

Field Note

“The day was so beautiful and the children’s faces so expressive I could hardly believe I was visiting an AIDS hospice village set up for children. The Sparrow Rainbow Village on the edges of Johannesburg, South Africa, is the product of an internationally funded effort to provide children with

HIV/AIDS the opportunity to spend what time they have in a clean, safe environment. Playing with the children brought home the fragility of human life and the extraordinary impacts of a modern plague that has spread relentlessly across significant parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.”

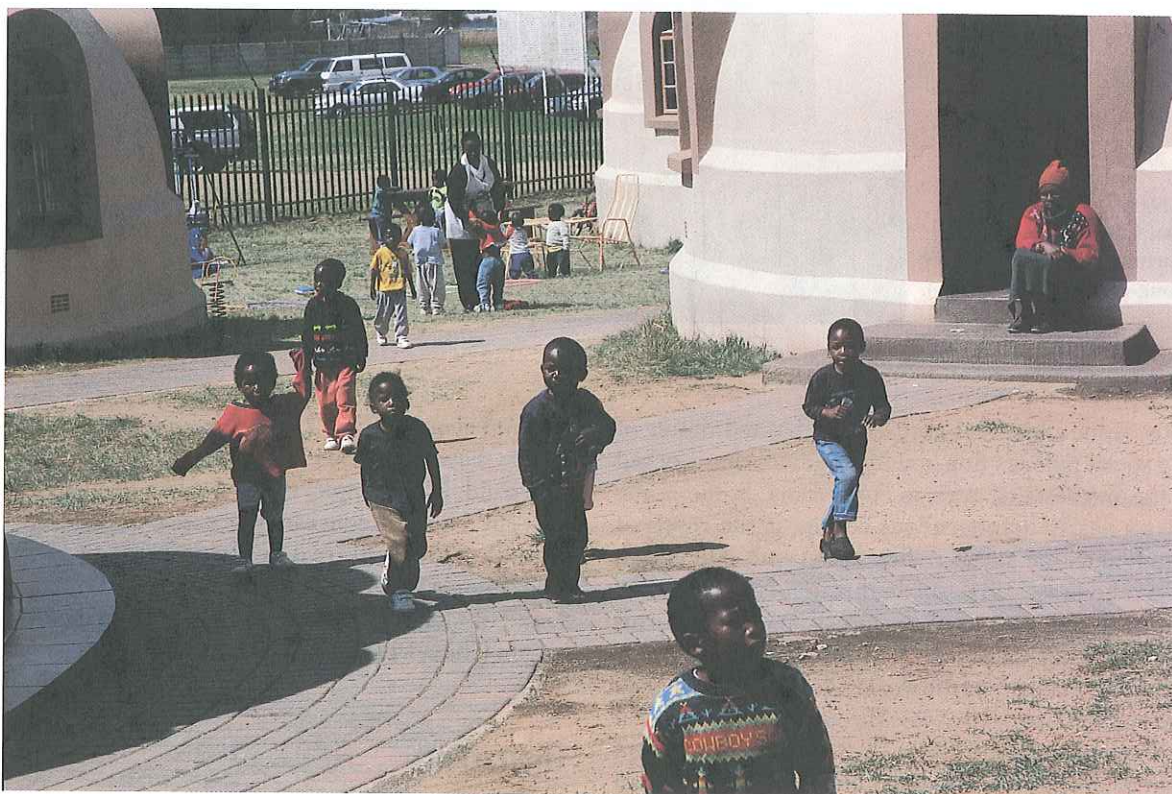


Figure 2.21
Johannesburg, South Africa. © Alexander B. Murphy.

(through tax incentives and by other fiscal means) families to have more children.

Birth rates in Russia plummeted after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. The total fertility rate (TFR) in Russia in 1980 was 2.04, and now the TFR for Russia is 1.34. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin calls the demographic crisis Russia’s greatest current problem. The Russian government offers cash subsidies of \$10,000 to women who give birth to a second or third child.

In response to concerns over Russia’s aging population, the government of Ulyanovsk Province has held a National Day of Conception each September 12 since 2005. In 2007, government and businesses in Ulyanovsk Province offered the afternoon off for people to participate in the National Day of Conception. The government

planned to award a free car to the proud parents of one of the children born 9 months later, on June 12—the Russian National Day. On June 12, 2008 in the Ulyanovsk Province, 87 children were born, about 4 times the average daily birth rate in the province. Russia experienced an increase in TFR in the first half of 2008, but the ability to sustain a high TFR in the country will depend on many factors, including alleviating social problems, stabilizing incomes, and continued government support.

