

Democratic Transition in the Maghreb Countries and the Phenomenon of Illegal Youth Migration

التحول الديمقراطي في دول المغرب العربي وظاهرة الهجرة غير الشرعية لدى الشباب

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Date of submission: 16/03/2026

Date of acceptance: 02/06/2026

Date of publication: 30/06/2026

Abstract:

This study examines the relationship between democratic transition in the Maghreb countries and the rise of irregular migration among youth, within a context marked by accelerating political, economic, and security transformations since the end of the Cold War, intensified by the events of the “Arab Spring.” The study is based on the assumption that the fragility of democratic transition processes and the limited effectiveness of political reforms have contributed to growing political and social frustration among young people, thereby reinforcing tendencies toward irregular migration.

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach supported by a comparative method among Maghreb countries in order to analyze the dynamics of political transition and the limits of democratization in relation to socio-economic factors influencing migration decisions.

The study concludes that irregular migration is not merely the result of economic factors but rather an expression of an incomplete democratic transition. This situation calls for strengthening democratic governance and designing integrated public policies that respond more effectively to youth aspirations.

Keywords: Democratic transition, Maghreb, youth, irregular migration.

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة إشكالية التحول الديمقراطي في دول المغرب العربي وانعكاساته على تنامي ظاهرة الهجرة غير الشرعية لدى فئة الشباب، في سياق اتسم بتسارع التحولات السياسية والاقتصادية والأمنية منذ نهاية الحرب الباردة، وتكتنفها مع أحداث «الربيع العربي». وتنطلق الدراسة من فرضية مفادها أن تعثر

♦ Author Sent

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مسارات التحول الديمقراطي وضعف فعالية الإصلاحات السياسية أسهما في تعميق الإحباط السياسي والاجتماعي لدى الشباب، مما عزز نزعات الهجرة غير النظامية. وتعتمد الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي-التحليلي مدعوماً بالمقاربة المقارنة بين دول المغرب العربي، لتحليل ديناميات التحول السياسي وحدود الانتقال الديمقراطي وعلاقتها بالعوامل السوسيو-اقتصادية المؤثرة في قرارات الهجرة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الهجرة غير الشرعية لا تمثل فقط نتيجة لعوامل اقتصادية، بل تعبيراً عن أزمة تحول ديمقراطي غير مكتمل، ما يستدعي تعزيز الحكم الديمقراطي وصياغة سياسات عمومية مندمجة تستجيب لتطلعات الشباب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحول الديمقراطي، المغرب العربي، الشباب، الهجرة غير الشرعية.

Introduction

The Maghreb region has emerged as one of the significant geopolitical spaces that has increasingly witnessed dynamic interactions due to its local specificities and its position within the sphere of international competition among global powers. This has become particularly evident following the transformations experienced by the region after the end of the Cold War, at both the political and structural economic levels. These transformations generated profound repercussions on the structure of the Maghrebi state, the effects of which extended over nearly two decades.

By the end of 2010, the region witnessed a wave of revolutionary events calling for change, commonly referred to as the “Arab Spring.” This event introduced a set of new challenges to the structural reality of Maghrebi states. Despite the variation in its repercussions and outcomes across different countries, it produced divergent models of state transformation in the Maghreb. In some cases, these developments deepened the security crisis and strengthened various non-state actors that threaten regional security in ways that increasingly exceed the capacity of the state to confront them.

Within the widening gap between the aspirations for political change and the deteriorating living conditions, the phenomenon of irregular migration emerged as a form of silent protest and a last resort for youth seeking to escape the consequences of stalled transitional phases. Migration in this context is no longer merely a search for employment; rather, it has evolved into a sociological phenomenon reflecting the depth of the crisis between a generation aspiring to participatory democracy and a reality pushing them toward what are commonly known as “boats of death” in search of a new horizon beyond the sea.

The study of the relationship between democratic transition and irregular migration has become highly significant in the present context, as it touches upon the very core of stability in the Maghreb region. Its importance lies in understanding how political stagnation or the absence of developmental prospects during transitional periods can transform into a “push factor” driving young people and skilled individuals to migrate. In this sense, the study seeks to link the macro level (politics and political systems) with the micro level (the individual and the decision to migrate), while analyzing the impact of major transformations on the sociological structure of Maghrebi societies.

From this perspective, the present paper examines and analyzes the repercussions of democratic transition on the phenomenon of irregular migration among youth in the Maghreb region. Accordingly, the study revolves around the following central research question:

How does the process of democratic transition affect irregular migration among youth in the Maghreb region? And what mechanisms can be adopted to limit this phenomenon?

