
THE PERVASIVENESS OF POLITICS

By Nazli Choucri

Population programmes have political dimensions—and political problems often have demographic roots. But just how do politics and population interact?



Nazli Choucri is a Professor of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is currently focusing on the problems of public policy in developing countries and has written extensively on population issues in development.

Few would deny the existence of a population issue in the world today, but many uncertainties remain about the precise nature of the “problem” and the merits of alternative “solutions”. Prevailing disagreements in both academic and policy-making circles are informed as much by disparities in insights and evidence, as by differences in beliefs, ideologies, and interpretation of facts.¹ The spectrum of opinion ranges from those who maintain that the global problem is one of high fertility, attribute most social problems to population growth, and assert that the solution lies in accelerated investments in family planning programmes,² to those who maintain the problem is developmental, population is a multiplier of other difficulties, and contend that controlling fertility alone does not address the multiple consequence of population growth.³

I shall argue that a society’s demographic characteristics inevitably elicit political effects which bear upon national priorities, the distribution of power, and the performance of governmental institutions.⁴ Demographic interventions are, by definition, political and can only rarely be considered in a purely administrative or bureaucratic guise. So, too, the overall population characteristics of a society, in terms of size, composition, and distribution, may influence national stability, political cohesion, and economic development and, at times, even create political conflict. High fertility simply aggravates, but rarely causes, societal dislocations. Yet only seldom are the demographic components of national problems clearly identified; even more seldom is there an awareness of the structural demographic constraints that neutralize political solutions to social conflicts. Indeed, many problems which are viewed as strictly political have, in fact, demographic roots.⁵ Conversely, policy interventions that are proposed with demographic intents often result in distinctly political consequences. It is this dual interaction between population and politics that has contributed to the increasing politicization of demographic issues in the world today.

Political Implications of Population Dynamics

A look at *The New York Times* while preparing this paper revealed the persistence of civil war in Lebanon, civil disorders in Southern Africa, potential upheavals by return migrants from Angola to Portugal, new legislation in Kuwait to regulate the inflow of foreign workers, conflict between Israeli-Arabs and Israeli authorities over settlements in various occupied lands, the

prospects of a war between Egypt and Libya, the possibilities of border conflicts between Columbia and Ecuador stimulated by oil disputes, and a long list of seemingly unrelated, disparate conflicts. The war in Ireland persists. There is continuing unrest in the Basque country of Spain. And the Rhodesian conflict threatens to involve all of Black Africa.

Each of these situations is labelled as a political conflict and its explosive nature is sometimes underestimated. Each seems to involve differences in objectives among competing groups. Each entails some proposed governmental intervention that is often both ineffective and tentative. And in each case the "problem" is posed solely in political terms. But each situation has been set in motion by peculiar combinations of demographic and economic characteristics, and by changes in these characteristics. In every case, the political outcomes were created by a highly volatile and unstable demographic structure. That volatility is not the result of increased fertility alone, nor can it be viewed solely in terms of added numbers. To stress fertility is to adopt a simplistic, if not misleading, explanation of complex phenomena. Changes in the size, composition, and distribution of a society's population will *under certain circumstances* generate serious political dislocations. And policies designed to influence these characteristics may also result in marked social conflicts. But the effects of changes in fertility are generally indirect in that they will influence the size, composition, and distribution of groups in a society and, as such, may well contribute to the evolution of political conflicts.⁶

The impact of demographic variables can best be viewed in relation to time. In any immediate sense, population variables are more or less fixed *parameters* of a social system. In the longer run, they fluctuate (due to changes in fertility or mortality) and act as *variables* in a situation. Often, too, population variables may produce *multiplier* effects in that they can exacerbate prevailing strains and stresses and provide obstacles to distinctly political solutions.⁸

Population size may function as a political parameter when, for example, it generates population pressures upon resources that lead to expansionist tendencies. Population composition may be a parameter of a conflict when it sets the cleavages in a society, generating tensions that result in ethnic or religious conflict. So, too, the population distribution may be a political parameter when, for instance, tribal allegiance crosses national boundaries and generates overt conflict, or when the migration of population changes the ethnic composition of the receiving community and results in a nativist reaction.

Population creates a multiplier effect in a social situation when it exacerbates the prevailing strains and stresses and provides obstacles to distinctly political solutions. For example, population size may be a multiplier by intensifying the effects of rural-urban migration whereby congestion in urban areas is accentuated and strains upon governmental capacities increased. The composition of the population may be a multiplier when it worsens economic performance, exacerbates resource constraints, or accentuates competition among groups. And population distribution may provide multiplier effects when it may intensify divisions in a society, be they ethnic, religious, racial, or tribal.

Population becomes a *political* variable when it changes the course which political conflicts might take, or alternatively, creates political divisions. For example, population size may be changed drastically through genocide; the distribution of population may change through migration or through relocations, And population composition may change through movements, differential fertility, or mortality.

Demographic features of society are simply not manipulatable on short

order, not at seemingly acceptable social costs. Even if such manipulation were possible, the ethical basis would still be subject to question. In cases where there has indeed been a drastic and immediate change—through migration, changes in composition, genocide, or relocation—the effects have generally been disruptive. Although it would be premature to label fertility interventions as disruptive, policies designed to change the birth rate of certain groups within a society but not others are immediately regarded as suspect by some quarters. That perception provides the germ of a political view of population issues.

