

ISSUE 19



Are Declining Growth Rates Rather Than Rapid Population Growth Today's Major Global Population Problem?

YES: Michael Meyer, from "Birth Dearth," *Newsweek* (September 27, 2004)

NO: Danielle Nierenberg and Mia MacDonald, from "The Population Story . . . So Far," *World Watch* magazine (September/October 2004)

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Michael Meyer, a writer for *Newsweek International*, argues that the new global population threat is not world overpopulation but underpopulation in many countries. Declining birth rates will ultimately lead to declining population and increasing ratios of older people to younger people in many countries. This situation creates immense problems in supporting the elderly and maintaining a healthy economy.

NO: Danielle Nierenberg and Mia MacDonald counter those who fear negative consequences of stable or declining population. The worriers fail to notice the benefits of a stable population. Furthermore, the population decline thesis is overblown. The population of developed countries with healthy economies is likely to grow through immigration. Stable or declining population countries will only have to change some policies to avoid the anticipated serious problems.

Beginning in the late 1960s, demographers began to observe dramatic increases in population growth, particularly in the developing world. Some analysts feared terrible consequences. They warned of mass starvation of humans in the 1970s and 1980s due to overpopulation and advocated immediate action to limit population growth. By the mid-1970s, growth rates, particularly in the developing world, were such that the doubling of the world's

population was predicted to occur in only a few decades. And indeed, as the last millennium was coming to an end, a billion people were added to the world's population in just 12 short years. Contrast this time frame with the fact that it had taken all of recorded history until 1830 for the planet to reach a population of 1 billion and 100 years for the second billion.

In the last decade of the millennium, however, something unforeseen happened. Population growth slowed, not only in the developed sector of the globe but also in the developing world. The UN Population Fund lowered its short-term and long-term projections. These recent trends have been surprising, as most observers had long believed that the built-in momentum of population growth in the last third of the twentieth century would have major impacts well into the new century. It turned out, however, that when people had the means to control their fertility, the birth rate dropped considerably. Now a new population debate is raging. One side says that further population growth is bad because of its impacts on the environment and the depleting of limited resources, and the other side worries about the economic crises that will be brought on by population declines. The anti-growth position fears that further population growth, though slower, will nevertheless increase starvation, deplete resources faster, accelerate global warming with possible catastrophic results, and badly damage the environment even to the point, possibly, of environmental collapse. The anti-population decline position fears that a high number of retirees per worker will reduce welfare, reduce innovation rates, increase deficits, cause crushing health care expenses, and other economic crises.

Michael Meyer describes how families in both the developed and developing worlds are choosing to have fewer children and chronicles what he believes to be an array of negative consequences associated with this population transition. Danielle Nierenberg and Mia MacDonald applaud the current demographic changes and argue that stable or declining population has many positive effects and manageable negative ones. They estimate that the optimal world population is about 2 billion. Much more than that is either unsustainable or must live constricted lives.



Birth Dearth

Everyone knows there are too many people in the world. Whether we live in Lahore or Los Angeles, Shanghai or Sao Paulo, our lives are daily proof. We endure traffic gridlock, urban sprawl and environmental depredation. The evening news brings variations on Ramallah or Darfur—images of Third World famine, poverty, pestilence, war, global competition for jobs, and increasingly scarce natural resources.

Just last week the United Nations warned that many of the world's cities are becoming hopelessly overcrowded. Lagos alone will grow from 6.5 million people in 1995 to 16 million by 2015, a miasma of slums and decay where a fifth of all children will die before they are 5. At a conference in London, the UN Population Fund weighed in with a similarly bleak report: unless something dramatically changes, the world's 50 poorest countries will triple in size by 2050, to 1.7 billion people.

Yet this is not the full story. To the contrary, in fact. Across the globe, people are having fewer and fewer children. Fertility rates have dropped by half since 1972, from six children per woman to 2.9. And demographers say they're still falling, faster than ever. The world's population will continue to grow—from today's 6.4 billion to around 9 billion in 2050. But after that, it will go sharply into decline. Indeed, a phenomenon that we're destined to learn much more about—depopulation—has already begun in a number of countries. Welcome to the New Demography. It will change everything about our world, from the absolute size and power of nations to global economic growth to the quality of our lives.