In the past, some governments engaged in **eugenic population policies**, which were designed to favor one racial or cultural sector of the population over others. Nazi Germany was a drastic example of eugenics, but other countries also have pursued eugenic strategies, though in more subtle ways. Until the time of the civil rights movement in



Figure 2.23
Chengdu, China. A large billboard warning readers to follow China's one-child policy. © H. J. de Blij.

the 1960s, some observers accused the United States of pursuing social policies tinged with eugenics that worked against the interests of African Americans. Some argue that Japan's nearly homogeneous culture is the result of deliberately eugenic social policies. Eugenic population policies can be practiced covertly through discriminatory taxation, biased allocation of resources, and other forms of racial favoritism.

Today the majority of the world's governments seek to reduce the rate of natural increase through various forms of **restrictive population policies**. These policies range from toleration of officially unapproved means of birth control to outright prohibition of large families. China's **one-child policy**, instituted after the end of the Maoist period in the 1970s, drastically reduced China's growth rate from one of the world's fastest to one of the developing world's slowest (Fig. 2.23). Under the one-child policy, families that had more than one child were penalized financially, and educational opportunities and housing privileges were kept from families who broke the one-child mandate.

Population growth rates in China fell quickly under the one-child policy. In the 1970s, China's growth rate was 3 percent; in the mid-1980s it was 1.2 percent; and, today, China's growth rate is 0.7 percent. The main goal of the one-child policy was achieved, but the policy also had several unintended consequences, including an increased abortion rate, an increase in female infanticide, and a high rate of orphaned girls (many of who we were adopted in the United States and Canada).

During the 1990s, under pressure to improve its human rights records and also with the realization that the population was quickly becoming gender (Fig. 2.24) and

age imbalanced (Fig. 2.25), China relaxed its one-child policy. Several caveats allow families to have more than one child. For example, if you live in a rural area and your first child is a girl, you can have a second child, and if both parents of the child are only children, they can have a second child. With these changes, the National Bureau of Statistics of China now estimates that the population growth rate in China will climb again over the next 10 years.

Limitations

Population policies are not independent of circumstances that can influence growth and decline. In the 1980s, the government of Sweden adopted family-friendly policies designed to promote gender equality and boost fertility rates. The programs focused on alleviating much of the cost of having and raising children. In Sweden, couples who work and have small children receive cash payments, tax incentives, job leaves, and work flexibility that last up to eight years after the birth of a child. The policies led to a mini-birth-rate-boom by the early 1990s.

When the Swedish economy slowed shortly thereafter, however, so did the birth rate. The children born in 1991 made up a class of 130,000 students in the Swedish education system. But the children born three years later, in 1994, made up a class of only 75,000 students. The government had to build new classrooms for the temporary population boom, but then faced excess capacity when the boom subsided. Sweden's population policies have helped to produce a natural rate of increase that is a little higher than that in many other European countries,

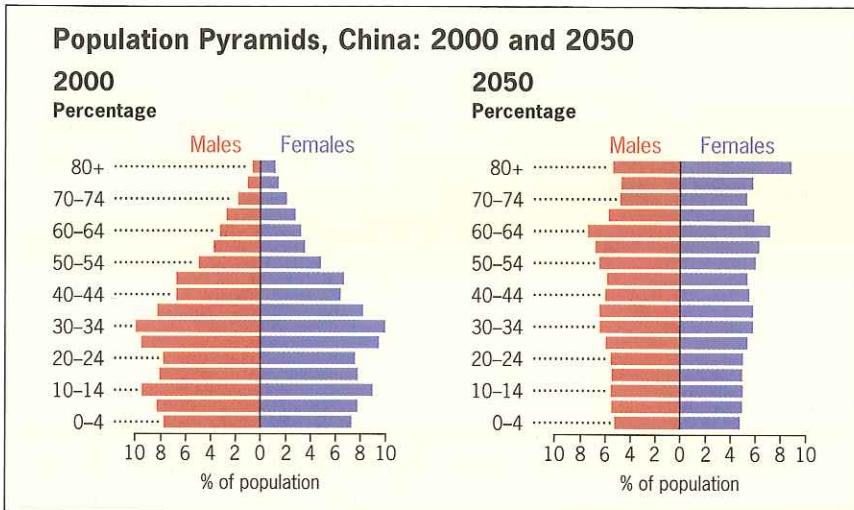


Figure 2.24
Population Pyramids, China: 2000 and 2050. Data from: Population Reference Bureau, 2005.

but these policies can achieve only so much. With a TFR still well below 2, the Swedish government continues to think about new ways to support families and promote birth rates. One imaginative, but not evidently successful, approach was suggested by a spokeswoman for the Christian Democrat Party, who urged Swedish television to show racier programming at night in hopes of returning the population to a higher birth rate!

