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### Abstract

Population policies are meant to regulate changes to human populations in defined areas or localities (cities, countries, etc.) These policies commonly consider altering the birthrates by measures that can either increase or decrease fertility rates. Other policies can target migration flows by measures that can increase or decrease immigration (arrivals of foreigners) or emigration (departures of residents). Population policies that control growth rates are usually implemented by a political authority. These policies are often in conformity with religious dogma, cultural values, and political ideals.

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### Keywords

Demographic transition • Fertility rates • Migration flows • Natality rate • Population control

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## Definition

Population refers to a group of human beings. Population policies are meant to regulate changes to human populations in defined areas or localities. The growth of human populations is a major factor for environmental change in the world with direct consequences for impacts on uses of natural resources and production of wastes. At both the global level and regional levels, demographic trends will influence the course of change of natural ecosystems, the local economy, geopolitical relations, and quality of life.

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## Introduction

The acceleration of population growth since the early eighteenth century can be summarized by the following data. In the early 1800s, during the first phase of industrialization, the world population was about one billion. A century later, in about 1930, the world population reached two billion. The United Nations Population Fund estimated that the world population had reached five billion in 1990, then it increased to six billion in October 1999 and then to seven billion in 2012. Some have characterized this exponential growth rate as a “population explosion.” This has been attributed to numerous factors including increased agricultural productivity coupled with improved distribution of food; greater access to education, medical, and health care; and improved housing, living, and working conditions especially in urban areas.

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## Population Growth and Demographic Transition

The acceleration of population growth during the last two centuries has been related to what has been termed “the demographic transition.” This concept is based on an interpretation of demographic history developed in 1929 by the American demographer Warren Thompson (1887–1973). Demographic transition refers in the first instance to declining mortality rates which meant that people began to live longer; life expectancy has doubled in many so-called developed countries since 1900. In addition, the demographic transition refers to declining fertility rates in these same countries during the last half of the twentieth century. Birthrates and death rates vary between countries, and different ethnic groups in a specific country, owing to different cultural, economic, and political circumstances which vary over historical periods.

The growth of a human population in a specific area or country is the sum of the number of live births and deaths which is referred to as the natural population size of that locality at a precise time. This number is supplemented by the sum of the number of persons migrating into and leaving the area at the same time. Human population control is the explicit alteration of these two demographic trends (Demeny and McNicoll 1998).

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## Rationale of Population Policies

Population policies are meant to regulate changes to human populations in precise localities (cities, countries, etc.) These policies commonly consider altering the birthrates by measures that can either increase or decrease fertility rates. Other policies can target migration flows by measures that can increase or decrease immigration (arrivals of foreigners) or emigration (departures of residents).

Population policies can aim to increase or decrease population growth for various reasons; for example, lower population growth rates may be intended owing to reduced access to food, water, energy sources, housing, or employment. On the contrary, higher population growth rates may be intended to complement other policies or programs that promote economic and industrial development or the decentralization of economic activity or a public administration. Australia and Canada are two countries that have explicitly introduced financial incentives to attract immigrants to their countries especially after 1945.

Migration flows between countries and regions of the world are explicitly controlled by sovereign states, which claim the right and possess to a certain degree of control, to regulate the movement of people across national boundaries. The right to move from one country to another is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In practice, however, this right has not been respected by many nondemocratic regimes (e.g., countries of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia). Moreover, many countries with a democracy (including those in the European Union and Switzerland) do not respect freedom of entry to foreigners.

Population policies that control growth rates are usually implemented by a political authority. These policies are often in conformity with religious dogma, cultural values, and political ideals. Historically, those measures that can be applied to regulate natural population growth (not migration flows) include the practice of abstinence, contraception, abortion, infanticide, sterilization, euthanasia, and genocide.

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## Controlling Fertility and Natality Rates

The regulation of birthrates can involve measures that improve people's lives, especially women during the childbearing period of their life cycle, by enabling them to have a degree of personal control over their reproduction. However, there are recorded cases of political authorities that have severely imposed population control such that women have no choice in the number of children they can have.