This revolutionary transformation will be led not so much by developed nations as by the developing ones. Most of us are familiar with demographic trends in Europe, where birthrates have been declining for years. To reproduce itself, a society's women must each bear 2.1 children. Europe's fertility rates fall far short of that, according to the 2002 UN population report. France and Ireland, at 1.8, top Europe's childbearing charts. Italy and Spain, at 1.2, bring up the rear. In between are countries such as Germany, whose fertility rate of 1.4 is exactly Europe's average. What does that mean? If the UN figures are right, Germany could shed nearly a fifth of its 82.5 million people over the next 40 years—roughly the equivalent of all of east Germany, a loss of population not seen in Europe since the Thirty Years' War.

And so it is across the Continent. Bulgaria will shrink by 38 percent, Romania by 27 percent, Estonia by 25 percent. "Parts of Eastern Europe, already sparsely populated, will just empty out," predicts Reiner Klingholz, director of the Berlin Institute for Population and Development. Russia is already losing close to 750,000 people yearly. (President Vladimir Putin calls it a "national crisis.") So is Western Europe, and that figure could grow to as much as 3 million a year by midcentury, if not more.

The surprise is how closely the less-developed world is following the same trajectory. In Asia it's well known that Japan will soon tip into population loss, if it hasn't already. With a fertility rate of 1.3 children per woman, the country stands to shed a quarter of its 127 million people over the next four decades, according to UN projections. But while the graying of Japan (average age: 42.3 years) has long been a staple of news headlines, what to make of China, whose fertility rate has declined from 5.8 in 1970 to 1.8 today, according to the UN? Chinese census data put the figure even lower, at 1.3. Coupled with increasing life spans, that means China's population will age as quickly in one generation as Europe's has over the past 100 years, reports the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. With an expected median age of 44 in 2015, China will be older on average than the United States. By 2019 or soon after, its population will peak at 1.5 billion, then enter a steep decline. By midcentury, China could well lose 20 to 30 percent of its population every generation.

The picture is similar elsewhere in Asia, where birthrates are declining even in the absence of such stringent birth-control programs as China's. Indeed, it's happening despite often generous official incentives to procreate. The industrialized nations of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea all report subreplacement fertility, says Nicholas Eberstadt, a demographer at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. To this list can be added Thailand, Burma, Australia and Sri Lanka, along with Cuba and many Caribbean nations, as well as Uruguay and Brazil. Mexico is aging so rapidly that within several decades it will not only stop growing but will have an older population than that of the United States. So much for the cliché of those Mexican youths swarming across the Rio Grande. "If these figures are accurate," says Eberstadt, "just about half of the world's population lives in subreplacement countries."

There are notable exceptions. In Europe, Albania and the outlier province of Kosovo are reproducing energetically. So are pockets of Asia: Mongolia, Pakistan and the Philippines. The United Nations projects that the Middle East will double in population over the next 20 years, growing from 326 million today to 649 million by 2050. Saudi Arabia has one of the highest fertility rates in the world, 5.7, after Palestinian territories at 5.9 and Yemen at 7.2. Yet there are surprises here, too. Tunisia has tipped below replacement. Lebanon and Iran are at the threshold. And though overall the region's population continues to grow, the increase is due mainly to lower infant mortality; fertility rates themselves are falling faster than in developed countries, indicating that over the coming decades the Middle East will age far more rapidly than other regions of the world. Birthrates in Africa remain high, and despite the AIDS epidemic its population is projected to keep growing. So is that of the United States.

We'll return to American exceptionalism, and what that might portend. But first, let's explore the causes of the birth dearth, as outlined in a pair of new books on the subject. "Never in the last 650 years, since the time of the Black Plague, have birth and fertility rates fallen so far, so fast, so low, for so long, in so many places," writes the sociologist Ben Wattenberg in *"Fewer: How the New Demography of Depopulation Will Shape Our Future."* Why? Wattenberg suggests that a variety of once independent trends have conjoined to produce a demographic tsunami. As the United Nations reported last week, people everywhere are leaving the countryside and moving to cities, which will be home to more than half the world's people by 2007. Once there, having a child becomes a cost rather than an asset. From 1970 to 2000, Nigeria's urban population climbed from 14 to 44 percent. South Korea went from 28 to 84 percent. So-called megacities, from Lagos to Mexico City, have exploded seemingly overnight. Birthrates have fallen in inverse correlation.

