

POPULATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN CANADIAN DEMOGRAPHY

Roderic Beaujot

The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

Abstract — Properly focused research has an important role to play in policy formulation, but we must also acknowledge that research is only one element in policy decision-making. Another important element is the values and priorities of the political community. The evidence from literature on Canadian population studies suggests that members of the Canadian Population Society have not paid much attention to policy issues and have not been very involved in policy circles. This paper considers specific substantive areas — including population growth, fertility, immigration, migration, urban growth, aging, language and education — in order to review briefly the available policy-oriented research and to suggest issues that merit further discussion. It concludes with ideas for expanding the “institutional niche” of demography in Canadian policy-making circles.

Key Words — **policy, general demography, research**

Introduction

Demographers often justify their work in terms of its policy relevance, especially when seeking public funding. Putting in a word regarding the importance of the proposed research to policy issues is almost *pro forma* in writing such proposals. Yet, have we paid much attention to policy aspects in our research, and have we been effective in influencing policy decisions in Canada? These are questions that appear to be worth raising, especially in the context of the June

1984 celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Canadian Population Society and after a decade of publication of *Canadian Studies in Population*.

After a few reflections about the possible role of demographic research in policy development, I will consider the evidence regarding this role, first in general, then with regard to the specific substantive areas of population growth, fertility, immigration, migration, urban growth, aging, language and education. I will conclude with some thoughts on institutional and professional reasons that explain the extent of our involvement.

It should be noted that this paper was originally written for the plenary session marking the tenth anniversary of the Canadian Population Society. In this context, the objective is less to offer complete coverage than to identify some issues, policy gaps and policy alternatives that merit attention. Also, the focus is exclusively on Canadian issues and ignores the research done by Canadians on policy questions in other parts of the world.

Role of Research for Policy Development

In considering the role of research in policy development one can hardly do better than referring to the paper which Ivan Fellegi (1979) presented at a joint meeting of the Canadian Population Society and the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This latter paper, written when he was newly named as chief of the Social Statistics Field of Statistics Canada, is really a challenge to the social science research community. Fellegi proposes that there is a paucity of policy relevant analytical work in Canadian social science. In order for us to make a greater and more readily visible contribution to Canadian society, Fellegi argues that we must become more involved with the social problems perceived to be important by policymakers, as well as the decision-making issues that they face. For social scientists to be relevant to decision makers, they need to (a) identify social problems of recognized importance, (b) determine through analysis the factors related to such problems, (c) find out which of these can be influenced through decisions and (d) effectively communicate the results.

While Fellegi's agenda is challenging, there is also the danger that we come to expect too much from research in the context of policy formulation. Policymakers, faced with difficult choices, can easily be tempted to avoid taking the responsibility for these decisions by putting the onus on

the researchers. Given the complexity of the real world, rare is the case where research is more than one of the several input factors to a decision. There is also the problem that research in a given area tends to focus on factors that are more measurable and that correspond to disciplinary preoccupations. Thus, an equally important task is that of questioning research conclusions, to ensure that decisions not be based on narrow analytic results and to ensure that decision makers do not shirk from their political task. It is in this context that Simon (1981) has played an important role with his book on *The Ultimate Resource*. It is sobering to think, as one reviewer has put it, that population growth is not very important in contributing to either the problem or the solution for many important critical social issues (Timmer, 1982:168). As Simon (1981:332) argues: "Whether a population is now too large or too small, or is growing too fast or too slowly, cannot be decided on scientific grounds alone. Such judgements depend upon our values, a matter about which science is silent." In addition, we cannot expect our research models to incorporate future developments that might solve our problems or set them into a very different context.

Thus, in concluding this section on the role of research for policy development, it is clear that properly focused research has an important role to play, but we must also recognize that research is only one element in policy decisions. Another important element is that of the values and priorities of the political community, as represented by or as promoted by the decision maker.

