
TOPICAL REVIEW

THE WORLD POPULATION: TWO DISTINCT "BLOCS"*

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FOLLOWING THEIR PARTICULAR DOCTRINARY INCLINATIONS, STUDENTS OF the social and the political situation have utilized diverse designations to identify the various segments into which they divide the world. These designations have always tended to present a tripartite division, based frequently on economic or politico-social organizations. They have thus used terms such as "free," communist and uncommitted, capitalist, socialist, "third world," imperialistic, colonial or marxist.

1. NATALITY, THE DIFFERENTIATING FACTOR

Without discussing the appropriateness of the preceding classifications, this article presents data designed to show that the categories are entirely senseless in reference to the world demographic situation. Concrete facts affirm that the world is at present divided into two large demographic "blocs" that transcend ideological frontiers and those of politico-social organizations. On one side, we find countries with high or moderately high birth rates, higher than the world average; on the other, those in which these rates are low or moderately low. An examination of table 1 clearly shows that all classification based on ideological or politico-social criteria is mere reminiscence today. We find capitalist and socialist countries mixed in the category of countries that have reached low or moderately low levels of natality, while China, among others, is included with those that are above the world average.

Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and other professionals have persistently searched for explanations to clarify the determinants of the decline registered in the level of natality in certain societies, which appears to be a

* The opinions expressed in this paper reflect the author's personal points of view.

TABLE 1

ESTIMATED BIRTH RATES FOR THE DIFFERENT REGIONS OF THE WORLD FOR THE PERIOD 1960-1965

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Birth rates (per thousand)</i>
West Africa	52.0
North Africa	44.0
Continental Central America	43.6
South Africa	42.8
Central South Asia	42.6
South East Asia	41.9
East Africa	41.7
Tropical South America	41.4
South West Asia	41.2
Rest of East Asia	40.4
Central Africa	40.0
Melanesia	40.0
Caribbean	37.9
China (Mainland)	34.3
<i>THE WORLD</i>	33.6
Temperate South America	26.4
North America	22.6
Australia and New Zealand	22.3
Soviet Union	22.1
Southern Europe	19.3
Eastern Europe	18.0
Western Europe	17.1
Japan	17.0
Northern Europe	16.5

Source: It refers to rates used by United Nations in the "medium" projection in "Provisional Report on the World Population Prospects, as Assessed in 1963," ST/SOA/SER. 7, See Table 1, 310.

sequel to modifications in the social organization. There seems to be consensus on only one point: the decline is voluntary, and it occurs because resort is made to the use of contraceptives or provoked abortion. Although certain authors have advanced the hypothesis that motivations are different in different societies, the ultimate result is the same: a reduced number of children per woman; in general, a number smaller than three on the average.

While reliable statistical data are lacking on the methods utilized by European populations to reduce their fertility after the advent of the indus-

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trial revolution, it is accepted that the non-socialist European populations, those of North America, Australia, and New Zealand have recently attained this goal mainly through the use of contraception, and those of Japan and socialist countries through induced abortion. The figures for Japan have been systematically published in official documents.¹ Those pertaining to the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have become available more recently. In a document submitted by Andras Klinger to the World Population Conference in 1965,² figures are given for abortions in five socialist countries during the year 1962; when compared with the number of recorded live births in the same year, these figures show the importance of abortion as a means of reducing natality.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Abortions (per thousand)</i>	<i>Live births</i>	<i>Rate of abortion per 1000 live births</i>
Bulgaria	97.8	134.1	729.1
Czechoslovakia	115.9	217.5	533.0
Hungary	197.6	130.1	1519.4
Poland	210.7	599.5	351.5
Yugoslavia	200.0	413.1	484.2

The most spectacular case is undoubtedly that of Hungary, in which the number of abortions exceeds the number of live births by 52 percent.

Based on a survey conducted in the Soviet Union, Heer has estimated the number of abortions during the year 1959 to be 5,829,000, which represents an excess of 11 percent over the estimated number of live births (5,242,000); in other words, a rate of abortion of 1111.0 per thousand live births.