The added considerations that most government interventions designed to influence demographic characteristics result in some impact upon population variables,⁹ but that there is no significant relationship between type of population intervention, governmental perceptions of a population “problem” and actual fertility rates,¹⁰ point to the conclusion that the social and political consequences attributed to population factors cannot be defined in terms of growth alone.¹¹ Thus, some “solution” to perceived population-related problems may result in generating further demographic difficulties.¹² The inevitable confounding of perceptions, policies, and problem-definition renders close to impossible the adoption of a value-neutral perspective on population problems or proposed responses.

The choice of policy interventions to affect population variables—in terms of size, composition, or distribution—is in fact made on the basis of political, not demographic, criteria. The consequences, though anticipated in demographic terms, will be perceived, evaluated, and reacted to largely in political terms. The interpretation of “facts” is predicated on values and preferences. And the “technical” basis of demographic interventions often serves as a rationale for value-laden political choices. This dual consideration serves to complicate any evaluation of available evidence regarding linkages between population and politics, and make it more difficult to glean the political implications of demographic factors, or to isolate the political component of population issues.

The Nature of the Evidence

What do we know? With what degree of confidence?

The answer is: not very much. And with not much confidence. Nonetheless, the observations presented in the Introduction are drawn from a fairly comprehensive survey of the evidence and, invariably, suffer from an important constraint: political scientists have not focused on the demographic implications of politics. Demographers seldom acknowledge the political implications of population characteristics. Studies in political demography are few, and the basis of inference slim, but the conjunction of empirical evidence and illustrative observation enables some plausible generalizations.¹³

1. Added numbers generate demands for increases in government services, such as housing, education, health delivery, and the like.¹⁴ The requirements are so perceived by most governments and responses envisaged. But it is unclear whether the motivating perception is one propelled by added numbers or by evolving concerns for social equity or economic growth. Nonetheless, numbers are viewed as obstacles and some investigations substantiate that numbers do indeed become obstacles to provision of service.¹⁵

2. The rapid entry of numbers into the labour force is likely to expand the mass base entering political life and becoming potentially active. The evidence is ambiguous regarding the type of political activity engendered.¹⁶ Some studies conclude that such activity is politically disruptive; others argue that the



The 1974 World Population Conference—where the politicization of population issues “surfaced unequivocally”

evidence does not support the disruption hypothesis.¹⁷ Still others, pointing to political upheavals, cite unemployment and labour unrest as major determinants.¹⁸ That societies with high dependency ratios are also the most unstable does not constitute sufficient evidence to infer that large numbers of unproductive youth create political instability.¹⁹ The attractiveness of the simple relationship may lead to an uncritical view of the evidence.

3. A high proportion of youths in a population may strain the socialization mechanism of a society, particularly when resources are inadequate to cope with the induction of large numbers into the social order. At most one can argue confidently that pressures of numbers on institutions accelerate impending strains, but do not necessarily cause them.²⁰

4. While there is no evidence to suggest that population density *per se* has any direct bearing upon internal instability or domestic conflict, there is some evidence that density may be part of the conflict-generating dynamic in societies that already exhibit tendencies for internal conflict.²¹

5. Rapid urbanization appears to have a moderately positive (though not statistically significant) correlation with measures of internal turmoil and rebellion.²² But recent studies of population movement among the urban poor in Latin America suggest that the city is not necessarily a radicalizing influence, that there appears to be no difference among migrants on social conditions, political attitudes, or behavior patterns, and there is no evidence that such migrants provide an invariably radical base for political change.²³

6. When the migrants are more skilled than the native population, thereby succeeding in obtaining economic benefits or a more beneficial economic position, a nativist reaction sets in, and the migrants are opposed politically by the host population.²⁴

7. The differential size, rate of growth, and level of knowledge and skills of hosts and migrants set the context for political conflict.²⁵ Any effort to intervene through policies which are designed to influence demographic variables will inevitably have political ramifications and be perceived in political terms.

8. Despite the near universal assumption that large numbers engender political power, numbers alone do not contribute to military effectiveness or to economic performance.²⁶ Defining the effects of size depends upon skills and resources available. In a military confrontation, the effects of large numbers may be neutralized through superior technology.

9. Size provides one basic social constraint by contributing to the definition of acceptable casualty rates in any conflict, desirable levels of induction into the military, and expectations of military performance.²⁷

10. The rate of population growth contributes to the criticality of demographic variables in a conflict situation: the higher the rate of fertility increase, the more salient are demographic variables likely to be in the evolution of a conflict situation.²⁸