Evidence on the Extent of Policy Research

The subject indexes of books written on the Canadian population provide one indication of the extent of policy-relevant demographic research. Kalbach and McVey (1979) send us to seven pages that regard policy, Overbeek (1980) to three and Beaujot and McQuillan (1982) to 32 pages. In judging whether this is a lot or a little, we must note that most of these pages involve presentation and discussion of Canada's immigration policy. Very little relates to research that is policy oriented. While Beaujot and McQuillan perhaps pay more attention to policy, they begin the most relevant section with a question mark and they end with the hardly breath-taking remark: "Given the diversity of arguments and the difficulty of implementing effective policy, it is perhaps appropriate that Canada have no comprehensive policy, except that of using immigration

as a year-to-year lever by which to accommodate to changing circumstances" (p. 218). Without claiming to be exhaustive, two other books should be mentioned here — those of Stone and Marceau (1977) and Foot (1982). It is interesting that both books begin by presenting demographic projections, and then spend much of their time thinking through some of the consequences of these projected futures.

As another source of evidence on the extent of policy research in Canadian demography, selected journals were checked for the period 1979 to 1983, inclusively. In *Canadian Studies in Population*, there are 14 articles in these five years that involve "Canadian content". In none of these is there reference to policy in either the abstract or the key words presented at the beginning of the articles. Turning to *Canadian Public Policy*, there are 12 articles in the 1979-83 period that involve the discussion of demographic issues in a policy context: Beaujot (1979), Castonguay (1979), Denton and Spencer (1983), Howard (1980), Kernaghan (1982), Patterson (1980), Polese (1981), Rao and Kapsalis (1982), Reeves and Frideres (1981), Reid and Smith (1981), Ridler (1979) and Vanderkamp (1982). It might be noted that only three of the 16 authors listed above are members of the Canadian Population Society as defined by the 1984 Directory of Members. Thus, while 12 articles is a reasonable amount in five years, most authors are economists who do not belong to our professional association. In four other relevant journals — the *Canadian Geographer*, the *Canadian Journal of Economics*, the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* and the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* — there are a total of 20 articles with Canadian demographic content, but judging from the abstracts, nowhere does there appear to be explicit reference to policy issues.

While I did not look at other Canadian journals, I did consider the *Population Research and Policy Review*, the *Population and Development Review* and the *Population Index*. In the first of these, there are no articles on Canada and none by Canadian authors. In the second, I found two Canadian authors, Simmons (1979) on urban growth in Asia, and McQuillan (1979) on Catholic and Marxist thought. I also checked "Canada - policy" in the *Population Index*. Here, after excluding a few tangential entries, I found 24 publications for the 1979-83 period, but only six in which the senior author is a member of the Canadian Population Society: Henripin (1981), Henripin *et al.* (1981), Kubat (1979), Lachapelle (1977), Marr *et al.* (1977) and Marsden and Harvey (1977). It is interesting that of these six, three are written in French by people who are also members of the Association des Démographes du Québec. In ad-

dition to these three, there are six other articles listed by members of the Quebec association: Charbonneau and Landry (1979) Gauthier (1981), Gauvreau (1981), Messier (1981), Rochon (1981), and Roy (1978). For the record, the articles retained that are written by people who are not members of these two population associations are the following: DeVoretz and Maki (1980), Frinking (1981), Gourgues (1981), Lanphier (1981), Nord (1979), North and Wagner (1981), Passaris (1979), Rao and Kapsalis (1982), Robinson (1981) and Sachdev (1981). There are also two corporate authors: Conseil des Affaires Sociales et de la Famille (1978) and Canada, Employment and Immigration (1983).

Finally, the *Annotated Bibliography of Canadian Demography, 1966-1982* includes 1532 titles of which 162 (11 per cent) are indexed under the "policy" heading (Wai *et al.*, 1984). Since up to three key words were taken from each abstract for this index, it again indicates that policy issues have a relatively low priority.

While this is not all the relevant evidence, I would conclude that there are some research articles that are concerned with policy issues, especially in Canadian Public Policy, but very few of them were authored by members of the Canadian Population Society. Obviously, we have ignored here policy papers that make their way into government circles but that do not appear in scholarly journals. Also, very few journals have been used; a more systematic review would have required the consideration of a number of other Canadian journals.

Let us now consider specific content areas in order to briefly consider available research and to suggest certain policy options. The objective here is to suggest issues that merit further research and discussion.