Research Methodology

In order to address the aforementioned research problem, the study adopts the descriptive-analytical approach to describe the reality of democratic transition in Maghreb countries and analyze statistical data related to migration. The comparative method is also employed to compare the experiences of countries in the region (Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria) and to assess the varying degrees to which their political trajectories are associated with migration patterns.

Additionally, the study utilizes the institutional-legal approach as well as the state–society relations approach in order to reach scientifically grounded conclusions. The research also relies on various bibliographical sources, including books, academic theses, and research papers.

Structure of the Study

First Axis: Democratic Transition and Irregular Migration – A Conceptual Approach

Second Axis: The Dynamics of Political Transformations in the Maghreb Region

Third Axis: Causes and Motivations of Irregular Migration and Mechanisms to Limit It

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First Axis: Democratic Transition and Irregular Migration – A Conceptual Approach

1. The Concept of Democratic Transition

The concept of democratic transition has not achieved unanimous agreement among scholars and researchers, as its definition varies from one thinker to another. Therefore, it is necessary to examine a number of different conceptualizations and definitions¹.

The Moroccan intellectual Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri defines democratic transition as the shift toward democracy from a state where human rights are not respected in their broad sense, where the political structure is not based on institutions that transcend individuals and groups, and where power is not transferred according to the principle of political majority. Instead, it moves toward a state founded upon three essential pillars:

Human rights, including freedom, equality, democratic liberties, the right to work, and equality of opportunity.

The state of institutions, in which the political and civil structure is based on institutions that transcend individuals regardless of their rank or ethnic, religious, or partisan affiliations.

The peaceful transfer of power within these institutions among multiple political forces on the basis of majority rule while preserving the rights of minorities.

Meanwhile, the American political scientist Philippe C. Schmitter defines democratic transition as “the process of implementing democratic rules either in institutions that had not previously applied them,² or extending such rules to individuals or domains that were previously excluded.” In this sense, it refers to a set of processes and procedures undertaken to transform a non-democratic system into a stable democratic one.

Thus, democratic transition can be understood as a set of measures adopted to move from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system. Three main actors contribute to this process: the political regime, internal opposition forces, and external actors. Each actor attempts to weaken the others, and the final outcome often depends on which actor prevails in the struggle.

¹ Sahraoui, Shahrazad. The Structure of Democratic Transition in the Maghreb Region: A Comparative Study (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco). Master's Thesis in Political Science and International Relations, University of Mohamed Khider, Biskra, 2012–2013, p. 11.

² Sahraoui, Shahrazad. Ibid., p. 12.

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Democratic transition remains a relative and complex process, characterized by the transformation of political systems from authoritarianism toward democracy. Nevertheless, the possibility of setbacks remains present. To minimize such setbacks, it is essential to adopt appropriate methods of transition. Among the most effective mechanisms are negotiated agreements, which ensure that most political elites accept democratic rules.

For democratic transition to succeed, it is also necessary to adapt the traditional social environment to the new democratic variables and to build democratic political, economic, and social institutions in place of authoritarian ones. This requires avoiding disruptions, regressions, and coups that destabilize society without advancing the process of institutional and civilizational construction.

In general, democratic transition is a complex and multidimensional process resulting from the interaction of political, economic, social, and cultural factors. It produces transformations in structures, goals, and processes. At the same time, it is characterized by uncertainty and carries the risk of regression to authoritarianism, as institutions of the old regime often coexist with those of the emerging democratic order.

From an analytical standpoint, the transition to democracy may follow one of two paths:

either a gradual approach, allowing democratic forces within society to establish representative institutions, or a non-gradual path, through which the ruling authority is either compelled to relinquish power under pressure from democratic forces or removed by them.

Ultimately, democratic transition requires a civilized social environment that rejects violence in favor of peaceful interaction, replaces secrecy with transparency, and rejects political monism in favor of pluralism. It is founded upon the construction of a state governed by the rule of law, supported by strong political and social institutions that respect the will of voters through political pluralism and the principle of the peaceful transfer of power.

2. The Concept of Irregular Migration Linguistic Definition:

The term migration carries multiple meanings. It may refer to the voluntary movement of workers and others within a single country, or to forced movement. Linguistically, it derives from the Arabic root “hajara”, which implies separation or departure.

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According to classical Arabic linguistic scholars such as Ibn Fāris and Ibn Manẓūr, the root indicates either severance or relocation. Migration thus refers to leaving one place and moving to another.¹

Hence, migration generally denotes leaving one's habitual place of residence and moving to another location either for settlement or for subsequent relocation.

In sociology, migration may also signify a change in social status, such as changing profession or moving between social classes.

In English, migration terminology distinguishes between three concepts:

Immigration: entry into a foreign country for settlement.

Emigration: leaving one's country to settle in another.

Migration: movement within the same country².

