

High hopes and broken promises: Young adult life courses in Senegal

The research project investigates the demographic, historical and sociological conditions of Senegal that may give rise to contestations of the liberal script, particularly by its young adults. Many post-colonial countries in Africa have followed the liberal script – implementation of democracy, free markets, and expanded education – yet have failed to achieve the liberal promises of meritocracy and prosperity. Such failed promises may lead to disillusioned youths that question the liberal script, resulting often in emigration that in turn threatens the borders and stability of the destination liberal democracies.

1. Historical development of regional labour markets and population growth

How have rapid population growth rates affected economic development in Senegal? The project involves long time series and historical data on local population growth and local labour market development coupled with information on outmigration. Researchers also work with partners in Dakar to identify and analyse regions that have economically thrived despite considerable population growth.

2. Quantitative life course profiles as determinants of contesting behaviour

What are potential links to migration and radicalization among young adults in parent-child generations of specific socio-historical backgrounds? Using cohort panels, demographic and health surveys and migration analysis, the researchers hope to assess the conditions that potentially cause Senegal's youth to engage in contestation-related behaviour such as political and religious radicalization.

3. Qualitative biographical interviews in Senegal, Paris, and Buenos Aires

In addition to rural and urban Senegal, researchers conduct biographical interviews in France and Argentina, destinations for many sub-Saharan migrants. Interviews focus on rationalization and coping strategies of young adults when facing adversity, and ask questions such as: Which life goals and aspirations do they follow? Which events mark achievements and disappointments? Which ideas do they connote with liberalism, how appealing is the liberal model to them, and which alternatives do they see?