

WHAT WILL DEMOGRAPHY BE IN 1996?

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Résumé — Que sera la démographie en 1996? Ceci était le thème d'une des discussions à table ronde des réunions de 1986 de la Population Association of America. Les dix à douze personnes qui ont participé avaient une variété d'âges, de résidences et d'intérêts professionnels. Sachant que c'est aussi difficile de prévoir le future de la discipline que celui de la population elle-même, nous l'avions tenté et il y avait un consensus surprennant sur la plupart des thèmes. Nous avons reconnu le fait que la mortalité n'est pas un champ qui meurt. En dehors de cela, nous avons parcouru la plus grande partie de la démographie telle qu'elle est et que nous pensions elle deviendrait. A la fin de la session nous avons chacun écrit une note sur l'accroissement ou le déclin de chaque partie de la discipline afin de les placer dans les archives de la PAA et de les faire ouvrir en dix ans. Je fais un sommaire ici des notes préparées avant la réunion et la discussion elle-même.

Abstract — Demography in 1996 was the topic of one of the luncheon roundtable discussions at the 1986 meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA). The ten or twelve persons who participated ranged widely in age, geographical location and professional interest, and the exchange was lively. While we knew that it is no less chancy to forecast the future of the discipline than that of population, we made a good try, and there was a surprising consensus on most issues.

We agreed that mortality is not a dying field. Apart from that, we ranged over most of demography as it is and we thought it would become. At the end of the session, we each wrote down which major areas would decline in importance and which would grow. Our notations were placed in the PAA archives, no less, to be salvaged ten years hence and used to measure our composite prescience. What follows is partly notes that this author had prepared in advance of the meeting, partly a summary of the discussion.

Key Words — Population Association of America

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) was derived indirectly from the first World Population Conference, held in Geneva in 1927 and organized by Margaret Sanger, who was already notorious as a strong proponent of birth control. The statisticians, biologists and economists who attended the meeting deemed it inappropriate to establish a continuing organization linked to so outspoken an advocate for so controversial a cause. The following year several of them met privately in Paris, where the IUSSP was officially founded. After a hiatus during the Second World War, however, the IUSSP held its "third" meeting in 1947, thus giving the once-forbidden subject of birth control a half-legitimacy. As the episode highlights, as recently as the 1920s and 1930s, most professionals were fearful of being linked to family planning, which is now the discipline's major preoccupation.

Of the 67 substantive sessions at the 1986 PAA meeting, 16 were on family planning and an additional five on the closely related subject of population policy. That not quite one-third of the reports were on this topic probably understates the attention given it in most demographers' recent research, whether described in conferences, in journals or in monographs. All of the participants at the roundtable agreed that this harping on the same theme with half-repetitive papers is no longer, in Bernard Berelson's phrase, "an instructive entertainment." We agreed that over the next decade there would be a sharp reduction in funding and thus in research, if only because the ever sharper criticism of family-planning programmes has not been satisfactorily answered. As one example, in testimony before the House Select Committee on Population (February 9, 1978), Kingsley Davis commented as follows on the funding of family-planning programmes (which ostensibly includes paying for evaluations by the Agency for International Development):

Population growth in the less developed countries as a whole has *not* slowed down, but has *increased*.... The rate was 9.95 per cent in 1950-55 and 12.26 per cent in 1970-75.... In 1995-2000 the 5-year absolute increase will be 451.5 million, whereas in 1950-55 it was only 163.6 million. These figures do not indicate that the effort to limit population growth has been successful or will be successful. On the contrary, it looks to be probably the most tragic failure in the entire history of the human species.