The concept of migration is also used in other fields, such as the migration of capital, animals, or plants, which illustrates its interdisciplinary nature.

Human migration dates back to ancient times. Early settlements emerged in the Horn of Africa and Egypt, followed by successive migration waves to Yemen, then across the Arabian Peninsula, Europe, and Asia. History records numerous important migrations, including the migration of Semitic peoples to Babylon, Phoenicians to the Gulf of Aqaba and Egypt, Greeks to the northern Mediterranean, and the Prophet Muhammad's migration (Hijra) from Mecca to Medina, considered one of the most significant migrations in human history.

However, such definitions often overlook the coercive dimension of migration, particularly irregular or clandestine migration, which may occur as a result of harsh circumstances forcing individuals or groups to migrate.

Theoretical Interpretations of Migration

This section presents the theoretical frameworks that explain migration, focusing on three major schools: The Copenhagen School, the Paris School, and Dependency Theory.

¹ Barkan, Faiza. Mechanisms for Combating Illegal Migration. Complementary Master's Thesis in Law (Specialization: Criminology and Penology), University of El Hadj Lakhdar, Batna, 2011–2012, p. 56.

² Hamdouch, Riyad. "The Evolution of the Concept of Security and Security Studies in International Relations Perspectives." In: Proceedings of the International Conference: Algeria and Security in the Mediterranean: Reality and Prospects. University of Constantine, 2008, p. 272.

1. The Copenhagen School

Researcher Edward Mortimer notes that after the end of the Cold War, European security perceptions underwent significant transformation. Security concerns began to vary according to geographic location within Europe. In Northern and Central Europe, the chaos resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union was perceived as the primary threat to European security. Meanwhile, in Western and Southern Europe, the dominant perception was that threats originated from the southern Mediterranean region.

Mortimer argues that threats from the south have economic, social, and political roots, meaning that military power alone cannot guarantee European security. Instead, comprehensive policies addressing these dimensions are required. This reflects the transformation in the concept of security in the post-Cold War era.

Contemporary security is therefore understood as comprehensive security, encompassing multiple dimensions beyond the purely military. It includes political, social, and economic stability. According to the critical security perspective developed by Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen School, global security concerns the safety of individuals worldwide and emphasizes that the security of one actor depends significantly on the security of others.

Buzan following his entry into the Copenhagen Institute in 1988 as the director of one of the institute's research projects entitled "Non-Military Aspects of European Security." Later, Ole Wæver joined the school and collaborated with Buzan in producing a series of theoretical studies. Through several meetings, these theorists developed an alternative research program in security studies that challenged the dominant concepts and intellectual frameworks prevailing in strategic studies, which had long shaped the understanding of security.

Second: The Paris School

Beginning in the early 1990s, the political construction of security became the central concern for a number of scholars analyzing policing practices. The formation of an internal security field and the securitization of migration in Europe were among the most frequently addressed topics within a research agenda grounded in perspectives derived from political sociology and political theory. These scholars proposed a research agenda that focused on security professionals, governmental security rationality, and the effects of the political organization of security technology and knowledge. With the exception of Huysmans, most of them worked in Paris

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alongside Didier Bigo and Sergio Carrera, publishing their work in the journal *Cultures & Conflits*. Hence emerged the designation “the Paris School.”

The approach of the Paris School modifies the dominant perspective in three ways:

First, instead of analyzing security as a deterministic concept, the Paris School proposes a Foucauldian approach (according to Michel Foucault’s perspective) to security, considering it a “technique of government.”¹

Second, rather than focusing on “speech acts,” the Paris School emphasizes practices, audiences, and the contexts that enable or constrain the production of specific forms of governmentality.

In a world threatened by terrorism, organized crime, persecution, political unrest, and irregular migration, the capacity and efficiency of governmental techniques and strategies for surveillance and maintaining order move to the center of analysis as a practical research program for studying contemporary security issues and problems. For the Paris School, these security issues and challenges appear to the researcher as unresolved questions requiring answers within the framework of an appropriate research program.

However, the new and evolving nature of threats has revealed the degree of interconnection and interdependence among many different professions that may play an effective role in security tasks. These professions include urban police forces, criminal police, counter-terrorism police units, customs services, immigration control authorities, intelligence agencies, counter-espionage services, information technology specialists, and long-distance surveillance systems, in addition to many other professions. As Didier Bigo emphasizes, all of these share the same logic, expertise, and practice and converge toward a single function under the title of “security.” In other words, they all relate to security or are considered part of the security function. Some security institutions that previously received little attention—such as the gendarmerie, customs, border guards, and immigration officers—have now moved to the center of the security field because their productive capacities appear suitable for mitigating contemporary challenges and threats.