Population Growth

With regard to overall population growth, there are so many varied considerations that it is difficult for research to have a policy input. I would agree with Dobson (1975:26) that it is "difficult to identify how much better a population of 28 million in 2001 will serve social goals than one of 35 million". Certainly, some have argued that it would be best to have slow population growth (Canada, 1976). It can be argued that Canada has benefited from the fact that between about 1871 and 1981, while the world population increased slightly more than three-fold, the Canadian population increased more than six-fold. Since the mid-1960s our rate of growth has been below the world average and I would agree

with Kalbach (1975:307) that there would be advantages to continued growth at or near the world average. Again, it is hard to justify this on research grounds. I think that a population that grows at a rate slower than that of its neighbours can become too inward-looking, too conservative, too pre-occupied with comfort for its own sake. Besides, if we do not act appropriately as stewards of our large land mass, others can justifiably call for an "international land reform" that would be for the benefit of the landless of this world. Is it not the biblical view that those who have riches must see themselves as stewards who are called to administer these resources for the benefit of the whole community?

Fertility

English Canadian social scientists have tended to consider either that no attempt should be made to influence fertility (Canada, 1976:67) or that their role should be limited to helping people not to have more children than they want and thinking through the policy consequences of low fertility (Veevers, 1983: 81, 85). The French Canadian demographic community is much more willing to at least debate the issue of pro-natalism (see *Cahiers Québécois de Démographie* 10(2); Henripin *et al.*, 1981; and Lux, 1983). Again, I would suggest that it is political circumstances rather than research results that orient Canada's two language groups in different directions on the issue of pro-natalism. To the extent that research is used, it focuses especially on three things: (a) the problems of population aging, (b) the costs of children along with the extent to which these costs are borne by couples or the broader society and (c) the conflict between pro-natalism and the aspirations of women for more diversified roles.

Immigration

After the 1974 World Population Conference, the Canadian attempt to develop a comprehensive population policy has essentially been abandoned in favour of focusing only on immigration. The Special Joint Committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons on Immigration Policy recommended in 1975 that "immigration in future be treated as a central variable in a national population policy and that this objective be achieved through the establishment of an immigration target" (quoted in

Stone and Marceau, 1977:59). As a consequence, the Immigration Act, which took effect in 1978, indicates that one of the objectives of the Act is "to support the attainment of such demographic goals as may be established by the Government of Canada" (Canada, 1977:1197).

It has been difficult to base immigration targets on demographic considerations. For instance, in the latest Annual Report to Parliament on Future Immigration Levels, it is noted that the population totals for the end of the century implied by various projection assumptions do "not seem to be inconsistent ... with recent perceptions about the carrying capacity of the country in terms of such factors as food supplies and energy resources" (Canada, 1983:28). When a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report estimates that the carrying capacity of Africa in regard to potential agricultural production is 9.6 billion people (United Nations, 1980, as cited in Revelle, 1982:833), one can doubt whether research can tell us much about carrying capacity. Having established immigration targets in the range of 90,000 to 120,000 in the 1983-86 period, the Report to Parliament argues that it does not "expect that any negative demographic developments would result in the foreseeable future from [these] immigration levels" (Canada, 1983:28). While it is hard to make an argument for given demographic goals, reference to "carrying capacity" and the absence of "negative demographic developments" is not a particularly sound basis for immigration targets.

Let me select one exchange in Canadian Public Policy that tries to bring research into immigration considerations. Rao and Kapsalis (1982) concluded through various simulations using the CANDIDE model that a substantial increase in immigration would be detrimental to per capita income. However, Robertson and Roy (1982) argued that the CANDIDE model is structured in such a way that immigration always has negative consequences on per capital income. It is interesting that this commonly used simulation model for the Canadian economy introduces an assumption that appears contrary to the long-term Canadian experience.

It is also interesting to contrast the 1966 White Paper with the 1974 Green Paper on immigration (Canada, 1966, 1974). The 1966 paper was very positive on the role of immigration in economic expansion, while the 1974 paper said that "it would probably be a not unfair assessment of our understanding of the economic consequences of higher against lower population growth rates...to conclude that the evidence in favour of higher rates is uncertain (Canada, 1974:6). Did we learn from our mistakes? We may have, but I would argue that it is difficult to be con-

clusive regarding appropriate immigration levels. I am not saying that research should be discouraged or ignored, but simply that the world is too complex to incorporate in a neat model that would give us appropriate immigration levels. Ultimately, it remains a political decision to assess and weigh the various considerations, including those stemming from research results. The foremost consideration is how many immigrants we want as a political community. In that light, is it not time for us to show a greater willingness to share our resources with the poor of this earth? Our points system works in favour of the educated middle class who aspire to immigrate. This also tends to be true with regard to refugees. We lent a helping hand to the Indo-Chinese refugees who were rich enough to pay their way on those fateful boats leaving Vietnam. While their plight was not to be ignored, we seem much more willing to ignore the plight of, for instance, the more than two million peasants from Afghanistan displaced into Pakistan.

