



## Analysis of Local Governance in the Maghreb Region—The Case of Mauritania and Algeria

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**Abstract:** The Maghreb region is undergoing a period of significant political and economic transition, and improving national governance capacity is a critical challenge facing the governments of these countries. Local governance, as a key component of national governance, plays a crucial role in maintaining public order and service delivery. This article examines the local governance systems and central-local relations in two Maghreb countries - Mauritania and Algeria - to explore their successful experiences and the challenges they face. The local governance system of Mauritania is highly centralized, with the central government maintaining strong control over local decision-making that is deeply influenced by the country's traditional tribal political structure. In contrast, Algeria, as a republic in the Maghreb, has a local governance system that combines elements of centralization and decentralization. Both countries have achieved certain successes in local governance, but also face difficulties in balancing central and local power, as well as improving the efficiency of public service provision. The practices of local governance in the Maghreb region provide useful lessons for other developing countries. Going forward, Maghreb countries should further promote local autonomy, strengthen coordination between central and local governments, and enhance overall governance capacity to maintain social stability and foster sustainable development.

*Keywords: Local Governance, Mauritania, Algeria, Central-Local Relations*

## Introduction

The Arab Maghreb region is located in northwestern Africa, between 15° north latitude and 37° north latitude, and 25° east longitude and 17° west longitude. The region is mainly composed of five countries: Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania (MOROCCO, ALGERIA, LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA, MAURITANIA, & TUNISIA, 1989). Mauritania is a Muslim country located in West Africa and is also part of the Maghreb region (Rhomari, 1991). The total area of the region is around 6 million square kilometers. The region is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Egypt to the east, and the coastal countries of the Sahara Desert in Africa to the south

(Noureddine, Gaaloul, Eslamian, & Katlane, 2021). This region is very close to the European continent, with the Strait of Gibraltar only about 14 kilometers wide.

## **1. A Brief description to the local governance structure of Mauritania**

### **1.1 The division of power and relationship between the central government and local governments**

Mauritania has an area of about 1.037 million square kilometers, making it the 11th largest country in Africa and the 28th largest country in the world. It is worth noting that about 90% of Mauritania's territory is located in the desert region. Mauritania has a population of about 5 million, most of which is concentrated in the relatively temperate southern region of the country (Naia & Brito, 2021). Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott, is located on the Atlantic coast and is the country's largest city, accounting for about one-third of the total population. Administratively, Mauritania is composed of 13 administrative regions, namely Adrar, Assaba, Brakna, Dakhlet Nouadhibou, Gorgol, Guidimaka, Trarza, Tiris-Zemmour, Tagant, Hodh Ech Chargui, Hodh El Gharbi, Inchiri, Nouakchott Nord, Nouakchott Ouest, Nouakchott Sud, and Tagant. These administrative regions are further divided into 56 counties (James, 2002).

Mauritania's local governance structure reflects the power distribution and mutual relationship between the central government and local governments. This system reflects the balance between centralization and local autonomy, which helps promote national development and improve administrative efficiency. In Mauritania, the central government holds the major decision-making power and the majority of resource allocation power. The constitution stipulates that the President is the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, with the final decision-making power on major domestic, foreign, and defense affairs. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister appointed by the President leads the government and formulates and implements various policies. The Parliament, composed of the National Assembly and the Senate, oversees the work of the government. This governance model that emphasizes centralization has made the voice of local governments relatively weak in decision-making and resource allocation (Ciavolella, 2014). However, Mauritania's local governments also have a certain degree of autonomy. The constitution stipulates that administrative regions have their own parliaments and administrative agencies, and can autonomously manage their local affairs according to the law. Each region has a governor appointed by the central government, responsible for the administrative management of the region. At the county level and below, there are also local governments at the township level, mainly responsible for the provision of basic public services. This relatively decentralized local governance model allows the needs of some remote areas to be responded to in a timely manner, enhancing the execution capacity of local governments.