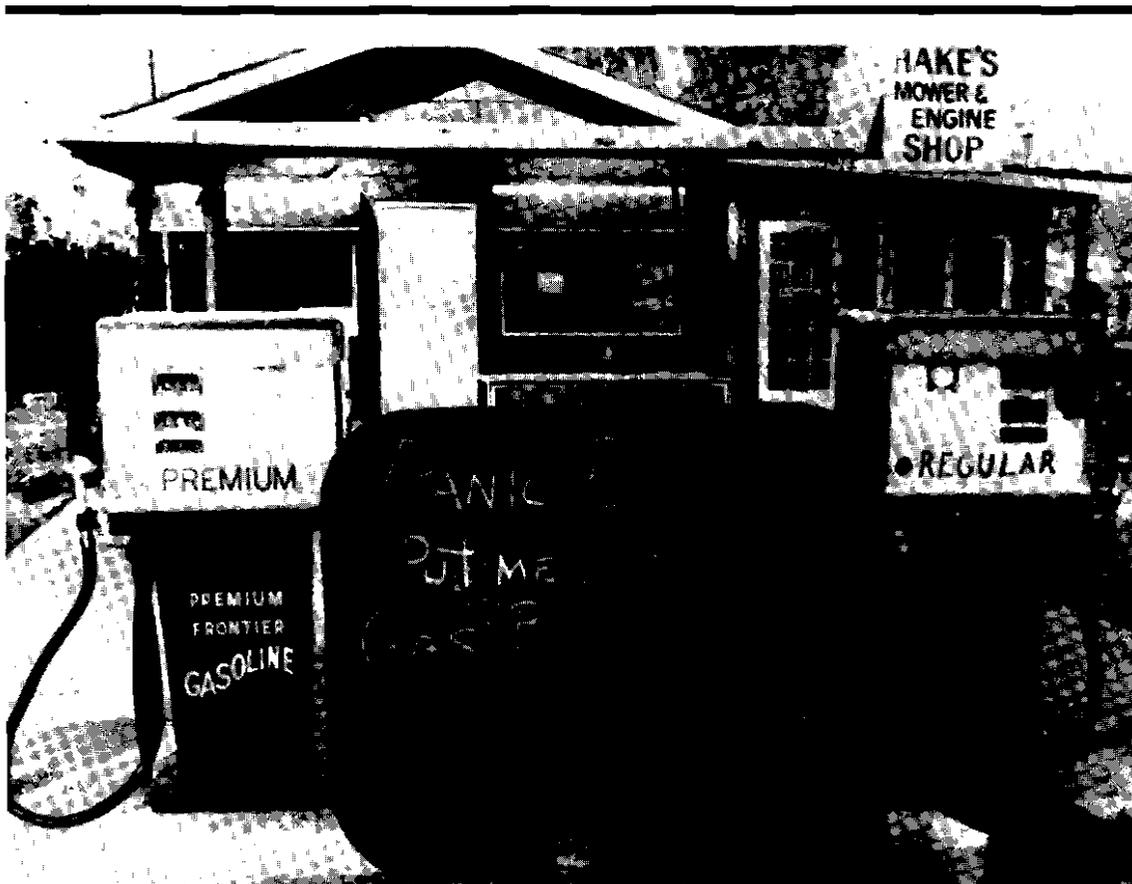
11. Similarly, differential rates of increase among different ethnic groups may create political conflict, and in any ongoing conflict they will exacerbate it.²⁹

12. When ethnic, religious, racial, or tribal divisions cross national boundaries, the mobilization of these divisions across territorial borders will contribute to overt conflict.³⁰ Territorial divisions that cut across homogeneous groups will increase the salience of ethnic or other divisions and contribute to the mobilization of political opposition.

13. Population growth and density are basic contributors to the expansion of a country's activities outside territorial boundaries.³¹ This expansion, if undertaken under military auspices, is a direct determinant of violent conflict. Historically, population density and density in relation to available resources have been regarded as constraining economic growth and propelling external expansion. Major wars can be traced to long-term dynamics that are rooted in the relationship of demographic factors to economic ones.³²

14. Two causal paths relating population to violent conflict emerge. On the one hand, it is argued (on some empirical ground) that population growth is a detriment to economic growth, thus possibly leading to instability and internal upheaval; on the other, it has been demonstrated empirically that population density and rate of growth contribute to economic growth, to the demand for food and raw materials, and to behavior designed to meet these demands. Such behavior is a direct determinant of external conflict.³³

None of the foregoing should be interpreted to mean that population variables alone have political outcomes, that population growth is invariably destabilizing, that most social problems can be traced solely to population factors, or that demographic solutions are always required. Each of the results



"The petroleum dispute illustrated new constraints on the behaviour and policies of the industrial states and new sources of friction between rich and poor."

noted above must be interpreted to mean that population variables *in relation to* resource availability and/or level of knowledge and skills may lead to destabilizing outcomes. Further, the effects of population variables are seldom direct: there is a long series of intervening processes that mediate between demographic factors and political outcomes, the complexity of which tends to reduce the salience of population variables once the outcomes have become crystallized. By the same token, fertility rates alone cannot be interpreted as problematic. It is *in relation to* national attributes and social characteristics that these can in fact be problematic and can be perceived as such. The analyst's task is to determine whether there seems to be a relationship between population and politics, establish the nature of the relationship, then specify the processes by which impacts occur.

It is useful to recall the value implications of different types of data. For example, aggregate statistics—such as population size—represent the outcome of discrete action. Indeed, each statistic is an indicator of—and a consequence of—a discrete (implicit and explicit) decision by an individual human being governed by a value preference.³⁴ Population growth, for instance, is the outcome of a personal choice over which national governments do not have direct control. And individual decisions have national consequences. The determinism involved is thus a social determinism. That is, a whole society is impelled, or simply drifts, in a predictable direction—some almost in spite of official policy—because thousands or millions of private citizens behave in legitimate, customary, routine ways. Intervening to change behavior involves changing values and making an explicit decision about the

Politicalization and Political Change

A review of analytical positions on the population issue prepared before the World Population Conference identifies 12 views against any interventions and four in support of policies and programmes.³⁹ The anti-intervention positions include conventional pro-natalist policies, revolutionary postures, anti-colonial perspectives which regard population intervention as equivalent to genocide, and the social justice position which regards population programmes as insufficient for bringing about fertility declines, among others. While the 12 anti-intervention positions are not mutually exclusive, they cover the major policy positions opposed to fertility control.