Other factors are at work. Increasing female literacy and enrollment in schools have tended to decrease fertility, as have divorce, abortion and the worldwide trend toward later marriage. Contraceptive use has risen dramatically over the past decade; according to UN data, 62 percent of married or "in union" women of reproductive age are now using some form of nonnatural birth control. In countries such as India, now the capital of global HIV, disease has become a factor. In Russia, the culprits include alcoholism, poor public health and industrial pollution that has whacked male sperm counts. Wealth discourages childbearing, as seen long ago in Europe and now in Asia. As Wattenberg puts it, "Capitalism is the best contraception."

The potential consequences of the population implosion are enormous. Consider the global economy, as Phillip Longman describes it in another recent book, *"The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do About It."* A population expert at the New America Foundation in Washington, he sees danger for global prosperity. Whether it's real estate or consumer spending, economic growth and population have always been closely linked. "There are people who cling to the hope that you can have a vibrant economy without a growing population, but mainstream economists are pessimistic," says Longman. You have only to look at Japan or Europe for a whiff of what the future might bring, he adds. In Italy, demographers forecast a 40 percent decline in the working-age population over the next four decades—accompanied by a commensurate drop in growth across the Continent, according to the European Commission. What happens when Europe's cohort of baby boomers begins to retire around 2020? Recent strikes and demonstrations in Germany, Italy, France and Austria over the most modest pension reforms are only the beginning of what promises to become a major sociological battle between Europe's older and younger generations.

That will be only a skirmish compared with the conflict brewing in China. There market reforms have removed the cradle-to-grave benefits of the planned economy, while the Communist Party hasn't constructed an adequate social safety net to take their place. Less than one-quarter of the population is covered by retirement pensions, according to CSIS. That puts the burden of elder care almost entirely on what is now a generation of only children. The

one-child policy has led to the so-called 4-2-1 problem, in which each child will be potentially responsible for caring for two parents and four grandparents.

Incomes in China aren't rising fast enough to offset this burden. In some rural villages, so many young people have fled to the cities that there may be nobody left to look after the elders. And the aging population could soon start to dull China's competitive edge, which depends on a seemingly endless supply of cheap labor. After 2015, this labor pool will begin to dry up, says economist Hu Angang. China will have little choice but to adopt a very Western-sounding solution, he says: it will have to raise the education level of its work force and make it more productive. Whether it can is an open question. Either way, this much is certain: among Asia's emerging economic powers, China will be the first to grow old before it gets rich.

Equally deep dislocations are becoming apparent in Japan. Akihiko Matsutani, an economist and author of a recent best seller, *"The Economy of a Shrinking Population,"* predicts that by 2009 Japan's economy will enter an era of "negative growth." By 2030, national income will have shrunk by 15 percent. Speculating about the future is always dicey, but economists pose troubling questions. Take the legendarily high savings that have long buoyed the Japanese economy and financed borrowing worldwide, especially by the United States. As an aging Japan draws down those assets in retirement, will U.S. and global interest rates rise? At home, will Japanese businesses find themselves competing for increasingly scarce investment capital? And just what will they be investing in, as the country's consumers grow older, and demand for the latest in hot new products cools off? What of the effect on national infrastructure? With less tax revenue in state coffers, Matsutani predicts, governments will increasingly be forced to skimp on or delay repairs to the nation's roads, bridges, rail lines and the like. "Life will become less convenient," he says. Spanking-clean Tokyo might come to look more like New York City in the 1970s, when many urban dwellers decamped for the suburbs (taking their taxes with them) and city fathers could no longer afford the municipal upkeep. Can Japanese cope? "They will have to," says Matsutani. "There's no alternative."

Demographic change magnifies all of a country's problems, social as well as economic. An overburdened welfare state? Aging makes it collapse. Tensions over immigration? Differing birthrates intensify anxieties, just as the need for imported labor rises—perhaps the critical issue for the Europe of tomorrow. A poor education system, with too many kids left behind? Better fix it, because a shrinking work force requires higher productivity and greater flexibility, reflected in a new need for continuing job training, career switches and the health care needed to keep workers working into old age.