¹ Koujili, Sayed Ahmed. “The Etymological Construction of Security: An Introduction to Security Studies.” University of Oran, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Department of Political Science, 2010, p. 10.

Second Axis: The Dynamics of Political Transformations in the Maghreb Region

The peoples of the Maghreb region (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) experienced, during the 1980s, a multidimensional crisis—political, economic, social, and cultural—which negatively affected their societies and led them to organize protests and demonstrations to express their rejection of the prevailing conditions and their deep desire for reform and change. In addition, external pressures played a significant role, becoming almost inevitable in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global spread of liberalism, and the linkage of international institutional assistance to the necessity of promoting democracy and protecting human rights.¹

Under these circumstances, the ruling elites in the states under study decided to initiate political reform processes by adopting democratic transition mechanisms through a set of principles and indicators associated with democratic transformation. Political systems in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco began constitutional reform processes by introducing amendments that incorporated democratic principles according to the specific conditions of each state. Some of these states adopted political pluralism because they had previously followed single-party systems, as was the case in Tunisia and Algeria. Others already possessed mechanisms of party pluralism and elections since independence and attempted to develop them in accordance with new circumstances, as in the case of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Tunisia constituted the starting point for the popular events that swept across Arab countries beginning in 2011. Their effects varied from one country to another depending on the political and social context prevailing in each state. In the Tunisian case, violence remained relatively limited, confined mainly to certain disturbances and limited acts of looting and theft. Moreover, security forces did not resort to extremely violent practices, and the rapid departure of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power helped preserve most state institutions, making the transition relatively smooth. In contrast, in the Libyan case, the obstinacy of President Muammar Gaddafi led the country into a major cycle of violence, which allowed Western powers, along with some Arab states, to intervene militarily, further aggravating the situation. This had profound repercussions for the subsequent transitional phase, particularly given the weakness of state institutions during Gaddafi's rule. Violence continued to such an extent that Libya came to be described as a failed state.

¹ Sahraoui, Shahrzad. *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

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Within the same Maghreb context, Algeria, the Kingdom of Morocco, and Mauritania did not experience large-scale popular uprisings; however, they did witness some protest movements that compelled their regimes to undertake certain measures, most of which were constitutional reforms. All these transformations had an impact on increasing irregular migration.¹

1. Transitional Events in Tunisia

The beginning of the Tunisian protest movement dates back to December 18, 2010, when thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in the city of Sidi Bouzid to express widespread dissatisfaction with conditions of marginalization and to show solidarity with the young man Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire in response to the way security forces had treated him. Following this incident, protests erupted and thousands of demonstrators expressed their rejection of numerous negative conditions, including unemployment, the absence of social justice, and the spread of corruption within the ruling system.

Demonstrations spread across several Tunisian cities, and the number of protesters continued to grow steadily, along with their enthusiasm and courage day after day. The situation gradually moved beyond the control of the security authorities, prompting the Tunisian political system to employ various methods and strategies in an attempt to quell the protests. These methods ranged between intimidation and appeasement, but all of them ultimately failed to halt the wave of popular anger.

The regime also attempted to create disorder by withdrawing security forces from neighborhoods and streets, which led to widespread looting and theft. Despite the criminal nature of these acts, many of them were motivated by hunger. To confront the instability caused by the security vacuum, Tunisian youth, in cooperation with local residents, formed “protection committees” to safeguard security and protect the population.

The Tunisian events unexpectedly led to the resignation of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who temporarily delegated his powers to the Prime Minister in accordance with Article 56 of the Constitution. Within hours, however, a permanent vacancy in the presidential office was declared, and Article 57 of the Constitution was invoked, according to which the Speaker of Parliament assumes the presidency temporarily for a

¹ Saidi, Yacine. *New Security Challenges in the Maghreb*. Master’s Thesis in Political Science and International Relations, University of Oran 2, 2015–2016, p. 62.

period ranging between forty-five and sixty days, during which presidential elections must be organized.

Mohamed Ghannouchi initially announced that he would assume the presidency, but this step was openly opposed by Tunisian constitutional law experts. By the following morning, January 15, the presidential position was once again declared permanently vacant, and the Speaker of Parliament assumed the role of interim president. Surprisingly, the interim president, Fouad Mebazaa, in his first address to the Tunisian people, tasked the former Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi with forming a national unity government to organize parliamentary elections as soon as possible. This move was an attempt by the ruling group to normalize the situation, restore stability and cohesion to the state and the political system, and provide constitutional legitimacy to the process of normalization.¹

However, popular rejection of the transitional Ghannouchi government forced it to submit its collective resignation. Subsequently, Beji Caid Essebsi was appointed Prime Minister, marking a stage in which events indicated a strong popular desire to dismantle Ben Ali's regime entirely.²