Two facets of Mrs. Sanger's career, in fact, were rejected in 1927. A generation or two ago, when demographers designated themselves as scientists, they understood that term to mean that they would consciously try to separate research from policy. As the scientific canon was then interpreted, research had to be undertaken in a context rendered as neutral as possible, and, in particular, the researcher was not permitted to allow the outcome that he hoped for to influence his findings. It was ordinarily expected, moreover, that no policy affecting the public would be instituted before its probable consequences were established. For example, still today if a new drug were to be distributed/tested to reduce the incidence of a disease and, at the same time, to find out whether its use was both effective and safe, such an amalgam would be regarded as irresponsible or worse. However, action-research, or an effort simultaneously to understand a social problem and take steps toward solving it, has become routine in family-planning programmes. In such a marriage both types of offspring are aborted: relative to the effort exerted, progress has been extraordinarily slow both in gaining a genuine understanding of what determines fertility levels and in reducing significantly the birth rates of the large less developed countries.

We did not discuss this second facet at length in the roundtable, but there was a feeling that research is likely to remain not only policy-oriented but joined with policy in such a quasilegitimate union. This has become the common practice not only in family planning, but to some degree in most of demography, and no strong voices are calling for a reversal.

One important reason for the partial failure of family-planning programmes is that government officials of less developed countries do not agree with the professed aim of cutting fertility and population growth. As they see it, the problem is not excessive numbers, but their maldistribution. According to reports collated by the U.N. Population Commission in 1978-79, of 158 governments and other official sources throughout the world, exactly the same number of spokesmen for less developed countries (116) judged natural increase to be a positive as a negative factor in economic development. By far the more

important impediment in their view was the rapid expansion of urban populations and particularly the increasing concentration in the largest metropolises.

The consensus in the discussion group was that research on internal migration and urbanization should, and probably will, grow rapidly. Even in the United States, census data on city size are on the average five or six years out of date or, in any comparison of data from two censuses, ten or eleven years. The statistics of less developed countries are typically far less adequate. Conceivably novel procedures made available through technical innovations could be used more generally. One paper at the PAA meeting, by John Stover and his associates, used two sets of satellite photographs of Egypt to demonstrate the incursion of urban settlements on agricultural land. In another technique — remote sensing of urban areas — samplings of population density are taken from censuses and from the air, and with the ratio between them, continually corrected, one can derive estimates of population from air surveys alone. Such an improved method of measuring urban densities would be one step, but an important one, toward instituting more effective controls.

The quality of statistics on international movements, which are often of great significance, is certainly no better. In a 1972 study by the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe, migrants within that region were counted at both ends of the 342 paths between any two ECE countries. The number of recorded migrants was 57 per cent greater than that of emigrants, and such great inaccuracy in the documentation of *legal* migration within the region with the world's best population statistics indicates how prevalent and serious the deficiencies are. Net immigration to the United States may account for more than half the country's population growth, and the fact that so large a component is only sketchily known means that all data on population characteristics may also be seriously unrepresentative. Because of the poor quality of the statistics, among other reasons, the Census Bureau has announced that it does not plan to adjust areal census counts for errors in enumeration.

An important reason for this lamentable record of counting international migrants is that "emigrant" and "immigrant" are not defined consistently, one example of the arbitrary and even eccentric definitions that many agencies and analysts use. According to the influential monograph of the United Nations, *The Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends*, as an egregious example, " 'migration' excludes population transfers, ... deportations, refugee movements, and the movement of 'displaced persons' " (1953:98). Such a delimitation of the term leaves out a probable majority of those who have crossed international borders since World War II, as well as a large proportion of those who did so during the prior generation. Indeed, many members of the United Nations help generate refugee flows, and it is understandable

that the international body would not want to examine too closely the conditions that lead to politically motivated migrations. Other analysts who have followed this lead have sometimes cited the poor records of these supposedly anomalous types of migration, but one reason for the inadequate statistics is that the concepts, merely taken over from government agencies rather than developed independently, are generally themselves imprecise.

Raid Tabbarah, who chaired sessions on international migration at three successive meetings of the IUSSP, noted the marked disparity between the attention devoted to the topic and that given to fertility and family planning. At his urging, in 1979 the IUSSP instituted two working groups on the methodology and economics of international migration, respectively, and subsequently these were established as permanent committees. As chairman of one of them, Tabbarah renewed a suggestion that the IUSSP collaborate in undertaking a World International Migration Survey (WIMS) comparable in scope with the World Fertility Survey and leading to data that could be the basis of similar comparative studies.