The positions supporting the need for special policies include: 1) The

The second anomaly is that while research on population problems has been seemingly apolitical in its orientation, population issues have become increasingly politicalized. That politicalization had gone largely unnoticed during the decade of the 1960s but surfaced unequivocally at the World Population Conference in Bucharest, 1974.³⁷ The nature of that politicalization was still to be understood and many countervailing political trends were articulated, sometimes contradictory, yet all attesting to emergence of new dimensions of discourse in world politics. Population issues were now viewed in terms influenced—even defined—by prevailing global political cleavages.³⁸ This new politicalization was barely recognized in the population field. To find issues further, national positions on population problems were influenced by foreign policy objectives, not by the "facts" associated with population change.

The Research Gap

Two anomalies prevail in current work on population issues. First is that analysis of population problems has tended to be the sole purview of demographers, and the demographic paradigms dominate. Indeed, even the most recent and seemingly comprehensive review of social science research on population issues is so biased toward the demographic (and to a lesser extent, the sociological) literature that there is little cognizance of the policy or the political implications of population dynamics.³⁵ This review is evidence of the narrow perspective on the "problem" that prevails in population circles and has defined issues mainly in terms of fertility increase. There is no reference to studies of the political consequence of population change. Recent work on the behavior of migrants, illegal migration, return migration, conflicts associated with population factors, military implications of added numbers—and a whole range of policy-related or political issues emanating from population factors are not covered or even cited, nor is the less-developed countries' perspective adequately taken into account. Even the recent study by the National Academy of Sciences reporting on perspectives and views on population issues from the developing world prepared prior to the World Population Conference 1974 to identify some key demographic issues for poorer countries is not cited.³⁶

relative preference of one set of values rather than another. This is done all the time in fertility control programmes or policies. But to assume that controlling numbers is a sufficient condition for resolving population "problems" is simply a substitution of one set of values for another. It does not, in any sense, constitute a sufficient reaction to the "problem" since from a political perspective population "problems" are not created by added numbers alone. The ultimate dilemma is that the pursuit of legitimate values at the individual level results in outcomes that, according to national values, are socially costly.

conventional views that unrestrained population growth inevitably results in poverty, malnutrition, environment deterioration and associated social ills; 2) The more recent concern for the provision of social services being constrained by added numbers; 3) The humanitarian perspective which recognizes the "right" of individual control over reproductive processes; 4) The integrationist posture which argues for the inclusion of population interventions within a large developmental context. Again, these positions are not mutually exclusive. More than one view is commonly held at a time.

At Bucharest, these various pro- and anti-intervention views consolidated into four major policy positions.⁴⁰ The lines of cleavage were drawn accordingly. They were informed less by demographic trends and patterns than by political objectives and value perspectives. Factors that were seemingly extraneous to population issues shaped emerging positions and the main lines of contention were clearly political.

First was the view that rapid population growth is a positive force for economic development, that demographic problems are really problems of distribution, social justice, and social organization, and that changes in economic relations between rich and poor states will alleviate demographic difficulties. This position was adopted by China, Algeria, Argentina, Albania, sub-Saharan Africa, Rumania, Cuba, and Peru.

Second was the position that some countries do have population problems which hinder development, but solutions to these problems are developmental and do not rest on fertility interventions alone. India, Egypt, Mexico, Yugoslavia, Italy, and some Latin American countries opted for that perspective.

Third was the belief that rapid population growth intensifies the effects of social and economic problems, and population policies and programmes are required to reduce fertility rates to a level consonant with the prevailing level of economic development. Reduction of population growth is believed to make an important contribution to the potential success of economic programmes. The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Western Europe (other than France and Italy), and Bangladesh adopted that position.

Fourth was the position that there is no "problem" in the abstract, but that economic systems generate their own demographic problems. For this reason there is no need for specific fertility interventions; demographic trends adjust to social and economic ones. The East European countries (excluding Rumania and Yugoslavia) have expounded that view.

Underlying these four perspectives was yet a more basic issue; namely, the difference between an incremental perspective and a redistribution one.⁴¹ The incrementalist view maintained that population growth was a serious problem: although economic development was necessary, strengthening population programmes could have only positive effects. The debates at Bucharest ought to be confined to these issues. The redistributionists argued that the Conference should accept the view that population was not a major cause of underdevelopment, but a consequence, and that collective solutions entail fundamental changes in international economic relations.

The resulting polarization will shape population debates for the years to come. It has broadened the issues beyond fertility alone and may serve as a catalyst for the development of a systematic integration of population issues

within specific development contexts. The cleavages were reflected in the final version of the World Population Plan of Action.⁴² The absence of any specific targets for fertility control programmes has been interpreted as a weakening of western influence on the developing countries' positions and as evidence of a basic disjuncture between population analysts and United States representatives at the Conference, on the one hand, and the majority of the participants, on the other. The sources of this polarization can be found in the changes in the nature of international political and economic relations.