2. Libya and Indicators of State Failure

On February 14, 2011, 213 personalities representing various Libyan factions, political forces, and human rights organizations issued a statement demanding that Colonel Muammar Gaddafi step down from power and affirming the Libyan people's right to express their opinions through peaceful demonstrations to achieve this demand. On February 15, large numbers of protesters gathered in Benghazi demanding the release of 110 political prisoners. The police responded with excessive force, resulting in deaths.³

Following these events, protests spread across Libyan cities. On February 20, the two largest tribes in Libya, Tarhuna and Warfalla, announced their support for the revolutionaries. Tribal presence soon dominated the scene, with some tribes directly joining the fighting groups, while others were unable to act more actively for various reasons. Certain tribes were deliberately contained by Gaddafi to prevent them from joining the revolutionaries, such as the tribes of Tarhuna and Warshafana, which occupy strategic positions around Tripoli. Nevertheless, the role played by

¹ Bradley, John. *After the Arab Spring*. Translated by Shaimaa Abdel Hakim Taha. Kalimat Arabia for Translation and Publishing, Cairo, 2012, p. 12.

² Saidi, Yacine. *Op. cit.*, pp. 68–69.

³ Saidi, Yacine. *Op. cit.*, pp. 73–75.

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these tribes proved decisive in accelerating the fall of the regime, particularly after their involvement in the capture of the capital, Tripoli.¹

Amid these developments, the leaders of the Libyan uprising moved quickly to establish the National Transitional Council in early March 2011 to serve as the political face of the movement before the international community. This represented the first decisive turning point in the process of overthrowing the existing authority, as it led to the emergence of a new political entity even before the fall of the regime. The council gained revolutionary legitimacy, challenging the legitimacy of Gaddafi's regime, which rapidly lost control of eastern Libya within a week due to intense battles led by opposition forces.

International actors also took several escalating steps against Gaddafi in an effort to compel him to step down, including referring him and several of his associates to the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity. On the ground, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which imposed a no-fly zone over Libya, along with Arab League Resolution No. 7298 calling on the Security Council to assume responsibility for the deteriorating situation in Libya, provided the legal justification for NATO's military intervention. NATO launched strikes against command centers and key supply lines of Gaddafi's forces after they advanced toward Benghazi.

The intervention targeted the core positions of the regime's forces, destroying or weakening them. The final battles of the eight-month conflict took place around the last strongholds of Gaddafi in Bani Walid, southwest of Misrata, and Sirte. On October 23, three days after the killing of Gaddafi and the fall of Sirte—his hometown and the last stronghold of loyalist forces—the National Transitional Council declared that Libya had been fully liberated.

A new era then began in Libya, characterized by the absence of effective state institutions and the emergence of conflict among the forces produced by the uprising. These forces included internal actors, opposition groups returning from exile, and elites inherited from the Gaddafi era—whether supporters or defectors. Their struggle centered on wealth, influence, and power in Libya, reflecting attempts by both sides to settle old scores dating back to the Gaddafi period. Former revolutionary militias refused to strengthen the national army in order to maintain their control over various

¹ Saidi, Yacine. *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

regions, while some jihadist currents adopted hardline positions against the state and the army in general, viewing them as tools in the hands of foreign powers and representatives of non-Islamic orientations.

3/Popular protests in Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania

The other Maghreb states (Algeria, the Kingdom of Morocco, and Mauritania) did not remain immune to the wave of protest movements. They were also swept by some demonstrations and attempts for change, despite their limited popular support, as they were confined within a narrow framework represented by certain opposition political organizations in Mauritania and informal movements (which are not subject to any organized structural framework such as political parties) in the Kingdom of Morocco, where the protests were led by the Youth of February 25. There were also youth demonstrations with socio-economic demands in Algeria, which the political opposition attempted to transform into an organized movement.

Moreover, these protests were geographically limited, concentrating mainly in the capitals and major cities. On the other hand, they did not extend for long periods of time, as they lacked continuity, unlike the “Saturday demonstrations” in Algeria.

These observations about the protest movements in the three countries do not negate their ability to influence the political trajectory. Despite their failure to generate momentum similar to the Tunisian uprising and to produce radical change, they nevertheless succeeded in pushing political regimes to undertake certain reforms in order to avoid any potential slippages that might threaten the continuity of the regimes in these countries, which found themselves caught between the hammer of the Tunisian model and the anvil of the Libyan model.

A – Protest movements in Algeria (2011):

The phenomenon of protests has been inherent to the development of the Algerian state. Since independence, a number of social movements and some elites have attempted to use protest methods to express their rejection of the government’s policies or to demand certain rights, whether social, political, or cultural. Among the most prominent examples are the Arabization crisis of 1965, the Kabylie events of 1980, and the October events of 1988.¹

¹ Saidi, Yacine. Op. cit., pp. 81–82.