However, the relationship between the central and local governments is not completely coordinated. On the one hand, the central government dominates, intervening in local affairs by dispatching governors and issuing orders. On the other hand, local governments also try to expand their autonomy and seek more autonomy in the implementation of specific policies. In general, this governance model of centralization and decentralization has led to contradictions in the division of power between the central and local governments and its actual operation. Local governments find it difficult to obtain sufficient financial support to meet the needs of the local public, leading to serious imbalances in infrastructure construction and public service delivery. Local governments are to some extent constrained by the central

government and find it difficult to complete self-governance independently. Additionally, in public policy formulation, although local governments can put forward demands based on local realities, the final decision-making power still rests with the central government. The policies formulated also need to be implemented by local governments. This power balance and coordination between the upper and lower levels often leads to difficulties in execution. Local governments sometimes find it difficult to fully comply with central instructions, and the central government also cannot fully supervise the implementation by local governments.

## **1.2 Cultural Development in Mauritania**

Since gaining independence in 1960, Mauritania has experienced multiple coups and periods of military rule. Through this turbulent history, Mauritania has been seeking a stable and peaceful political transition. The 2019 presidential election was the first peaceful transfer of power in Mauritania's history, marking the country's transition towards democracy. Mauritania is a country rich in diversity, with a variety of cultures and traditions. The country is composed of a series of tribes and ethnic groups, each with its own unique language, customs, and way of life. This diversity adds richness to Mauritania's culture, but also presents challenges in the political and social sphere (Salem, Zekeria Ould Ahmed, 2020). Geographically, Mauritania is located in the heart of the Sahara Desert, bordering Algeria, Mali, Senegal, and Western Sahara. This strategic location makes it an important transit country, connecting sub-Saharan Africa with the Mediterranean coast.

However, the vast desert landscape also poses challenges for the country's infrastructure development and economic growth. Economically, Mauritania is a country primarily focused on mining and pastoralism. Mineral resources particularly iron ore and copper, have been the main pillars of its economic development.

In recent years, the government has also been actively developing the fishing and tourism industries to diversify the economic structure (Zartman & William, 1961). Politically, Mauritania has undergone a complex and difficult transition process. Starting from the military coup in 1978, the country experienced a series of coups and transitional governments. It wasn't until 2019 that Mauritania finally achieved its first peaceful transfer of power, marking the country's move towards democracy and stability. The new President, Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, has been committed to reforms, strengthening government institutions and local governance, and laying the foundation for the country's future development. The government has also prioritized socioeconomic development, working to reduce the wealth gap and ensure that the dividends of democracy benefit all citizens (Horma & Ettah Mohamed, 2023). Mauritania still faces some challenges, such as the continued influence of the military in politics and the need for more time to consolidate the democratization process. However, as long as the government, the military, and the people remain united, Mauritania will ultimately realize its vision of peace, stability, and prosperity. As a country rich in diverse cultures, Mauritania is writing a new chapter of development in its own unique way. From turbulence to peace, from poverty to prosperity, this ancient desert nation is demonstrating its resilience and determination, composing an inspiring anthem of progress. In the not-too-distant future, Mauritania is poised to rise as a more stable and prosperous nation on the African continent.

## **1.3 Mauritania's Local Government Governance**

As a country in the Maghreb region, Mauritania has adopted a unitary system, but its local government governance system has some unique features. Unlike the centralized state model, Mauritania's local governments maintain a certain degree of autonomy, reflecting the concept of decentralization and pluralistic governance. Mauritania's local administrative system consists of three levels: regions (wilaya), departments (moughataa), and communes (commune).

Each administrative unit has an administrative head and a local council, providing institutional safeguards for the operation of local governments. The regional governor (Wali) is appointed by the President and is responsible for coordinating the socioeconomic development of the region. Regional governments have a high degree of autonomy and can formulate and implement their own development plans. The regional council is elected and is primarily responsible for reviewing budgets and overseeing administrative work. This system of regional governors provides local governments with a significant degree of autonomy, facilitating tailored regional development.<sup>1i</sup>

The department prefect (Hakem) is appointed by the regional governor and is responsible for organizing the implementation of policies and public services. The departmental council is elected and oversees the work of the department government. This system of departmental government power being constrained and supervised by the local council helps prevent corruption and improve the transparency and efficiency of government work. The commune mayor (Maire) is elected by the local residents and is responsible for the daily management and public affairs of the commune. The communal council is elected and exercises legislative and supervisory functions. This grassroots democratic election mechanism enhances the sense of participation and belonging of local residents, helping to meet the specific needs of different regions (Kirsch-Jung & Soeftestad, 2006).