In an ideal world, perhaps, the growing gulf between the world's wealthy but shrinking countries and its poor, growing ones would create an opportunity. Labor would flow from the overpopulated, resource-poor south to the depopulating north, where jobs would continue to be plentiful. Capital and remittance income from the rich nations would flow along the reverse path, benefiting all. Will it happen? Perhaps, but that presupposes considerable labor mobility. Considering the resistance Europeans display toward large-scale immigration from North Africa, or Japan's almost zero-immigration policy,

it's hard to be optimistic. Yes, attitudes are changing. Only a decade ago, for instance, Europeans also spoke of zero immigration. Today they recognize the need and, in bits and pieces, are beginning to plan for it. But will it happen on the scale required?

A more probable scenario may be an intensification of existing tensions between peoples determined to preserve their beleaguered national identities on the one hand, and immigrant groups on the other seeking to escape overcrowding and lack of opportunity at home. For countries such as the Philippines—still growing, and whose educated work force looks likely to break out of low-status jobs as nannies and gardeners and move up the global professional ladder—this may be less of a problem. It will be vastly more serious for the tens of millions of Arab youths who make up a majority of the population in the Middle East and North Africa, at least half of whom are unemployed.

America is the wild card in this global equation. While Europe and much of Asia shrinks, the United States' indigenous population looks likely to stay relatively constant, with fertility rates hovering almost precisely at replacement levels. Add in heavy immigration, and you quickly see that America is the only modern nation that will continue to grow. Over the next 45 years the United States will gain 100 million people, Wattenberg estimates, while Europe loses roughly as many.

This does not mean that Americans will escape the coming demographic whammy. They, too, face the problems of an aging work force and its burdens. (The cost of Medicare and Social Security will rise from 4.3 percent of GDP in 2000 to 11.5 percent in 2030 and 21 percent in 2050, according to the Congressional Budget Office.) They, too, face the prospect of increasing ethnic tensions, as a flat white population and a dwindling black one become gradually smaller minorities in a growing multicultural sea. And in our interdependent era, the troubles of America's major trading partners—Europe and Japan—will quickly become its own. To cite one example, what becomes of the vaunted "China market," invested in so heavily by U.S. companies, if by 2050 China loses an estimated 35 percent of its workers and the aged consume an ever-greater share of income?

America's demographic "unipolarity" has profound security implications as well. Washington worries about terrorism and failing states. Yet the chaos of today's fragmented world is likely to prove small in comparison to what could come. For U.S. leaders, Longman in "The Empty Cradle" sketches an unsettling prospect. Though the United States may have few military competitors, the technologies by which it projects geopolitical power—from laser-guided missiles and stealth bombers to a huge military infrastructure—may gradually become too expensive for a country facing massively rising social entitlements in an era of slowing global economic growth. If the war on terrorism turns out to be the "generational struggle" that national security advisor Condoleezza Rice says it is, Longman concludes, then the United States might have difficulty paying for it.

None of this is writ, of course. Enlightened governments could help hold the line. France and the Netherlands have instituted family-friendly policies that help women combine work and motherhood, ranging from tax credits

for kids to subsidized day care. Scandinavian countries have kept birthrates up with generous provisions for parental leave, health care and part-time employment. Still, similar programs offered by the shrinking city-state of Singapore—including a state-run dating service—have done little to reverse the birth dearth. Remember, too, that such prognoses have been wrong in the past. At the cusp of the postwar baby boom, demographers predicted a sharp fall in fertility and a global birth dearth. Yet even if this generation of seers turns out to be right, as seems likely, not all is bad. Environmentally, a smaller world is almost certainly a better world, whether in terms of cleaner air or, say, the return of wolves and rare flora to abandoned stretches of the East German countryside. And while people are living longer, they are also living healthier—at least in the developed world. That means they can (and probably should) work more years before retirement.

Yes, a younger generation will have to shoulder the burden of paying for their elders. But there will be compensations. As populations shrink, says economist Matsutani, national incomes may drop—but not necessarily per capita incomes. And in this realm of uncertainty, one mundane thing is probably sure: real-estate prices will fall. That will hurt seniors whose nest eggs are tied up in their homes, but it will be a boon to youngsters of the future. Who knows? Maybe the added space and cheap living will inspire them to, well, do whatever it takes to make more babies. Thus the cycle of life will restore its balance. . . .



Danielle Nierenberg and
Mia MacDonald



The Population Story . . . So Far

Forty years ago, the world's women bore an average of six children each. Today, that number is just below three. In 1960, 10–15 percent of married couples in developing countries used a modern method of contraception; now, 60 percent do.