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Beginning in early January 2011, an upward trend in protest movements emerged, taking multiple forms and involving different social groups. These events can be divided into three main manifestations :

- The oil and sugar events.
- The Saturday protests.
- The southern events.

1-3 The Southern Events :

Southern Algeria also witnessed numerous protests that varied in their causes, duration, and in the manner in which the political authorities dealt with them.

1-3-1 The Ouargla Events:

Poor economic conditions, weak local development in the southern regions, and high unemployment rates constituted strong motivations for residents of the southern provinces. Protests in southern Algeria began in February 2013 when a group of unemployed youth demonstrated in front of the headquarters of the “National Employment Agency” in Ouargla. University graduates among them burned their academic certificates in protest against their living conditions and unemployment.

Security services confronted these demonstrations using repressive methods, including the use of tear gas, beating demonstrators, and dispersing them by force. In addition, intimidation and security pressure were employed through the interrogation of those who called for the demonstrations, questioning and detaining them, and referring them to the judiciary on charges of illegal gathering.

B – Protests in Mauritania:

Mauritanian opposition parties, led by former president Ahmed Ould Daddah, preceded the mobilization of the Mauritanian street by calling for demonstrations through the organization of marches and popular rallies in the capital Nouakchott beginning on January 12, 2011. Although opposition forces focused on social realities in an attempt to mobilize popular support by raising slogans condemning the living conditions of citizens, this initiative did not receive widespread public support, particularly after the authorities organized parallel popular rallies.

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The aim of these rallies was to present the achievements of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and to call for dialogue and the preservation of stability in order to complete the process of state-building.

Calls launched by activists on social media platforms constituted the actual beginning of popular protests in Mauritania. This campaign resulted in the creation of the Coordination of February 25 Youth, coinciding with the first field attempts that began on the same day, which happened to be a Friday. Numerous demonstrations started from various mosques in the capital Nouakchott and moved through the major streets of the city, eventually ending at Bloc Square, one of the largest squares in the Mauritanian capital and one of its most sensitive and potentially volatile locations due to its position in the heart of the city among government buildings and the headquarters of banks and important state institutions.¹

There, hundreds of young people decided to organize an open sit-in until the demands of the protest movement were achieved.

The demands of the protesters in Mauritania varied between calls to reform the regime and calls for its complete overthrow. The demands also included social issues such as youth employment, reducing unemployment, raising wage levels, strengthening national unity, and condemning the practices of many officials within state agencies and institutions.

The protests continued for several months, but their confinement to the capital Nouakchott and the success of the security authorities in dispersing the sit-in at Bloc Square weakened them. In addition, the way the political regime dealt with this movement—oscillating between expressing willingness to respond to reform demands and attempting to weaken it by exploiting tribal affiliations—created a significant division in the pace of protest activity in Mauritania. This was particularly evident after the political regime appointed some activists to positions of responsibility. Some of them, with encouragement from the authorities, joined the political process by establishing a political party called the “Youth Movement,” which was tasked with negotiating with the regime regarding the demands of the protest movement.

The movement that occurred in the Maghreb countries also exacerbated the issue of migration. Migration was no longer limited to Moroccans and Algerians who, during previous years, had regularly attempted to cross the Strait of Gibraltar in small wooden boats. Citizens of the Sahel countries,

¹ Saidi, Yacine. *Op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

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which suffer from difficult economic, social, and political conditions, also became among the most likely candidates for irregular migration to Europe.

Furthermore, the Strait of Gibraltar was no longer the only route taken by small boats due to the tightening of security patrols along the Spanish coasts. The attraction center for migrants shifted to the occupied city of Melilla, located on Moroccan territory and considered a gateway to Spanish territory. Another route is through the Strait of Sicily via Tunisia toward Italy, or through the Libyan coasts toward Italy as well.

This phenomenon has expanded in recent years, and the number of irregular migrants who managed to enter the Schengen area through dangerous sea journeys in search of better living opportunities has increased. The number of those who drowned at sea has also risen. The issue of irregular migrants has increasingly appeared on the agenda of discussions and meetings between the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean and the countries of the European Union.

Despite all the security measures, these efforts have failed to curb the phenomenon, reduce the number of those who drown, or stop the wooden boats that cross the 14 kilometers between Tangier in northern Morocco and Spanish territory during the late hours of the night. These boats have therefore become known as “boats of death,” or “pateras,” as they are called in Spanish.