Conflict over Control

The most pervasive changes in the international system immediately prior to the Bucharest meeting involve the nature of control in international politics.⁴³ The cohesion of the oil-producing countries testified to the possibilities of employing economic instruments for political purposes, and prospects of sacrificing economic gains for political objectives.⁴⁴ The initial rise in petroleum prices of October 1973 and the events immediately following the crisis were evidence of the inability of the advanced states to impose their preferences on the less developed countries. The petroleum dispute illustrated new constraints on the behavior and policies of the industrial states and new sources of friction between rich and poor.⁴⁵

One immediate consequence was the attempt by poorer states to define for themselves the requirements of development and the priorities of national growth. Accompanying these attempts was a new skepticism regarding western motivation in extending development assistance. This skepticism gradually extended to population assistance. But demands for assistance persist, despite differences in orientations between donors and recipients. Gradual, though marginal, changes in western development assistance represent a reaction to these developments.⁴⁶

The extent of changes in western reactions, at least in the population field, can be gleaned from the orientation and policies of the major donor and advisory agencies. The more established organizations, such as the Population Council, U.S.A.I.D., and the World Bank, adopt more restrictive definitions of the "problem" and employ conventional modes and idioms of discourse, namely that of a donor, with all the political advantages and disadvantages thereof. The more recent entrants in the assistance realm reflect the changing orientations in international policies and seek to change the conventional donor-recipient relationship to one of shared participation in development efforts. That participation is, by definition, unequal given the flow of financial resources and technical skills, but the idiom of interaction is fundamentally different as is the mode of exchange.

The traditional advisory and donor agencies in the population field have, in fact, defined population growth as the major population "problem", and family planning as the major "solution". Formal recognition of the impact of other population variables has not been accompanied with notable and effective change in orientation, research directions, or advisory activities.⁴⁷ The conflicts that emerged in Bucharest were not anticipated, and a recognition of the increasing politicization of population issues has been both recent and halting. The reluctant appreciation of new trends in international policies constrains these agencies' continued receptivity in the developing world and harbours sources of dissension.

By effectively retaining a narrow definition of both problem and solution, traditional agencies are reinforcing the inherently conservative value orientations underlying their work. The discrepancy between their values and those articulated at Bucharest by three of the four contending groups simply accentuates the existence of value changes that remain not fully appreciated in the

west. This discrepancy is not idiosyncratic of population agencies alone, but reflects the orientations of U.S.A.I.D., the Department of State, and the World Bank on issues other than population. Indeed, the high degree of value congruence between U.S. foreign aid objectives and the orientation of those of the traditional agencies in the population field reveals the general thrust of western involvement in international developmental problems.

Both the Swedish International Development Authority and the Canadian International Development Research Center seem to reflect the growing dissatisfaction and skepticism of the assistance record in economic development most generally, but also in the field of population. Both agencies have been more sensitive to a changing international environment and to the increasing ability of the poorer countries to make effective demands upon the richer countries. They also reflect the growing gap between U.S. foreign aid orientation and the Canadian and Swedish perspectives. Although much of the Swedish contribution in the population field has been to family planning programmes, the guiding values are redistributive, supporting increasing political and economic independence of poorer states, and encouraging their allocation of Swedish aid consistent with their own priorities.⁴⁸

The Canadian and the Swedish agencies define population problems essentially as situation bound. In that respect, any of the four positions articulated at Bucharest would be consistent with these agencies' orientation. That context-specific definition of population problems is itself a novel input into conventional population perspectives. While it might be misleading to attribute to these agencies a greater appreciation of changes in international politics than may actually be the case, there is every indication that they believe their effectiveness is contingent upon participation of the recipient country in the research undertaken or in the use of assistance funds to articulate their own priorities. More important, effectiveness may be dependent upon a realization of evolving changes in the forms of conflict and control in relations between rich and poor.

The Effects of Politization

One immediate effect of this politization is the coupling of population with other socio-economic issues, thereby increasing the necessity of "packaging" solutions to the problem, however defined. Interventions can no longer be viewed or even justified solely in demographic terms. This change accounts in part for the criticism of family planning. Politization of population issues has also, by definition, increased their salience. Most countries now have an articulated view on the issue. Preparations for the Conference forced countries to adopt some position. The United Nations questionnaire was an inevitable sensitizer.⁴⁹

As a result, new constraints on interventionist policies emerged. Professional and research personnel involved in population programmes could now become the target of sustained opposition. Whatever neglect they had suffered on the part of planners and policy makers was now translated into potential confrontation. Anonymity was lost, and with it freedom of action. To evaluate these trends as positive or negative entails a value judgment. Politization of issues, while invariably signalling potential opposition, also enables greater avenues of generating support for population programmes. Predicting the effects of politization is a major dilemma for political scientists. Again, predictions and evaluation of effects depend upon underlying values. There are no objective criteria.

But there are political criteria at both national and international levels that determine the nature of the politization. The form that the political characteristics of population issues take varies considerably. At the international

level, politicization is primarily a by-product of the purposive creation of overlap on a number of issues of importance to poorer states. The politics of bargaining and collusion are predominant. At the national level, politics has been directly infused into population issues once it was recognized that population and developmental variables were related, and once the strain of added numbers became apparent. Developmental policy-making directly politicized population issues. The interaction between international and national politicization is mutually reinforcing, but fundamental differences remain.

