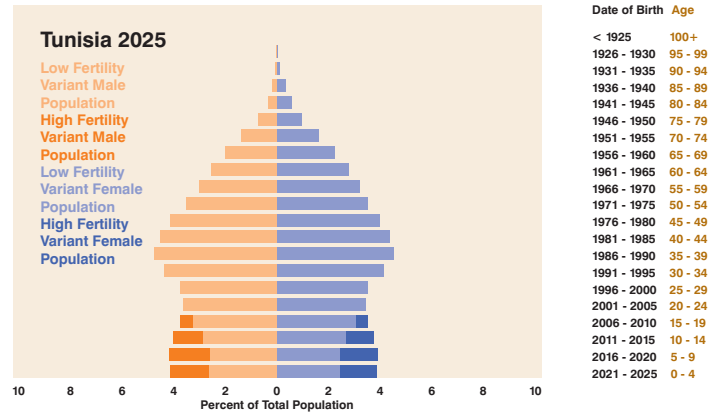
Population 1980 6 million
 Population 2005 10 million
 Population 2025 (medium fertility projection) 12 million
 Population 2050 (medium fertility projection) 13 million
 Median population age 27 years
 Population under age 15 26%
 Total fertility rate (2005-2010) 1.9
 Contraceptive prevalence rate (modern methods, 2001) 53%
 Unmet need for family planning 12%
 Life expectancy 72 years male, 76 years female
 HIV prevalence rate (ages 15-49, 2005) 0.1%
 GNI per capita (Atlas method, current US\$, 2005) \$2,890
 Population living below poverty line 8%
 Unemployment rate (2003) 14%
 Adult literacy rate (2004) 83% male, 65% female
 Arable land (% of total, 2003) 18

Tunisia has remained very stable politically for many decades, with no outbreaks of civil conflict for more than 25 years. The economy has grown at up to five percent annually in recent years, and foreign investors are showing interest in establishing companies in Tunisia. The country does still face political and economic challenges. Handovers in political power are extremely rare. President Ben Ali won the most recent election with 95 percent of the vote and faces no term limits. Unemployment rates remain high, near 15 percent.

Although Mexico, Tunisia and other countries that have made progress toward more favorable age structures still have areas of development that require attention, their histories can serve as models for other developing countries. The concentrated focus these countries' governments have placed on family planning and reproductive health care have brought their populations to the third – transitional – age structure category where the potential benefits of the demographic transition are at their peak.

Figure 4
Tunisia's Potential Age Structures, 2025

Projections of Tunisia's population age structure for 2025 show a dramatic difference between the low- and high-fertility variants. If Tunisia's fertility increases to 2.3 children per woman as in the high-fertility projection, the country will be in the final stages of the transitional age structure category. The population will include a resurging youth bulge among children and teenagers. In the low-fertility projection, with the fertility rate declined to 1.3, the share of those under 30 will shrink to 36 percent of the total population.



Endnotes

- 1 UN Population Division. 2005. *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision*. New York: UN Population Division.
- 2 UN Population Division. 2006. *World Contraceptive Use 2005*. New York: UN Population Division; MEASURE DHS. "Country Summary: Tunisia." Available online from http://www.measuredhs.com/countries/country.cfm?ctry_id=43; last accessed 21 September 2006.
- 3 Naik, G. 2003. "Women and Economy Gain with Lower Rate of Birth." *Wall Street Journal*, 8 August.
- 4 Ibid.; United Nations Development Programme. 2005. *Human Development Report 2005*. New York: United Nations Development Program.
- 5 UN Development Programme. 2006. *Human Development Report 2006*. New York: UN Development Programme; UN Population Division. 2005. *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision*. New York: UN Population Division; UN Population Division. 2006. *World Contraceptive Use 2005*. New York: UN Population Division; World Bank. 2006. *World Development Indicators 2006*. Washington, DC: World Bank; Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). 2006. *The World Factbook 2006*. Washington, DC: CIA.