Third Axis: Motives and Causes of Migration and Mechanisms to Limit It

1. Motives for Illegal Migration

Illegal migration is no longer a simple phenomenon; rather, it has grown significantly along with its impacts and increasing forms. This situation requires extensive coordination and cooperation in order to deter and control it by addressing the root causes that drive it. Therefore, studying the causes of migration is of great importance, because any solution that ignores these causes will remain ineffective and will not produce real results.

First: Economic and Social Causes

Many researchers attribute the causes of migration to economic and social factors, which some call the **classical causes**, since they represent the primary factor behind the emergence of migration.

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The economic motive for migration has a strong influence on the decision to migrate. According to 2005 statistics, there were about **190 million migrants** distributed across the continents as follows:

- 34% in Europe
- 23% in North America
- 28% in Asia
- 9% in Africa
- 3% in Latin America and the Caribbean
- 3% in Australia and New Zealand

These percentages clearly reflect the influence and urgency of the economic motive for migration. Approximately **60% of migrants settled in the most developed and wealthy societies**, and the percentage rises to **about 67%** if migrants to the oil-rich Gulf countries are included.

If the number of refugees (**13.5 million refugees**) is excluded from the total number of migrants—considering that refugees are mainly concentrated in Asia and Africa (about **7.8 million in Asia** and **3 million in Africa**)—then the proportion of migrants heading to developed and wealthy countries rises from **67% to about 71%**, which further confirms the relative importance of economic factors as a driving force for migration.

The relative weight of economic factors also determines the **type of migration**, whether permanent or temporary. When economic motives drive migration, most migrants tend to settle in host countries, whether through legal or illegal ¹means.

One of the consequences of unemployment is the increase in poverty. The **Arab Spring revolutions** increased poverty rates; for example, the proportion of people living below the poverty line in Algeria reached around **10%**. Wage disparities also encourage migration, since the minimum wage in some developed countries may be **three to five times higher** than in certain developing countries. While Europe experiences shortages in labor and abundant job opportunities with unemployment rates around **5.6%**, Maghreb labor is relatively cheap and capable of working in various sectors, even those rejected by Europeans.

¹ Rachid, Saad. The Reality of Illegal Migration in Algeria from the Perspective of Human Security. Master's Thesis in Political Science (Maghreb Studies), University of Mohamed Khider, Biskra, 2011–2012, p. 56.

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In Algeria, the distribution of national wealth has been associated with several problems, particularly among **university graduates and young people with vocational training certificates**. Social institutions have been unable to absorb the large number of graduates (approximately **230,000 students graduate annually from Algerian universities**). The inability to meet their minimum aspirations leads to increasing individual frustration and collective resentment. Consequently, individuals may become more inclined to adopt marginal or informal cultures, and **irregular migration becomes one manifestation of this culture**.

Illegal migration is therefore a reflection of young people's dissatisfaction with the conditions in their countries. Many migrant-sending countries suffer from political deprivation, authoritarian systems, lack of freedom of expression, absence of popular democracy, and weak respect for human rights and public freedoms. This creates feelings of psychological and social instability among individuals and drives them to seek a safe place where they can achieve human dignity, freedom of opinion, self-expression, and democracy. This phenomenon is particularly evident in highly authoritarian countries of the developing world, where increasing numbers of people attempt to migrate by any possible illegal means to escape the existing reality.¹

In this context, the former Spanish Prime Minister **Philip González** once said:

"If I were a young Maghrebi, I would try to migrate, and if they caught me, I would try again."

This statement reflects Europeans' awareness of the conditions faced by youth in the Maghreb countries, characterized by restrictions on freedoms, lack of democracy, limited freedom of expression, and a closed political sphere. As a result, many young people feel marginalized and excluded from political processes that often serve only certain groups. Thus, illegal migration becomes **a cry of protest by youth against administrative corruption in Maghreb countries**, leading them to seek new ways to achieve "harga" (irregular migration) with the least possible risk.²

¹ Ramadan, Mohamed. Irregular Migration in Algerian Society: Its Dimensions and Relationship with Social Alienation – A Field Study. Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tlemcen, p. 112.

² Rachid, Saad. Op. cit., p. 63.

2. Mechanisms to Limit Illegal Migration

First: Social and Economic Mechanisms

Human nature is not always revolutionary or constantly renewed among all people. Herbert Read analyzed its traditional and stagnant side, stating:

“Many people find security in large groups, happiness in remaining unknown, and dignity in routine work. They aspire only to be heads within a herd led by a shepherd, soldiers awaiting orders from a commander, or slaves under the authority of a tyrant.”¹

Only a few individuals develop ambitions that drive them to become leaders for those who willingly choose to remain followers. This situation closely resembles that of irregular migrants or those aspiring to migrate illegally.