Contradictions

Some areas of the world with low population growth rates (Fig. 2.9) are in the very heart of the Roman Catholic world. Roman Catholic doctrine opposes birth control and abortion. Adherence to this doctrine appears to be stronger in areas remote from the Vatican (headquarters of the Catholic Church). For example, in the Philippines,

thousands of miles from the Vatican, in Asia's only Roman Catholic country, the still-powerful Catholic Church opposes the use of artificial contraceptives, which the Philippine government supports as a method of controlling population growth. The Church and the Philippine State agree on abortion, as the Philippine constitution prohibits abortion.

Among Islamic countries, the geographic pattern is the opposite. Saudi Arabia, home to Mecca—the hearth of Islam—has one of the world's fastest population growth rates (2.7 percent). But in Indonesia, thousands of miles from Mecca and near the Philippines, the government began a nationwide family planning program in 1970. When fundamentalist Muslim leaders objected, the government used a combination of coercion and inducement to negate their influence. By 2000, Indonesia's family planning program had lowered the growth rate to 1.6 percent, and today it stands at 1.4 percent.

Percent of Total Population

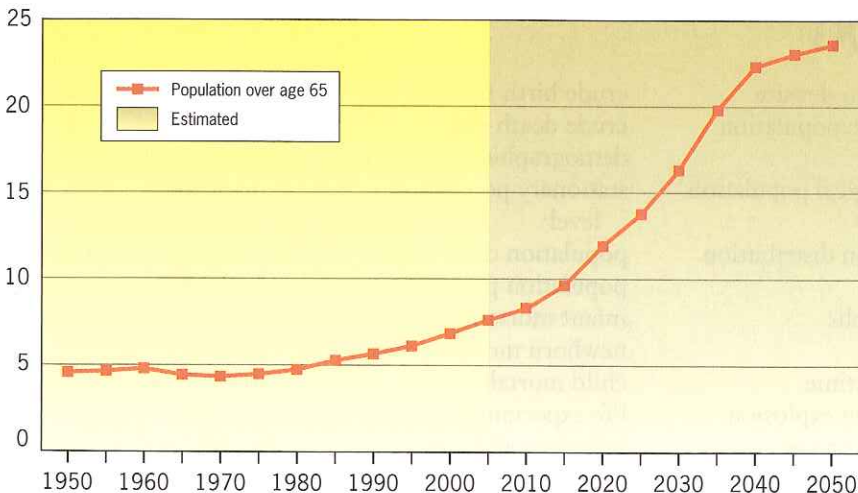


Figure 2.25
Percent of Population over Age 65 in China, 1950–2050. Data from: Population Reference Bureau, 2005.



When studying government policies on population, one of the most important things to remember is unintended

consequences. Choose one country in the world where women have little access to education and are disempowered. Consider the previous section of this chapter on age composition, and determine how restrictive population policies in this country will alter the population composition of the country.

Summary

In the late 1700s, Thomas Malthus sounded warning bells about the rapidly growing population in Great Britain. He feared a massive famine would soon “check” the growing population, bringing widespread suffering. Although the famine in Great Britain did not take place as he predicted, the rapidly growing worldwide population made many more follow Malthus’s trajectory, issuing similar warnings about the population explosion over the last two centuries.

The growth rate of the world population has certainly slowed, but human suffering is not over yet. Dozens of countries still face high death rates and high birth rates. Even in countries where the death rate is low, slowed population growth is often a result of horrid sanitary and medical conditions that lead to high infant and child mortality, diseases such as AIDS that ravage the population and orphan the young, or famines that governments deny and that global organizations cannot ameliorate.

Population pyramids illustrate that as wealthier countries worry about supporting their aging populations, poorer countries have problems of their own. A high birth rate in a poor country does not necessarily mean overpopulation—some of the highest population densities in the world are found in wealthy countries. Even poor countries that have lowered their birth rates and their death rates are constantly negotiating what is morally acceptable to their people and their cultures.

Geography offers much to the study of population. Through geography we can see differences in population problems across space, how what happens at one scale affects what goes on at other scales, and how different cultures and countries approach population questions.

Geographic Concepts

population density	crude birth rate	chronic or degenerative diseases
arithmetic population density	crude death rate	genetic or inherited diseases
physiological population density	demographic transition	endemic AIDS
population distribution	stationary population level	expansive population policies
dot map	population composition	eugenic population policies
megalopolis	population pyramids	restrictive population policies
census	infant mortality rate	one-child policy
doubling time	newborn mortality rate	
population explosion	child mortality rate	
natural increase	life expectancy	
	infectious diseases	