Mauritania also has some special local administrative units, such as nomadic resident areas (Moughata nomade) and urban areas (Commune urbaine), the former serving the nomadic ethnic groups and the latter managing the densely populated urban areas. This differentiated local governance model reflects Mauritania's care for different regions and ethnic groups, promoting balanced national development. Furthermore, the Mauritanian government attaches great importance to the role of civil society organizations in local governance. Many community development projects are led and implemented by local self-governing organizations, which not only enhances the relevance and sustainability of the projects but also strengthens the participation of local residents. This pluralistic governance model of government leadership and social participation helps to mobilize various forces to jointly promote regional development (Kirsch-Jung & Soeftestad, 2006). Although the central government reserves the final decision-making power on certain major issues, local governments have a high degree of autonomy in areas such as financial budgeting, infrastructure construction, and social affairs. This appropriate division of power between the central and local governments helps to play the leading role of local

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<sup>1</sup> Mauritania consists of 15 wilayas, an Arabic word denoting an administrative subdivision, usually understood to mean 'province' but in Mauritania often translated as 'region'. The wilaya consists of moughataas (French: 'Departement' [ 'Prefecture' is sometimes used]). The moughataa consists of 'Communes' [ 'municipalité' is also used] (rural municipalities), which is the lowest administrative level. Under the 'Commune' are villages. On administrative positions on the levels of wilaya and the moughataa, cf.

governments and meet the specific needs of different regions. Overall, Mauritania's local government governance system exhibits a certain degree of decentralization and pluralism. The central government provides institutional safeguards for the operation of local governments through laws and regulations, while local governments play their roles based on their own conditions, jointly promoting the country's balanced development. This coordinated governance model of central-local interaction lays an important foundation for Mauritania's long-term stability and prosperity. Mauritania's local government governance system embodies the unity of a unitary state while also reflecting the autonomy of local governments. This governance model, which combines centralization and decentralization, institutional safeguards and innovative practices, provides a good reference for us. In the process of promoting the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity, we need to further clarify the boundaries of responsibilities between the central and local governments, enhance the autonomy and flexibility of local governments, and allow local governments to play their due role in national development. Only through decentralization and pluralism can we maximize the enthusiasm of local governments, promote coordinated development of different regions, and achieve the long-term prosperity of the country.

## **2. A Brief description to the Local Governance Structure in Algeria**

### **2.1 The Division of Powers and the Relationship between the Central and Local Governments**

Algeria is an Arab country located in North Africa, belonging to the Maghreb region. The country has an area of approximately 2.38 million square kilometers, making it the second-largest country in Africa and the tenth-largest in the world. It is noteworthy that about 90% of Algeria's territory is located in the desert region. Algeria has a population of approximately 44.90 million, mainly concentrated in the relatively moderate northern part of the country. The capital of Algeria, Algiers, is located on the Mediterranean coast and is the largest city in the country, accounting for about a quarter of the total population (Martinez, 2006). Administratively, Algeria is composed of 58 states (Wilaya), which are further subdivided into approximately 1,541 municipalities (Communes) and 553 villages (Dairas). This multi-level local administrative system reflects the power distribution and mutual relationship between the central and local governments in Algeria (Entelis, & Naylor, 2019).