Such exhortations have not been merely the idiosyncratic views of demographers trying to highlight their own specialty. In most countries of the West, natural increase is close to the replacement level or, in a few cases, below it. Both growth in numbers and any amelioration of the aging of the population will thus depend on fresh entries from other countries. In the United States — with the major sources of immigration shifted to Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia — the assimilation of these “new immigrants” has become a major question of social policy, one that could be analyzed more satisfactorily with comparative work on the policies and experiences of such other developed countries as Britain, Germany, France and Sweden.

In sum, analysis of migration, both internal and international, has fallen far short of the need for its results, and the roundtable agreed that this lag is likely to be reduced over the next decade. Every level of work needs doing, including the clarification of concepts, finding or using methods to lay a better empirical base, analysis of the statistics, and elucidation of the probable results of policies.

Technical innovation is likely to be more and more in demand, for the expectation that the regular and reliable censuses of the West would soon spread to the rest of the world has proved to be oversanguine. In some cases, notably Lebanon and Nigeria, violent competition among population sectors made it impossible to carry out a useable enumeration. In other instances, also in Western countries, statistical agencies have given way to legal or extralegal pressures on their operations. Britain simply omitted the bothersome question on race from the 1981 schedule. In West Germany, where the census became

an issue in the 1982 election, about 1,000 suits were filed charging that the questions invaded respondents' privacy, and the census scheduled for April 1983 was postponed until the country's courts could decide on the issue. The most striking example in the Western world has been the Netherlands. In preparation for the 1971 count, a new law was passed specifying many added safeguards, but these did not satisfy the critics, some 75,000 of whom were "not at home" or illegally refused to respond to the questions. In two pilot surveys to prepare for the 1980-81 count, nonresponse rates were so high that the government decided to 'postpone' the census until 1983 or until 1990 or 1991 at the latest.

In the United States, though the 1980 count cost about four times that of 1970, no assurance could be given that there was an appreciable improvement in coverage. As the enumeration has become increasingly relevant to current issues, the whole process has been more and more embroiled in political disputes, which no technology can dissipate. Not only political power but many other values are now distributed according to the number of inhabitants of a particular area. In 1980, when an estimated annual total of \$78 billion was to go to states and other civil units, its allocation usually depended on how each locality's population was counted and classified. The sectors of the population that have always been underrepresented in any count — such as casual labourers, homeless vagrants, and those on the edge of the criminal subculture — are also the ones most likely to bring a municipality or state additional federal funds in one or another welfare program. Conceivably missing one individual could deprive a congressional district of its representative, as well as more than \$100 per year in federal dollars; but underenumeration as estimated by the Census Bureau itself has typically been of the order of five million. Following or anticipating the 1980 count, some 54 municipalities and other entities brought suit against the Census Bureau, generating more litigation than that challenging any prior United States census. Was the Bureau competent? Should local governments have a say in judging the results of the count? When there is an undercount, is a compensation for inequities appropriate? How can a check be made without violating the privacy of personal information? The courts decided in the Bureau's favour on such questions, but that did not mean that they have disappeared. There will be pressure to find as many and as suitable alternatives to an enumeration as possible, and such research is likely to flourish over the next 10 years.

Until recently a demographer outside academia or such data-gathering institutions as the Census Bureau was exceptional, on the periphery of the discipline and therefore more or less out of touch with his fellows. Most of those who accepted positions with business firms did so, one must suppose, because

no openings were available in universities. *American Demographics*, a lively and well-edited journal, was recently taken over by Dow Jones, publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*, and its focus on information of interest to corporation executives has sharpened. Yet even in Ithaca, where it is edited, one member of the roundtable informed us that the demographers at Cornell have no contact with those across the tracks — whose salaries are probably competitive, to put it no stronger. The marked rise in the number of persons involved in business demography should soon lead to a change in attitudes, with an enrichment of the typical subject matter of standard journals and annual meetings of the PAA. The purpose of technicians working in market research and similar areas is so clearly to help production and sales that their contributions would leaven the overriding concern with world policy, a rather recondite subject by comparison.

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