Internal Migration

Another interesting discussion that is taking place in Canadian Public Policy regards the role of migration in reducing regional disparities in Canada. Marr *et al.*, (1977) point out that economic growth can be adversely affected if the population is prevented from shifting to better economic opportunities, and, in that context, the Manpower Mobility Programme appears to have been effective in its aim of reducing barriers to interprovincial labour reallocation. However, Polese (1981) argues that in certain circumstances migration can have the effect of increasing regional disparities in wages and unemployment. That is because the receiving region is enhanced by greater consumer spending with associated multiplier effects, while the sending region loses its more educated population and the growth that is "know-how and talent based." He concludes that "we cannot be sure, as regional economists, of the effects of migration on regional economic disparities" (Polese, 1981:524).

Courchene (1981) has argued that transfer payments to the poorer provinces can impede the processes, including migration, through which market place adjustments can reduce regional disparities. On the other hand, Vanderkamp (1982) argues that recent results do not lend much support to the argument that fiscal transfers impede the migration process. He further proposes that the argument involves a conflict between

equity and efficiency. It is thus for the politician to decide whether to follow Courchene's (1981) view that the efficiency costs of transfer payments are too high or Mathews' (1981) view that it is the social arguments in favour of greater equity that should receive priority.

The political sensitivity of migration was evident once again during the 1984 federal election campaign when John Turner had to apologize to Manitobans for having over-estimated their out-migration. Courchene (1981) argues that Saskatchewan, which was the third largest province in 1931, has not suffered from the subsequent population stability. Needless to say, that is a conclusion which, rightly or wrongly, would not sit well with politicians from that province.

Urban Growth

Policy issues were raised in the 1970s relating to the growth of the large metropolitan areas. At a 1973 conference involving the three levels of government, the following general urban objectives were adopted: (a) the need to create a more balanced model of urban growth, (b) the need to redistribute urban growth towards small or medium-sized towns or new towns and (c) the need to maintain and improve the quality of the environment in very large urban centres (Stone and Marceau, 1977:62). In 1971, the Federal Government established the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, but its ability to initiate policy was severely hampered by the provinces who viewed that urban affairs were a provincial matter. Thus while there was some consensus on the need for action, the disagreements between the levels of government prevented any sustained national level policy thrust. What is interesting is that in spite of this political stalemate, the urban problems that were identified in the 1970s seem to have become considerably less important. In particular, the 1981 census shows that growth is now fastest in the medium-size cities. Questions of urban congestion and unrestrained expansion into neighbouring agricultural areas have become less pressing issues. When one thinks that our largest cities are more populated than most of the provinces, that there is uncertainty about federal-provincial jurisdiction, and that city government is not always the most enlightened, it is somewhat surprising that these problems took care of themselves. Although there was some research consensus on the need for action, it is perhaps fortunate that few initiatives were taken. The sections on education and language

will come back to the issue of the extent to which research consensus is an adequate basis for policy.

Population Aging

The field of aging has been generating a considerable quantity of policy related research. Without doing justice to this research here, I take heart in the healthy debate regarding the economic consequences of an aging population. Patterson (1980), Canada (1979) and Asimakopulos (1984) have argued that we have reason to be concerned about the consequences of aging, especially as it will affect pension plans in the second and third decades of the 21st century. Other authors — including Denton and Spencer (1983), Ridler (1979), and Stone and MacLean (1979) — argue that while there will be increasing costs in the health and pension sectors, the burden will not be intolerable, and a modest rise in the employment of the elderly could offset some of these costs. Again, policy decisions here involve considerations far beyond demography: for instance, the kind of health and pension facilities we consider appropriate, the access of various groups to these facilities, the appropriateness of manpower retraining that enables people to remain relevant to the labour force, and the feasibility of changes in labour force involvement of various age and sex groups. Clearly, it is crucial to know what categories of population are to be considered for the numerator of dependency ratios. We are now in a situation that is, in a sense, ideal in the short term given the low proportions at both the upper and lower ranges of the age distribution. This situation probably encourages lower labour force participation in these groups. To some extent, the society naturally makes changes to accomodate the age structure, thus the extrapolation of the current dependency ratios on a future age distribution is probably inappropriate.