The local governance structure in Algeria reflects a balance between centralization and local autonomy. On the one hand, the Algerian central government holds the power to make major decisions and control the majority of resource allocation. The constitution stipulates that the President is the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, with the final decision-making authority on critical domestic, foreign, and defense affairs. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister, appointed by the President, leads the government and formulates and implements various policies. The People's National Assembly and the Council of the Nation oversee the government's work. This governance model, which emphasizes centralization, ensures the unity and effectiveness of national policies (Zaoui & Boumediene. On the other hand, Algerian local governments also enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. The constitution stipulates that states and municipalities have their own local assemblies and administrative bodies, which can autonomously manage local affairs according to local realities and in accordance with the law. Governors are appointed by the central government and are responsible for state-level administrative management. Municipal and town governments are primarily responsible for providing basic public

services. This relatively decentralized local governance model helps to respond to local needs promptly and enhance the execution capacity of local governments. However, the relationship between the central and local governments is not entirely harmonious. On the one hand, the central government intervenes in local affairs through the appointment of governors and the issuance of directives, maintaining control over the local governments. On the other hand, local governments also try to expand their autonomy and seek more independent space in the implementation of specific policies. This tension between centralization and decentralization has led to certain contradictions in the division of powers between the central and local governments and their actual operation (Hamidane 2024).

For example, in terms of resource allocation, the central government often concentrates more resources on the capital Algiers and other coastal cities, while the impoverished inland regions are relatively marginalized. Local governments often lack sufficient financial support to meet the demands of the local population, leading to serious imbalances in infrastructure development and public service provision. To a certain extent, local governments are constrained by the central government and find it difficult to complete self-governance independently.

Similarly, in the formulation of public policies, although local governments can raise demands based on local realities, the final decision-making power still lies with the central government. The various policies formulated by the central government also need to be implemented by local governments. This power balance and coordination between the upper and lower levels often leads to difficulties in execution. Local governments sometimes find it challenging to fully comply with central instructions, and the central government is also unable to fully monitor the implementation by local governments.

On the one hand, the central government should further improve the division of powers and responsibilities between the central and local governments, granting local governments more autonomy and leaving room for local innovation and distinctive development. At the same time, the central government should increase fiscal transfer payments to remote and impoverished regions, promoting balanced regional development. On the other hand, local governments also need to further improve their management capabilities and execution, proactively take on more responsibilities, and better meet the needs of the local population. Local governments at all levels should also strengthen coordination and cooperation to form a vertically integrated work mechanism. Through the reasonable distribution of powers between the central and local governments, as well as the close cooperation among all levels of government, the local governance system in Algeria will be further optimized to provide a strong guarantee for the country's long-term stability and development.

## **2.2 Cultural Development in Algeria**

The historical development trajectory of Algeria has many similarities with that of Mauritania. As a country that gained independence from colonial rule in the mid-20th century, Algeria also experienced a difficult and tortuous process of political transformation. After independence, Algeria was once trapped in military rule and political turmoil. In 1965, the military staged a coup and overthrew the first president, Ben Bella, ushering in a 19-year period of military rule. During this time, Algeria's political situation was quite unstable, with frequent military mutinies and political conflicts, which heavily burdened the country's development. It was not until 1988 that the strong demand of the people prompted the

government to launch political reforms and begin the transition to a multi-party democratic system (Willis, 2022).

Despite the period of chaos and turbulence after its independence, Algeria's rich and diverse cultural tradition has always been the country's most valuable asset. Algeria is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, mainly composed of Arabs, Berbers, and nomadic groups from the Sahara Desert. People from different cultural backgrounds have coexisted harmoniously for a long time, forming a unique Algerian culture. This multicultural heritage has infused boundless creativity into Algeria's art, literature, and music. In terms of geography, as a country along the Mediterranean coast, Algeria's southern border is adjacent to the Sahara Desert. This geographic environment has brought both unique opportunities and challenges to the country's development. On the one hand, the vast hinterland bordering the Sahara has provided Algeria with abundant mineral resources, laying a foundation for its industrialization. On the other hand, the endless desert has also posted significant obstacles to infrastructure construction and economic development (Hollands, 2014).