To a considerable extent, these simple facts sum up the change in the Earth's human population prospects, then and now. In the mid-1960s, it was not uncommon to think about the human population as a time bomb. In 1971, population biologist Paul Ehrlich estimated that if human numbers kept increasing at the high rates of the time, by around 2900 the planet would be teeming with sixty million billion people (that's 60,000,000,000,000,000). But the rate of population rise actually peaked in the 1960s and demographers expect a leveling-off of human numbers this century.

Every couple of years the United Nations Population Division issues projections of human population growth to 2050. In 2002, UN demographers predicted a somewhat different picture of human population growth to mid-century than what the "population bombers" thought likely a generation ago. World population, growing by 76 million people every year (about 240,000 people per day), will pass 6.4 billion this year. The latest UN mid-range estimate says there will be about 8.9 billion people on Earth by 2050. And, according to this new scenario, total population will begin to shrink over the next hundred years.

These numbers are leading some people to say that the population bomb has been defused. A few nations, such as Italy and Japan, are even worried that birth rates are too low and that their graying populations will be a drain on the economy. (Some studies suggest that China, the world's most populous country, may also "need" more people to help support the hundreds of millions who will retire in coming decades.)

We're not out of the woods yet. While the annual rate of population growth has decreased since 1970—from about 2 percent to 1.3 percent today—the rate is applied to a much larger population than ever before, meaning that the added yearly increments to the population are also much larger. These numbers show that the largest generation in history has arrived: 1.2 billion people are between 10 and 19. In large measure, it will be their choices—those they have, and those they make—that determine where the global population meter rests by mid-century.

Population × Consumption

Potential for catastrophe persists. In many places, population growth is slowly smoldering but could turn into a fast burn. Countries as diverse as Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Pakistan are poised to more than double their size by 2050 even as supplies of water, forests, and food crops are already showing signs of strain and other species are being squeezed into smaller and smaller ranges. Arid Yemen will likely see its population quadruple to 80 million by 2050. The UN estimates that populations in the world's 48 least-developed countries could triple by 2050. And if the world's women have, on average, a half a child more than the UN predicts, global population could grow to 10.6 billion by mid-century.

But it is a mistake to think that population growth is only a problem for developing countries. While consumption levels need to increase among the 2.8 billion people who now live on less than \$2 a day, high rates of population growth combined with high levels of consumption in rich countries are taking a heavy toll on the Earth's natural resources:

- Carbon dioxide levels today are 18 percent higher than in 1960 and an estimated 31 percent higher than they were at the onset of the Industrial Revolution in 1750.
- Half the world's original forest cover is gone and another 30 percent is degraded or fragmented.
- Industrial fleets have fished out at least 90 percent of all large ocean predators—tuna, marlin, swordfish, cod, halibut, skate, and flounder—in just the past 50 years, according to a study in *Nature* in 2003.
- An estimated 10–20 percent of the world's cropland, and more than 70 percent of the world's rangelands, are degraded.

As global consumption of oil, meat, electricity, paper products, and a host of consumer goods rises, the impact of population numbers takes on a new relevance. Although each new person increases total demands on the Earth's resources, the size of each person's "ecological footprint"—the biologically productive area required to support that person—varies hugely from one to another. The largest ecofootprints belong to those in the industrialized world.

Further, new demographic trends can have significant impacts as well. Since 1970, the number of people living together in one household has declined worldwide, as incomes have risen, urbanization has accelerated and families have gotten smaller. With fewer people sharing energy, appliances, and furnishings, consumption actually rises. A one-person household in the United States uses about 17 percent *more* energy per person than a two-person home.

And while some nations are getting nervous about declining birth rates, for most of the world the end of population growth is anything but imminent. Although fertility rates are ratcheting down, this trajectory is not guaranteed. Projections of slower population growth assume that more couples will be able to choose to have smaller families, and that investment in reproductive health keeps pace with rising demand. But along the route to the eventual leveling-off

of global population, plateaus are possible. And smaller families are not guaranteed in countries where government resources are strained or where health care, education, and women's rights are low on the list of priorities.

In the West African country of Niger, for example, the availability of family planning and reproductive health services has declined, while birth rates have increased. According to a recent report by the World Bank, the average woman in Niger will give birth to eight children in her lifetime, up from seven in 1998 and more than women in any other nation. Niger is already bulging with young people; 50 percent of the population is under age 15 and 70 percent is under 25.