Historically, population control was advocated by Thomas Malthus in *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society* first published in 1798. His contribution has had a wide influence on many contemporary authors who have supported stringent controls on population growth. Malthus argued that if population growth, which increases in a geometric ratio, was not controlled, then famine would result because food subsistence only increases in an arithmetic ratio. Malthus also stated that there is a practical limit to the amount of

food that can be produced. Hence, a maximum number of people can be fed. If the population increases above this number then, owing to starvation, the death rate will rise to equal the birthrate.

Malthus also noted that “positive checks” such as infectious diseases, droughts, and warfare increased the death rate, whereas “preventive checks” including moral restraint, abstinence, and birth control measures influence the birthrate. Malthus wrote that the poor were most affected by access to subsistence and, consequently, they should be educated to apply “preventive checks” to lower population growth Ehrlich and Holdren (1971).

Since the 1960s and 1970s, a population control movement has been active. During this period there have been many alarmist predictions about the exponential growth of the world population. Paul R. Ehrlich, for example, published *The Population Bomb* in 1968. He advocated population policies including compulsory birth control using sterilizers added to food and drinking water. In 1990, Ehrlich repeated his viewpoint in another book titled *The Population Explosion* which he coauthored with his wife. Like Ehrlich some authors repeatedly claim that overpopulation is the cause of poverty, high unemployment, environmental degradation, famine, and genocide. Some advocates of population control have related their concerns to the concept of finite carrying capacity. Others state that unequal demographic growth between regions and countries can influence geopolitics, but there is no empirical evidence to support this claim.

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## United Nations Population Conferences

The First World Population Conference was organized by the United Nations, and it was held in Rome from 31st August to 10th September 1954. This academic conference debated how to measure the characteristics of populations and study those variables that influence these characteristics.

The Second World Population Conference was organized by the United Nations and the international Union for the Scientific Study of population (IUSSP). It was held from 30th August to 10th September 1965 in Belgrade. The conference linked fertility rates to policies for development planning at the time when scientists debated the negative impacts of exponential population growth.

The Third World Population Conference was organized by the United Nations, and it was held in Bucharest from 19th August to 30th September 1974. The aim of this event was to seek political support for lower population growth rates by the promotion of reproductive health campaigns and family planning programs that included contraception. These campaigns and programs were challenged by churches and government representatives for religious and political reasons. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has consistently opposed contraception, sterilization, and abortion as a general practice. Elsewhere, many feminist activists have advanced women’s reproduction as a component of human rights.

The Fourth International Population Conference was organized by the United Nations, and it was held from 6th August to 14th August 1984 in Mexico City.

The aim of this conference was to review and endorse the World Population Plan for Action agreed at the Bucharest Conference.

The Fifth United Nations Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo, Egypt, from 5th to 13th September 1994. Not less than 180 representatives from countries adopted a Program of Action on population and development for a 20-year period.

Today, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is a part of the United Nations Development Group. Since 1969, it has promoted the right of every individual (woman, man, and child) to enjoy a healthy life with equal opportunity.

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## Contemporary Policies

In China, the one-child policy introduced in 1978 is a significant population control measure that is still applicable. This policy is controversial both within and outside China owing to the issues it addresses, the measures applied, and its negative social consequences.

In Iran, there has been a reduction in the national birthrate in recent decades. The government has publicized the benefits of small size families. The authorities have introduced mandatory contraceptive courses for males and females before a marriage license can be delivered.

Today, several European countries have adopted social policies and programs that focus on community services that promote social care and welfare for women and children, and support child care, and parental leave with the aim of increasing low fertility rates and reducing ageing populations.

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## Conclusion

The consequences of demographic growth or decline in relation to environmental, economic, and social change at local and larger levels cannot be challenged. Dealing with these issues should be a high priority for policy decision makers during this century on the understanding that there is no simple answers to these issues given that fundamental values are involved.

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