Economically, oil and natural gas have always been the mainstays of Algeria's economy. The abundant fossil energy resources have provided the driving force for the country's economic growth. However, the over-reliance on energy exports has also led to an imbalance in the economic structure, making Algeria's economy long-term single-minded and fragile. In recent years, the government has begun to focus on economic diversification, vigorously developing agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism, in an effort to achieve sustainable development. Politically, Algeria has also made important progress in recent years. In 1999, Bouteflika was elected president, marking the beginning of a new chapter in Algeria's transition from military rule to democracy. Since then, the government has continuously promoted constitutional reform, strengthened parliamentary building, and expanded civil rights. Although the influence of the military in politics still exists, Algeria has generally shown a trend of political stability and accelerated democratic progress (Chekouri, Chibi & Benbouziane, 2017; Benmahdi, & Samir, 2024).

### **2.3 Local Governance in Algeria**

Algeria is a highly centralized country, but in recent years it has also gradually promoted decentralization reforms to better meet the needs of local citizens. The 1967 Municipal Law is the basic legal foundation for local governance in Algeria. The law stipulates that the local administrative unit in Algeria is the Municipal People's Assembly (Assemblée Populaire Communale, APC). The Municipal People's Assembly is the most grassroots administrative management institution in Algeria, responsible for managing public affairs within its jurisdiction (Entelis, & Naylor, 2019). The Municipal People's Assemblies in Algeria do not need to meet certain population and revenue criteria to be established but are determined by the unified administrative divisions across the country. The Municipal People's Assemblies in Algeria have relatively strong decision-making and executive powers. They are responsible for road construction, management of public utilities such as water, electricity and gas, garbage disposal, public health and security, and other affairs within their jurisdiction. At the same time, the Municipal People's Assemblies also undertake the functions of developing the local economy and promoting social equity. They can independently compile and execute budgets, and manage their own financial income and expenditure (Benmahdi & Samir, 2024). However, the central government oversees and reviews the activities of the Municipal People's Assemblies through the provincial governors (Wali).

The Municipal People's Assemblies consist of 15-35 members, who are directly elected by the voters for a term of 5 years. Decisions are made within the Assembly through majority voting. The Assembly elects a president from among its members, who is responsible for presiding over meetings and organizing the implementation of resolutions. The president also serves a 5-year term and can be re-elected (Belakhdar, 2013). In recent years, the Algerian government has been committed to strengthening decentralization. The 2011 constitutional amendment further expanded the powers of the Municipal People's Assemblies and granted them more autonomy. The 2019 Local Election Law further improved the electoral system of the Municipal People's Assemblies, enhancing the fairness and transparency of the elections. At the same time, the central government has also increased fiscal transfers to the Municipal People's Assemblies, strengthening their financial capacity (Cherbi, 2024).

The tradition of local governance in Algeria dates back to the administrative institution design during the French colonial rule in the 19th century. After Algeria became a French colony in 1830, France began to establish a series of administrative management systems in the local area. Initially, France set up some local committees in Algeria to handle public affairs such as infrastructure construction and public health. Over time, these committees gradually evolved into more formal local government institutions. In 1868, France established the first Municipal People's Assembly in the Algerian capital Algiers. Subsequently, other major cities such as Constantine and Oran also set up their own Municipal People's Assemblies. These Municipal People's Assemblies were responsible for managing local finance, infrastructure construction, urban planning and other affairs, to a certain extent achieving local autonomy. However, during the French colonial rule, the powers of these local government institutions were greatly limited, and they were largely just implementing the policies of the central government (Bennoune, 2002). In the early 20th century, with the rise of the Algerian independence movement, the status and role of local governments also underwent changes. After independence, the Algerian government tried to consolidate national unity and strengthen the central government's control over the local governments through decentralization. In 1967, the Algerian government promulgated a new local administrative system, dividing the country into 48 provinces (Wilaya) and 1,541 communes, implementing a system of governors and mayors. Under this system, the governors are appointed by the central government and are responsible for implementing the central government's policies. The commune governments, on the other hand, are responsible for managing local public affairs, such as infrastructure development and public services. However, due to constraints on financial allocations and personnel appointments, the autonomy of the commune governments is heavily restricted, making it difficult to truly achieve local self-governance. In addition, Algeria's local governance also faces some other issues (UCLG, 2008). First, there is an imbalance in urban-rural development, with large cities like Algiers receiving far more resources and policy support than rural areas, leading to a widening development gap between urban and rural areas. Second, there is a problem with the capacity building of local governments. Due to historical reasons, the overall quality of Algeria's local civil servants is relatively low, lacking professional management capabilities, which to some extent limits the efficiency of local governments. Furthermore, the lack of fiscal autonomy of local governments is also a major obstacle. Since the vast majority of fiscal revenues are controlled by the central government, local governments find it difficult to raise funds independently to carry out various construction and public services, making it hard to meet the growing needs of local residents.