The Pervasiveness of Politics

Politics refers to the authoritative allocation of values in a society in terms of who gets what, when, and how. It is the process of resolving conflicts over the allocation of resources and scarce values. It entails negotiations, the resort to varying ways of exerting influence, ranging from voluntary persuasion to overt coercion. A political *issue* is a substantive matter over which disagreement exists about how much and what type of resources are to be allocated. It entails a struggle, some costs and some benefits, some gainers and some losers, and invariably sustained conflict. A *policy* is the outcome of this conflict and the directive for the allocation of values.

The *mode* of policy-making, that is, of resolving conflicts over resource allocations, is itself a political issue. Societies differ over the nature of this conflict resolution. Democratic polities engage in basic policy selection through established processes and consensus-building and the creation of public support. Authoritarian polities dispense with public support and employ varying forms of coercion for allocating resources across issue-areas and resolving conflicts over priorities.

Population becomes a *political* issue when such claims influence the distribution of power in a society. Population becomes a political *problem* for national governments when it threatens the support-creating mechanisms of a society, generates demands upon the political process, and places loads upon government performance. It becomes a critical problem when it threatens existing modes of conflict resolution, creates additional possibilities of further conflict, and reinforces lines of social cleavages. Population becomes a policy issue when choices of interventions are to be made, with attendant costs and benefits. The selection then is the outcome of conflict among contending groups that define the parameters of the choice and the nature of acceptable interventions.

Population becomes an *international* issue when it raises the need for choices of interventions to change demographic characteristics, when support for alternative modes of interventions depends upon the position of the government and resource-recipients, and when a discrepancy arises between the values of the resource donors for such interventions. Population becomes an international problem when it threatens the prevailing structure of international order, when it raises the possibility of large-scale international transformations, and when such transformations influence the international distribution of authority and control. Population becomes an international issue when support for interventions is solicited at the national level, when directives for such interventions are not agreed upon, and when proposed interventions threaten national priorities and perceptions of appropriate allocations of resources across alternative issue-areas.

The politicization of population variables at both national and international levels has, ironically, highlighted the disincentives for adopting population as a policy issue. That is, the mere politicization of demographic factors has dramatized the political difficulties involved in taking *any* action to influence

the demographic characteristics of a society. Eight such disincentives are particularly constraining:

1. the demonstration value of most interventions is low; conventional means of influencing population characteristics yield changes only over the longer range;
2. the criteria of success are ambiguous, and the prospects of success directly attributable to the interventions is also low;
3. policy issues are, by definition, based on short-term considerations; demographic interventions yield only long-term effects, if any;
4. accordingly, there is a notable imbalance between the resource inputs and the behavioral outputs; that imbalance is a political cost that is seldom readily borne;
5. there is no public constituency for population interventions; as an issue, population is not a source of political support;
6. policy interventions are designed to induce individual behavioral change; but the outcomes are evaluated in social and national terms; the disjunction is a political cost;
7. population interventions entail value changes; intervention efforts will mobilize latent conflicts over social values and their implications for the distribution of resources; and
8. the targeted section of the population is generally that least mobilizable for change.

These disincentives are all political. There may be economic, social, and other disincentives as well.

Indeed, *who* defines the *issues* will determine what the nature of the *problem* is. Always that judgment is based on value premises, implicit or explicit as the case may be. The identification of population as a policy issue itself shapes the nature of the ensuing political problem. In the past three decades, the *nature* of the conflict over resource allocation to population-related matters has been determined by the *source* of the salience of the issue. In other words, the conduit for rendering population as a salient issue itself served to define the parameters of the attendant conflict and the policy problems that ensued.

While generalizations such as these invariably entail both oversimplification and a lack of attention to details, there are at least four ways in which demographic factors assume political salience. Each conditions the subsequent political conflicts over the allocations of resources to population interventions and each serves to define the political features of demographic issues.

First is the case in which external agencies influence national governments which, in turn, become susceptible to interventionist policies. Typically, such policies were targeted toward the poorest segments of the society which were most affected by rapid population growth but which are the least organized either to support or oppose interventionist policies. At best, they are the apathetic, yet potentially mobilizable, sectors. The political problem for the external agencies is to elicit government support for interventions; for the government it is to obtain resources commensurate with envisaged interventions, and to disburse these without mobilizing political opposition. Most family planning programmes are of this kind.

Second is the case in which initiative for interventions comes directly from the national government and is designed to affect everyone in the society regardless of socio-economic or political status. In that case, the political problem is simply one of eliciting active support for specified policies, as in China.

Third is the case in which salience results from the efforts of private groups domestically that become transformed into effective interest groups bearing pressure on national governments for evidence of concern. Such pressure is effectively translated into governmental requests for external assistance and the donor-recipient interactions define the nature of the political problem for each. Such is the case, for example, in the development of Egypt's involvement with interventionist measures.

Fourth is the case in which direct support is extended to the grass roots by an external agency without the intermediary involvement of the national government. The political problem for the donor is to avoid mobilizing governmental opposition to external involvement in local policies and programmes. For the local power structure, which might benefit from the resources expended by the external agency, the political problem is to ensure the continued flow of resources, neutralize potential governmental opposition, and prevent the mobilization of traditional interests in opposition to interventionist programmes.

Each mode of creating interest in, and challenging resources toward, population issues may generate conflict that, in itself, is evidence of the political dimensions of population issues, and places in appropriate context the query: "a problem for whom?"