Biology $\neq$ Destiny

A series of global conferences in the 1990s—spanning the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Cairo population conference (1994), the Beijing women's conference (1995), and the UN's Millennium Summit in 2000—put issues of environment, development, poverty, and women's rights on the global policy table. As a result, discussions of the relationship between growing human numbers and the Earth's ability to provide are increasingly framed by the realities of gender relations. It is now generally agreed that while enabling larger numbers of women and men to use modern methods of family planning is essential, it is not sufficient. Expanding the choices, capacities, and agency of women has become a central thread in the population story. Consumption—what we need and what we want—is, too.

Many studies have shown that women with more education have smaller, healthier families, and that their children have a better chance of making it out of poverty. Likewise, wealthier women and those with the right to make decisions about their lives and bodies also have fewer children. And women who have the choice to delay marriage and childbearing past their teens tend to have fewer children than those women—and there are millions of them still—who marry before they've completed the transition from adolescence. Equalizing relations between women and men is also a social good: not only is it just, but a recent World Bank report found that in developing countries where gender equality lags, efforts to combat poverty and increase economic growth lag, too.

Yet women's rights and voices remain suppressed or muted throughout the world. Over 100 million girls will be married before their 18th birthdays in the next decade, some as young as 8 or 9. Early childbearing is the leading cause of death and disability for women between the ages of 15 and 19 in developing countries. At least 350 million women still lack access to a full range of contraceptive methods, 10 years after the Cairo conference yielded a 20-year plan to balance the world's people with its resources. Demand for services will increase an estimated 40 percent by 2025.

The assault of HIV/AIDS is also increasingly hurting women: more than 18 million women are living with HIV/AIDS, and in 2003 women's rate of infection for the first time equaled men's. In the region hardest hit, sub-Saharan Africa, 60 percent of adults living with HIV are women. Two-thirds of the world's

876 million illiterates are women and a majority of the 115 million children not attending grade school are girls. In no country in the world are women judged to have political, economic, and social power equal to that of men.

Even in the United States, women's reproductive rights are increasingly constrained by the growing number of restrictions and conditions on choice imposed by state and federal laws. Like the U.S. lifestyle, the current Administration's blinkered view of sexuality has gone global. The United States has withheld \$34 million from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) every year of the Bush Administration due to a dispute over abortion. And the "global gag rule," a relic of the Reagan presidency reimposed by President Bush, binds U.S. population assistance by making taboo any discussion of abortion in reproductive health clinics, even in countries where it is legal.

The impacts reach more deeply than the rhetoric: due to the loss of U.S. population funds, reproductive health services have been scaled back or eliminated in some of the world's poorest countries, precisely where fertility rates are highest and women's access to family planning most tenuous. In Kenya, for instance, the two main providers of reproductive health services refused to sign a pledge to enforce the gag rule, with the result that they lost funds and closed five family planning clinics, eliminating women's access to maternal health care, contraception, and voluntary counseling and testing for HIV/AIDS. In Ethiopia, where only 6 percent of women use modern methods of contraception, the gag rule has cut a wide swath: clinics have reduced services, laid off staff and curtailed community health programs; many have suffered shortages of contraceptive supplies.

Need ↑ Funds ↓

A recent study by UNFPA and the Alan Guttmacher Institute estimated that meeting women's current unmet need for contraception would prevent each year:

- 23 million unplanned births;
- 22 million induced abortions;
- 1.4 million infant deaths;
- 142,000 pregnancy related-deaths (including 53,000 from unsafe abortions); and
- 505,000 children losing their mothers due to pregnancy-related causes.

The non-medical benefits are not quantified but are considerable: greater self-esteem and decision-making power for women; higher productivity and income; increased health, nutrition, and education expenditures on each child; higher savings and investment rates; and increased equality between women and men. We know this from experience: recent research in the United States, for example, ascribes the large numbers of women entering law, medical, and other professional training programs in the 1970s to the expanded choices afforded by the wide availability of the Pill.

Despite these benefits, vast needs go unmet as the Cairo action plan remains underfunded. The United States is not the only culprit. UNFPA reports that donor funds for a basic package of reproductive health services and population data and policy work totaled about \$3.1 billion in 2003—\$2.6 billion less than the level agreed to in the ICPD Program. Developing country domestic resources were estimated at \$11.7 billion, a major portion of which is spent by just a handful of large countries. A number of countries, particularly the poorest, rely heavily on donor funds to provide services for family planning, reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS, and to build data sets and craft needed policies.