In recent years, to address the above issues, the Algerian government has also taken some reform measures. In 2011, the government promulgated a new local election law, granting more autonomy to local governments. At the same time, it has increased the fiscal transfer payments to underdeveloped regions in an attempt to narrow the urban-rural gap (Limam, 2012).

However overall, the reform of local governance in Algeria is still a difficult path. The central government's control and intervention over local governments remain strong, and the autonomy and responsibility of local governments need to be further enhanced. How to truly achieve local self-governance while maintaining national unity remains a major challenge for the Algerian government. In short, the tradition of local governance in Algeria stems from the French colonial rule period, and its development has gone through a transformation from local committees to formal local government institutions. After independence, the Algerian government tried to consolidate national unity through decentralization, but the autonomy of local governments is still heavily restricted. Currently, Algeria's local governance faces various problems, such as unbalanced urban-rural development, inadequate capacity building of local governments, and lack of fiscal autonomy. The government is implementing a series of reform measures in an effort to find a path of local governance that suits the country's conditions.

### **3. Local Governance Challenges in the Maghreb Region**

As countries in the North African Maghreb region, Mauritania and Algeria face some unique challenges in local governance. Although these two countries differ in their geographic location and historical-cultural backgrounds, they share some common features in local governance. Mauritania is a relatively traditional Arab-Islamic country, where the local governance system is based on tribes and clans, and the influence of the central government is relatively weak. The government has long tried to strengthen centralization but has faced resistance from local forces. In recent years, the government has taken some measures, such as holding local elections and allocating funds to local authorities, to enhance local autonomy. However, due to historical and cultural factors, tribal and religious forces still dominate local affairs, making it difficult for the central government to truly control the local. In comparison, Algeria's local governance system is more modernized. Since independence, Algeria has maintained a relatively centralized political system, with the central government having strong control. But since the 1990s, decentralization reforms have been gradually implemented. Currently, Algeria has a direct election system for provincial governors and mayors, and local governments enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in areas such as budgeting and public services. However, the central government still maintains an important influence on the local, and the autonomy of local governments is limited.

The main challenges that Mauritania and Algeria face in local governance are:

1. The balance of power between the central and local governments, specifically how to give local authorities more autonomy while maintaining the overall interests of the state.
2. The institutionalization of the local governance system, including improving laws and regulations, personnel management, and public finance.
3. Eliminating the influence of traditional local forces such as factions and tribes on local affairs, and improving the efficiency and credibility of local governance. Only by continuously exploring

local governance models suited to their own national conditions can the Maghreb region better promote social and economic development.

#### **4. The Maghreb Region Faces Population Growth and Urbanization Challenges**

In recent years, the Arab Maghreb region countries in North Africa, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania, have been facing severe population growth and urbanization challenges. According to UN projections, the total population of the region is expected to exceed 200 million by 2050, with the majority concentrated in urban areas. This rapid urbanization has brought about various challenges for these countries (Benabdelkader, Saifi & Saifi, 2021). Firstly, there is an imbalance in population distribution. Currently, the population of Maghreb countries is mainly concentrated in coastal areas, with a population density exceeding 200 people per square kilometer. These coastal areas have attracted a large population due to better natural conditions and public service facilities. In contrast, the inland regions have relatively lower population densities, typically between 50 to 200 people per square kilometer, while the southern desert areas have even lower population densities, usually less than 50 people per square kilometer. Furthermore, the capital cities of these countries have much higher populations compared to other regions, such as Rabat in Morocco, Algiers in Algeria, and Tunis in Tunisia. This severe regional population imbalance has exacerbated the uneven distribution of resources, employment, and public services, hindering coordinated regional development (Noureddine, Eslamian, & Katlane, 2021).