A Problem for Whom?

The political problems emanating from population issues may either be recognized by groups within a society or the national government, or they may not. Once recognition takes place, the issues become politicized and generally incorporated within existing policy debates. At that point, the political issue for governments seeking to adopt interventionist postures is threefold: (a) to resolve conflicts over resource allocation; (b) to obtain financial and technical

FOOTNOTES

1. See, for example, Michael E. Conroy and Nancy R. Felbre, *Population Growth as a Deterrent to Economic Growth: A Reappraisal of the Evidence*, Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences, 1976.
2. The positions articulated at the World Population Conference, 1974, reflect one range of views. See below.
3. This view is gaining increasing support in the developing world.
4. A survey of the issues that inform that type of argument is presented in Robert C. North and Nazli Choucri, "Population and the International System: Some Implications for United States Policy and Planning" in *Governance and Population: The Governmental Implications of Population Change*, Volume IV of the Report of the Commission of Population Growth and the American Future, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 251-278.
5. See, for example, Myron Weiner, "Political Demography: An Inquiry into the Political Consequences of Population Change", National Academy of Sciences, *Rapid Population Growth: Consequences and Policy Implications* Volume II (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 567-617.
6. The absence of a theory of fertility impact on other demographic variables compounds the difficulties of analysis and inference.
7. See Robert C. North, *The World That Could Be* (Stanford University: Stanford Alumni Association, 1976).
8. See Nazli Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence: Propositions, Insights, and Evidence* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, Lexington Books, 1974), Chapter 8 for examples and illustrations.
9. United Nations Secretariat, "Population Policies and Programmes", in *The Population Debate: Dimensions and Perspectives*, Papers of the World Population Conference, Bucharest, 1974, Volume II, (New York: United Nations, 1976), pp. 583-605.
10. United Nations Secretariat, "Population Policies and Programmes", *The Population Debate*, 1976, p. 585.
11. This inference is drawn upon the results of the United Nations questionnaire in United Nations Secretariat, "Population Policies and Programmes", *The Population Debate*, 1976.
12. That relationship is simply not recognized in current debates and analyses of population issues.
13. These illustrations are selective and indicate some recent findings based on systematic as opposed to purely descriptive analysis.
14. Weiner, "Political Demography: An Inquiry into the Political Consequences of Population Change", 1971.
15. John D. Montgomery, "Planning to Cope: Administrative Consequences of Rapid Population Growth", in Warren F. Ilchman, et. al. *Policy Sciences and Population* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, Lexington Books, 1975), pp. 95-116.
16. See, for example, Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), for dominant views in the literature.
17. Weiner, "Political Demography: An Inquiry into the Political Consequences of Population Change", 1971.

assistance for intervention postures; and (c) to obtain domestic political support, or at least neutralize opposition to proposed interventions.

In cases where demographic trends, if unchecked, will result in substantial changes in the overall population structure within a foreseeable future—such as in Israel, South Africa, Rhodesia, to cite the most obvious cases—demographic characteristics are recognized as critical parameters of national politics. In such situations, governments may seek to develop interventionist strategies that are target specific, directed toward particular groups. Selective population interventions are often politically explosive and may mobilize opposition to the government.

In societies where national governments are more supportive of demographic interventions but fear the domestic political opposition, the problem is at least neutralizing political objections. This opposition is often from traditional sectors, but recently a revisionist perspective now rejects population intervention on revolutionary grounds. The underlying political belief is that social change is a necessary condition for development and establishing social justice, that any measures which buttress existing political systems simply delay the revolution and, on that ground alone, must be opposed. The thread that distinguishes rhetoric from reality in that type of argument is that population dynamics will, under certain circumstances, result in political instability and social upheaval, either directly or by reinforcing existing cleavages and providing multiplier effects upon prevailing problems. The revolutionary solution is to prevent piecemeal interventions which are simply palliatives. The reformist solution is to view incrementalist policies as both appropriate and necessary. In each case, the underlying value is political control. The same may be said of the positions at Bucharest.

For international agencies in the population assistance field, the political problem is to devise incentives for persuading national governments to provide the support required. The nature of that support is itself informed by the

18. Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., *Mass Political Violence: A Cross-National Causal Analysis*. (New York: John Wiley, 1973).
19. Weiner, "Political Demography: An Inquiry into the Political Consequences of Population Change", 1971.
20. See essays in High D. Graham and Ted R. Gurr (eds) *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*. June 1969 (New York: Signet Books, 1969); and Weiner, "Political Demography: An Inquiry into the Political Consequences of Population Change", 1971.
21. T.R. Gurr and H. Weil, "Population Growth and Political Conflict: A Correlational Study of 84 Nations", Northwestern University, unpublished ms, April 1973.
22. Gurr and Weil, "Population Growth and Political Conflict", 1973, provides the basis of that inference.
23. Wayne A. Cornelius, Jr., "The Political Sociology of Cityward Migration in Latin America: Toward Empirical Theory", in Francine F. Rabinovitz and Felicity Trueblood (eds), *Latin American Urban Research Volume I*. (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1971), pp. 95-147; and Wayne A. Cornelius, Jr., "Urbanization as an Agent in Latin American Political Instability: The Case of Mexico", *The American Political Science Review* (Vol. 63, 1969), pp. 833-857.
24. Myron Weiner, *When Migrants Succeed and Natives Fail: Assam and its Migrants* (M.I.T.: Center for International Studies, 1975).
25. Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence*, 1974, see Chapter 12 for summary.
26. See the review of the evidence on that issue in Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence*, 1974.
27. Geoffrey Kemp, "Population and War: Strategy, Demography, and Military Power", (M.I.T.: Center for International Studies), 1974.
28. Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence*, 1971, pp. 99-102.
29. This inference is based on cross-case analysis of local conflicts in developing countries; see Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence*, 1974.
30. See Choucri, *Population Dynamics and International Violence*, 1974, for specific illustrations and evidence.
31. Nazli Choucri and Robert C. North, *Nations in Conflict: National Growth and International Violence* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1975); statistical evidence is presented in Part III.
32. See North, *The World That Could Be*, 1976, for a comprehensive survey of the issues and their implications.
33. For a general synthesis of the evidence in particular classes of cases see Choucri and North, *Nations in Conflict*, 1975, Chapter 16.
34. That argument is explained further in Choucri and North, *Nations in Conflict*, 1975; see especially Introduction and Part I.
35. Bernard Berelson, "Social Science Research on Population: A Review", *Population and Development Review* (Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1976), pp. 219-266.

particular definition of a population "problem" adopted and of the "solutions" proposed. The exchange between donor and recipient is a political one, couched in technical or demographic terms perhaps, but ultimately political. The rationality that informs this exchange is a political rationality that overshadows economic calculations or assessments of the effects of unimpeded demographic events. The costs and benefits of adopting interventionist postures are calculated not on technical grounds alone, or on demographic ones, or even on economic grounds, but largely in terms of their bearing upon governmental actual, as opposed to professed, priorities. The criteria employed for evaluating interventions will ultimately be political. The events at the World Population Conference simply accelerated, but did not create, politicization of population issue.

Conclusion

The observations cited at the onset are at the same time profoundly correct yet singularly misleading. To attribute all social ills to population growth is to reduce population issues to unduly simplistic proportions. More important, to focus on growth alone is to ignore those population variables that may, in certain circumstances, be even more crucial in conditioning social outcomes.

To focus on population alone is to abstract that variable out of its societal context and to ignore the fundamental issue at hand: that the effects of population variables assume problematic proportions only as they bear upon and relate to resources available and prevailing levels of knowledge and skills. It is the interactive effects of population, resources, and technology that shape social issues and outcomes. But, political outcomes and actions ultimately determine the extent to which population variables will be regarded as manipulable by a society and the degree to which such manipulation will be encouraged or even allowed. □

36. National Academy of Sciences, *In Search of Population Policy: Views From the Developing World* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1974).
37. See Anthony R. Measham, "Population Policy 1976: A Reexamination of the Issues", (Columbia University, 1976, unpublished ms) for a cogent survey of these issues.
38. For a general analysis, see W. Parker Mauldin, et. al. "A Report on Bucharest: The World Population Conference and The Population Tribune, August 1974", *Studies in Family Planning* (Vol. 5, No. 12, December 1974), esp. pp. 377-381 for general observations.
39. Michael S. Teitelbaum, "Population and Development: Is a Concensus Possible?" *Foreign Affairs*, (Vol. 52, No. 4, July 1974), pp. 742-760.
40. Mauldin, et. al., "A Report on Bucharest", *Studies in Family Planning*, 1974, p. 363.
41. Jason L. Finkle and Barbara B. Crane, "The Politics of Bucharest: Population, Development, and the New International Economic Order", *Population and Development Review* (Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1975), pp. 87-114.
42. Bernard Berelson, "The World Population Plan of Action: Where Now?", *Population and Development Review*, (Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1976), pp. 115-146.
43. For a descriptive and analytical review of major issues see Hayward R. Alker, Jr., Lincoln P. Bloomfield, and Nazli Choucri, *Analyzing Global Interdependence*, Volumes 1-IV, (M.I.T.: Center for International Studies, 1974).
44. Nazli Choucri, *International Politics of Energy Interdependence: The Case of Petroleum*, (Lexington, D.C. Health, Lexington Books, 1976), Chapter 7, 8.
45. Choucri, *International Politics of Energy Interdependence*, 1976, Chapter 8 and 9.
46. I am grateful to Michael Henry and Donald Warwick for forwarding unpublished material on international agencies in the population field. Also relevant is the survey presented by United Nations Secretariat, "The Role of International Assistance in the Population Fields", *The Population Debate*, Volume II, 1976, pp. 657-674.
47. I am grateful to W. Parker Mauldin for pointing out the new efforts in this direction. To date, however, such efforts still remain modest at best. The response has been largely in the nature of sub-groups of organizations to develop rational means of resource allocations in population research. Their symbolic importance is perhaps greater than their effectiveness at the present time.
48. Although far removed for the specific issues at hand, see Nazli Choucri (with the collaboration of Robert C. North), "In Search of Peace Systems: Scandinavia and the Netherlands, 1870-1970", in Bruce M. Russett, ed. *Peace, War and Numbers* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1972), pp. 239-274, for an analysis of foreign behavior of Sweden over the past century and evidence of changes in dominant orientation.
49. See United Nations Secretariat, "Population Policies and Programmes", *The Population Debate*, Volume II 1976, pp. 583-605 for questions and answers.