Feelings of frustration are inevitable in human life, but they can be reduced through several measures:

A. Training individuals from an early age to tolerate a certain level of frustration without being negatively affected by it, since life cannot always give people everything they want, when and where they want it. If parents fulfill all their child’s demands, the child will face a shock upon entering real life.

B. Individuals should avoid creating a wide gap between their aspirations and their abilities. In other words, they should not exaggerate their ambitions beyond their physical, material, or intellectual capabilities. Instead, they should set goals that fall within their realistic capacities.

The gap between ability and ambition often leads to feelings of failure, frustration, loss of self-confidence, unhappiness, and a sense of misfortune.

C. Individuals can avoid many frustrating situations by carefully planning their lives and programs, calculating possible variables and risks so they are not surprised by unexpected obstacles. Plans should be organized and associated with clear timelines.

D. Individuals should continuously develop their skills, talents, knowledge, and experiences to increase their productive, intellectual, and creative efficiency. Improving education and receiving appropriate training helps

¹ Barkan, Faiza. Mechanisms for Combating Illegal Migration. Complementary Master’s Thesis in Law (Criminology and Penology), University of El Hadj Lakhdar, Batna, 2011–2012, p. 65.

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them face life's challenges competently and reduces the likelihood of failure and frustration.¹

Societal Security

The study of social security in the Arab world examines the available conditions necessary to ensure that Arab societies are built on solid foundations that guarantee psychological, economic, and political stability for their citizens. It also addresses the disturbances affecting these societies due to deviance and crime, with the aim of understanding their causes and finding preventive solutions.

Ensuring the basic requirements for the development of Arab societies is closely linked to **social and economic development**. The more successful the development process is in achieving progress, the more favorable the environment becomes for establishing stable security systems.

Every society needs institutions capable of assuming defined responsibilities in development and progress and providing the required services effectively. Economic development without parallel institutional development will fail to meet citizens' needs. This imbalance can lead to negative consequences such as inequality in income distribution, inefficient investment, uneven sectoral growth, social structural imbalances, and inadequate social services.

Development goals are broad and not limited to economic objectives alone. Achieving development requires working on several fronts simultaneously. Among the most important goals are:

A. Increasing the production of goods and services capable of meeting people's basic needs, thereby freeing individuals from poverty, deprivation, ignorance, and disease.

B. Raising the standard of living by improving the satisfaction of basic needs, eliminating poverty and major inequalities in wealth distribution, and providing opportunities for self-realization so individuals can contribute creatively and productively while maintaining human dignity.

C. Liberating individuals from exploitation and humiliation by providing opportunities to develop their capabilities, practice freedoms, and participate in decision-making, while also strengthening economic independence and reducing dependence on the global capitalist system.

¹ Barkan, Faiza. Ibid., pp. 67–68.

These objectives can ultimately be summarized in one comprehensive goal: **human liberation**, meaning freeing individuals and societies from poverty, deprivation, exploitation, and dependency while expanding opportunities and enabling societies to control their development and progress.¹

Second: Political and Legal Mechanisms

The state plays several roles to ensure a dignified life for its citizens, protect their freedoms, and guarantee their security, thereby reducing their desire to leave the country even through illegal means.

A. Preserving the Authority of the State:

A state gains its authority when it is sovereign, free from external pressures, and able to exercise its powers in various directions. Political authority includes establishing laws that regulate society, determining behavioral rules for individuals, and making judgments or decisions in cases of violations. These powers allow the state to intervene in economic, social, political, military, civil, cultural, and even religious affairs while maintaining peace and stability and establishing institutions that guarantee social security. In democratic systems, the authority of the state is reflected through laws and traditions that ensure citizens recognize and respect the legitimacy of state institutions.

B. Security Role:

Ensuring internal security and protecting external borders are traditional functions of the state. Political philosophers have long considered security a central mission of the state. Since security is linked to threats and risks, states must take necessary measures to combat illegal migration, such as strengthening border protection and implementing preventive security strategies to stop such crimes before they occur.²

Conclusion

Transformations in political systems are often accompanied by emerging security threats, as these transitions frequently create institutional gaps within the state. This situation is evident in the **Maghreb countries**, which face increasing illegal migration both as transit countries and as countries of origin.

¹ Barkan, Faiza. Ibid., p. 69.

² Barkan, Faiza. Ibid., pp. 70–71.

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The outcomes of these transformations have not satisfied citizens, particularly the youth, creating a negative perception of the ability of political systems to confront threats and provide opportunities that encourage young people to remain in their countries through employment and improved living standards.

The growing number of irregular migrants—both transiting and native citizens—clearly indicates that the political elites in the Maghreb region have failed to strengthen institutions and adequately address the aspirations of their youth.

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