Secondly, urban infrastructure is unable to keep up with population growth. A large influx of rural population into a few major cities has resulted in a severe shortage of housing, transportation, healthcare, education, and other public services, leading to resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of slums, the so-called "urban diseases." For example, the population of Nouakchott, the largest city in Mauritania, has skyrocketed in just a few decades, but the corresponding infrastructure development and public service provision have lagged far behind, causing severe traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and the spread of slums. Similar situations can be observed in Algiers, Algeria, and Tunis, Tunisia. This "urban bloating" phenomenon has exceeded the carrying capacity of urban development, exacerbating not only the resource scarcity and environmental degradation within the cities but also the development imbalance between urban and rural areas. To address these challenges, the governments of Maghreb countries have taken some measures, such as promoting the development of small and medium-sized cities, increasing investment in rural infrastructure, and guiding the rational flow of population. However, due to historical baggage and current constraints, the effects of these measures have not been satisfactory.

How to effectively manage the urbanization process while maintaining economic development and providing a better living environment for urban residents remains a significant challenge for Maghreb countries.

#### **5. Influx of Foreign Workers - Challenges for Mauritania and Algeria**

In recent years, with rapid economic development, Mauritania and Algeria have attracted a large number of foreign workers. They come from various countries and work in different fields, becoming an important force driving the socio-economic development of these two countries. Taking Nouakchott, the

capital of Mauritania, as an example, it has gathered a large number of foreign workers from West African countries such as Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria. They are mainly engaged in construction, services, and retail, providing a large amount of cheap labor for this rapidly developing city. Similarly, in Algiers, there are also a large number of foreign workers from Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, concentrated in industrial areas and suburbs, engaged in production and cleaning work. The influx of these foreign workers has not only promoted the urbanization process of the local areas but also changed the demographic structure, causing a series of social problems. First, their large-scale influx has caused actual employment opportunities to be squeezed, exacerbating the unemployment problem of local youth. Second, in terms of cultural customs and religious beliefs, there are certain differences between foreign workers and local residents, which may lead to social conflicts. Third, these foreign personnel generally lack stable social security, are easy to fall into poverty, and bring new livelihood pressures to the government. To address the challenges brought by the influx of foreign workers, the governments of Mauritania and Algeria need to adopt more active and effective response measures. On the one hand, they need to strengthen the management and protection of the rights and interests of foreign workers, and improve relevant laws and regulations; on the other hand, they need to increase support for local youth employment and promote social fairness and justice. Only in this way can these two countries better achieve the dual goals of economic development and social harmony (Fargues, 2009).

## **6. Cultural and Linguistic Transformation - Challenges and Opportunities**

As a region with a long history and deep-rooted culture, the Arab Maghreb countries face an important task of cultural and linguistic transformation. This is not only an issue of internal integration but also reflects the interaction and integration of these countries with the outside world. Firstly, at the internal level, Maghreb countries need to strike a balance between Standard Arabic and local dialects. As the official language, Standard Arabic often differs from the local languages used by the common people. This not only affects the unity of the national culture, but also increases the difficulty of communication in areas such as education and administration. Therefore, how to promote Standard Arabic while protecting traditional languages has become an important challenge in language policy. Secondly, the Maghreb countries also face the problem of integrating with external cultures. With the development of globalization, these countries are inevitably influenced by the cultures of developed regions such as Europe and the United States. This brings the introduction of new ideas and technologies, but may also impact local cultural traditions. Among Arabic and French, French is becoming increasingly popular among the youth and may even surpass Arabic as the dominant language. Young people often mix Arabic and French or use non-standard language forms. Furthermore, due to the influence of colonialism and close ties with neighboring France, local youth are also widely exposed to and using French. This linguistic and cultural transformation can be understood as a natural development trend, reflecting the impact of globalization. However, as the core element of the national culture of the Maghreb countries, the status of Arabic cannot be ignored. The advantage of French on the one hand helps these countries integrate into globalization, but on the other hand may also weaken the national identity and cultural characteristics of the country. How to absorb foreign cultures while protecting and promoting its own cultural characteristics has become an urgent problem to be solved. In addition, language issues are also related to many fields such as economic development and international