A year from now, donors will be expected to be contributing \$6.1 billion annually, \$3 billion more than what has already been spent. "A world that spends \$800 billion to \$1 trillion each year on the military can afford the equivalent of slightly more than one day's military spending to close Cairo's \$3 billion external funding gap to save and improve the lives of millions of women and families in developing countries," says UNFPA's executive director, Thoraya Obaid. But as the world's priorities lie in other arenas, it is looking increasingly unlikely that the Cairo targets—despite their modest price tag in a world where the bill for a war can top \$100 billion—will be met.

But it isn't only poor people in developing countries who will determine whether the more dire population scenarios pass from speculation to reality. Family size has declined in most wealthy nations, but the U.S. population grew by 32.7 million people (13.1 percent) during the 1990s, the largest number in any 10-year period in U.S. history. At about 280 million people, the United States is now the third most populous nation in the world and its population is expected to reach 400 million by 2050. A recent study suggests that if every person alive today consumed at the rate of an average person in the United States, three more planets would be required to fulfill these demands.

Whether or not birth rates continue to fall, consumption levels and patterns (affluence), coupled with technology, take on new importance. The global consumer class—around 1.7 billion people, or more than a quarter of humanity—is growing rapidly. These people are collectively responsible for the vast majority of meat-eating, paper use, car driving, and energy consumption on the planet, as well as the resulting impact of these activities on its natural resources. As populations surge in developing countries and the world becomes increasingly globalized, more and more people have access to, and the means to acquire, a greater diversity of products and services than ever before.

It is the combined effect of human numbers and human consumption that creates such potent flash-points. Decisions about sexuality and lifestyle are among the most deeply personal and political decisions societies and their citizens can make. The fate of the human presence on the Earth will be shaped in large part by those decisions and how their implications unfold in the coming years. This population story's ending still hasn't been written.

POSTSCRIPT



Are Declining Growth Rates Rather Than Rapid Population Growth Today's Major Global Population Problem?

William P. Butz labels the two sides of this debate implosionists versus explosionists in *The Double Divide: Implosionists and Explosionists Endanger Progress since Cairo* (Population Reference Bureau, September 2004). The implosionists argue that falling birth rates throughout the world cause major negative consequences. The explosionists counter that there will still be substantial world population growth, and countries with declining populations should be able to deal with the potential problems. They think that world leaders and organizations must still focus on the problems of population growth under conditions of increasing environmental constraints. Implosionists include Charles C. Mann, "The Coming Death Shortage," *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2005); David R. Francis, "Now, Dangers of a Population Implosion," *Christian Science Monitor* (October 7, 2004); Denis Dutton "Now It's the Population Implosion," *New Zealand Herald* (July 23, 2003); Kerry Howley "Baby Bust!," *Reason* (July 2008); Phillip Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do about It* (Basic Books, 2004); Wolfgang Lutz, Warren Sanderson, and Sergei Scherbov, eds., *The End of World Population Growth in the 21st Century: New Challenges for Human Capital Formation and Sustainable Development* (Earthscan Publishers, 2004); Richard Jackson and Neil Howe, *The Graying of the Great Powers: Demography and Geopolitics in the 21st Century* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008); and Ronald Demos Lee, *Global Population Aging and Its Economic Consequences* (AEI Press, 2007). Explosionists include Werner Fornos, "A Global Concern: A Population Crisis Still Looms," *International Herald Tribune* (January 14, 2004); Michael Tobias, Bob Gillespie, and Elizabeth Hughes, eds., *No Vacancy: Global Responses to the Human Population Explosion* (Hope Publishing House, 2006); and K. Bruce Newbold, *Six Billion Plus: World Population in the Twenty-First Century* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

The United Nations serves as an authoritative source on various population data, whether historical, current, or future oriented. One of the UN agencies, the United Nations Population Fund, or UNFPA, issues an annual *State of the World Population*, as well as other reports. See, for example, its *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision—Highlights* (2009). Two Washington private organizations, the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) and The Population Institute, publish a variety of booklets, newsletters, and reports yearly.

A particularly succinct discussion of the "demographic divide" is found in PRB's *The Demographic Divide: What It Is and Why it Matters*, (Mary Mederios and Carl Haub, 2008). Another source on population issues is the Population Council of New York.