Education

It has been argued that the public school system was insufficiently prepared for the demographic waves of the baby boom and baby bust. To the extent that school systems can, in fact, change in anticipation of the population base, that may well be true. However, I would argue that the post-secondary system has been hurt by paying too much attention to

anticipated demographic change. It was widely held that post-secondary enrolment would decline starting in the early 1980s. When enrolment rates were stabilizing in the mid-1970s, there was concern that this decline might even come sooner and be stronger than anticipated. As a consequence, projections published in 1978 underestimated the 1983-84 full-time post-secondary enrolment by 83,000 students or 11.3 per cent (Statistics Canada, 1978:339, 1983:19). The anticipated demographic future was used as a basis for restraining the expansion of public funding for post-secondary education. These restraints have frustrated the career prospects of young academics. It can also be argued that this over-zealous anticipation of demographic trends has undermined the quality of education.

Language

Concerning language, research has indicated the decline of French outside of Quebec (Joy, 1972; Lachapelle and Henripin, 1980; Maheu, 1970). In this case, the federal government policy turned a deaf ear to the demographic research and has continued to promote the notion of institutional bilingualism. This bilingualism policy is now so fixed that aspirants to national leadership cannot deviate one iota from the position. Though I have argued against this policy based on demographic research (Beaujot, 1979), I must say that if the policy can succeed, in the long term Canada will be the better for it. In Quebec, the policy of unilingualism has, in fact, followed the conclusions of the predominant demographic research. Even with the 1981 census data, Castonguay (1983) continues to argue that it is the French language that needs support in Quebec. However, one can ask whether these unilingual policies will be for the long-term benefit of the province. Thus, I am arguing that it is unfortunate that education policy has followed demographic research, while language policy at the federal level may well be fortunate that research has been ignored.

Discussion

To summarize, I agree with Fellegi that we have not a great quantity of policy related demographic research. However, I also argue that research is only one element that goes into policy formulation and that

sometimes the visionary policymaker does well to ignore predominant research results. Permit me to discuss some possible implications of these observations for the Canadian Population Society.

It seems to me that there are institutional reasons for the observation that the members of our Association do not seem to be engaged in much policy oriented research. The discipline is relatively new in Canada and has not worked its way into policy circles. Slightly more than half of the members were born outside of Canada, which may also make them less interested in the Canadian policy. Most demographers, at least those writing for journals, are not well-placed to make policy inputs. The same is not true for members of the Association des Demographes du Québec. In fact, it is interesting that the 1984 directories list 128 members in the Canadian and 166 in the Quebec associations, respectively. The discipline of demography in Quebec is better established in the institutional arena; their newsletter regularly lists activities of members in some 25 institutions. Demography also has a higher profile in the United States and France than in English Canada. For the United States, consider, for instance the priority that foundations have given to population research and family planning programs in the Third World. There was even a Commission of Population and the American Future. At the Universities of Alberta and of Western Ontario, it is difficult to attract Canadians to Ph.D. programs on population. Notice that it is not necessarily the breadth of the discipline that counts with regard to the prominence of its public profile. At the Université de Montréal, the approach tends to be more technical, yet students have been hired in a wide variety of institutions.

Disciplines establish niches for themselves, and the extent of their success is often a function of historical accidents. For instance, let us suppose that a government is looking for a professional to analyze the facts related to an area of policy concern that is vaguely demographic. If a demographer heads the inquiry, rather than a lawyer, doctor or economist, and does a decent job, it helps to widen the niche for the discipline because the inquiry will necessarily touch on matters rather removed from demography.

We must work at widening our niche. That mostly involves infiltrating relevant organizations. Outside of Statistics Canada, we are poorly represented in government circles, especially at the provincial level. We also need better supportive exchanges between Canadian Population Society members in academic and government circles. We often do not even read each other's work: civil servants write reports that

do not stand properly on book shelves and academics write articles that appear in journals three or four years later. Civil servants must do a better job of disseminating the concerns of policymakers to academics, and academics need to place more of their research in a policy mode. Finally, our need to increase our public profile requires that we make more efforts to write to and speak to a broader popular audience.

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