communication. For example, French still plays an important role in countries like Morocco, which affects their ties with French-speaking countries. The popularization of English also makes the exchange of these countries with English-speaking countries smooth. Therefore, the choice of language policy is directly related to the development path of these countries (Wyrzten, 2014).

### **7. The Dilemma of Ethnic Religion - Challenges Facing Maghreb Countries**

As Arab Maghreb countries, Mauritania and Algeria also face the challenge of the dilemma of ethnic religion. Taking Mauritania as an example, its capital Nouakchott is a typical case. The southern part of the city is mainly inhabited by the Marabouts, a religious sect affiliated with the Sufi branch of Islam. For a long time, the Mauritanian government has been lackluster in providing public services and facilities to this region, with most concentrated in the core urban area. The infrastructure and public service quality in the southern peripheral areas are significantly lagging, and the environment is relatively dilapidated. Since the 1980s, this area has gradually become a breeding ground for Islamist movements.

A similar situation has also occurred in Algeria. The western and eastern suburbs of Algiers have relatively concentrated Berber communities. As a distinct ethnic and cultural group, the Berbers have long been marginalized in terms of access to public resources and services. The Algerian government has tried to maintain national unity by supporting Islamic sects and Arabic culture, but this has also exacerbated ethnic-cultural conflicts and fueled the rise of local extremist forces. At the same time, both Mauritania and Algeria have experienced relatively rapid urbanization processes, but the urban-rural and regional development gaps are significant. Some regions are overly dependent on the development of resource-based industries such as oil, forming a lopsided development pattern centered on cities, which has largely squeezed the resources and public investment in other regions. This has also led to the gathering of a large number of urban marginal groups, which has become another major hidden danger for local governance (Boudraa, & Krause, 2009). In general, the dilemma of ethnic religion is a complex challenge that Mauritania, Algeria and other Arab countries have long faced. The central government needs to adopt more inclusive and balanced local governance policies to alleviate religious and cultural conflicts, promote regional coordinated development, and maintain social stability. This is also a major task facing the future development of these countries.

### **8. Algerian-Mauritanian Relations: Evolution and Challenges**

In the 1970s, relations between Algeria and Mauritania witnessed a remarkable positive development. Algeria provided financial and technical support to Mauritania to help it confront the regional demands of Morocco, and also assisted it in abandoning the Franc system and adopting a national currency, as well as providing economic and cultural aid. However, these friendly relations did not last long. In 1974, Mauritania severed its ties with Algeria after aligning itself with Morocco and recognizing the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. This disagreement led to tensions in the relations between the two countries that lasted for decades (Zoubir, 2004).

In recent years, these relations have witnessed a remarkable improvement. In 2021, a new shipping line was inaugurated between the ports of the two countries, and a memorandum was signed to establish a joint border committee to enhance security and economic cooperation. Algeria has also come to see

Mauritania as a strategic gateway to West Africa and has worked to develop economic and security cooperation with it (Solarz, S. J. (1979).

Algerian exports to Mauritania witnessed a significant increase of 100% in 2020 compared to 2019, making Algeria the main exporter to Nouakchott. A memorandum of understanding was also signed in April 2021 to establish a bilateral border committee between the two countries for security and economic purposes. The construction of the 900-kilometer strategic road between the two countries is a turning point in the relationship, as it will contribute to the region's isolation and enhance trade and economic exchange between them. Algerian-Mauritanian relations are awaiting a "decisive step" in the near future, as the economic relations between the two countries continue to be strengthened and developed. In addition, Presidents Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani are keen to build a comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. This partnership aims to be exemplary in the region and reflect the strength of the deep-rooted historical relations between Algeria and Mauritania (Country Economic Memorandum. (2020).

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