Temperate South America, represented mainly by Argentina and Uruguay, seems to have reduced its natality by the combined effect of contraceptive and abortion, although information available on the frequency of their use is incomplete. A survey conducted recently in the city of Buenos Aires revealed a rate of abortion of 197⁴ per 1000 live births, which, if considered representative of the whole Argentinean population, would yield an annual number of more than 93,000 abortions.

The data cited above suggest that the desire to reduce fertility from its natural maximum to a level considered consistent with individual aspirations is universal. If this desire has not been transferred to the sphere of conduct in the high fertility demographic "bloc," it is due to a multiplicity of factors among which low cultural levels, diverse prejudices, lack of information on and access to contraceptive methods, and absence of action programs stimulated by private or public organizations are among the most important.

Nor are the so-called “utilitarian” motives lacking in the societies that have acted voluntarily to make fertility decline. If we accept as valid the data cited by Heer in the article mentioned above, a survey conducted among 26,000 Russian women in 1958–59 to determine the reasons adduced by them to request an abortion gave the following results:

Reason	Percentage declaring each reason	
	Urban area	Rural area
Material needs	10.0	11.2
Lack of space	14.0	4.2
No one at home or lack of institution to take care of child	11.0	10.9
New born child or too many children in the family	10.0	10.0

These are also the reasons frequently cited by women in other societies. It is to be expected that as new and better structured aspirations permeate the societies with high fertility patterns, they will search for ways and means to reduce it.

2. MORTALITY, BEHAVIOR DISSOCIATED FROM CHANGE

If the level of natality permits a division of the world into two large “blocs” in which the relationship between the level of underdevelopment and the level of fertility is clear, the same is not true of mortality, which has declined at least to some extent without significant changes in the social organization. We find populations with pre-modern levels of fertility exhibiting mortality rates below the world average. Even the value at which the level of mortality for Western Africa is estimated—(25 per thousand) the highest among those included in table 2—is indicative of important improvement in the general status of the health of the population and significantly different from the levels of mortality prevailing in different regions of the world at the beginning of the century.⁵

The causes of the decline in mortality in less developed societies have been amply discussed in the literature, and it is unnecessary to repeat them *in extenso* here. In socially and economically backward regions, the decline in mortality has been due primarily to the importation of medical and public health techniques; unfortunately these techniques have been applied without producing substantial changes in the politico-social organization. This explains why table 2 shows levels of mortality below the world average in certain parts

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TABLE 2

ESTIMATED DEATH RATES FOR THE DIFFERENT REGIONS OF THE WORLD FOR THE PERIOD 1960-1965

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Death rates (per thousand)</i>
West Africa	25.1
Central Africa	24.7
Melanesia	24.7
East Africa	24.0
China (Mainland)	21.0
Central South Asia	19.7
North Africa	19.2
South Africa	16.2
South East Asia	15.9
South West Asia	15.8
<i>THE WORLD</i>	<i>15.7</i>
Caribbean	14.9
Continental Central America	11.6
Rest of East Asia	11.2
Tropical South America	10.8
Western Europe	10.7
Northern Europe	10.4
Southern Europe	10.0
North America	9.2
Temperate South America	9.2
Eastern Europe	8.7
Australia and New Zealand	8.5
Japan	8.0
Soviet Union	7.2

Source: It refers to rates used by United Nations in the "medium" projection included in "Provisional Report on the World Population Prospects, as Assessed in 1963," ST/SOA/SER. 7. See Table 3, 312.

of Asia, in the whole of Latin America, and declining rates in most of Asia and important parts of Africa. In other regions, as in the case of the Soviet Union, for example, the reduction in mortality has been accompanied by and in great measure has been possible due to the evolution of the social and economic organization and to significant improvements in the levels of living.

While direct comparison of the rates presented in table 2 is somewhat complicated by the different age structures of the population in the various regions included in it, it is in general possible to appreciate what the level of

mortality was in the 1960–65 period. Only ten regions showed rates above the world average, with the highest value corresponding to West Africa, as it did in the case of natality.

If we examine the figures in table 2, bearing in mind the division into two “blocs,” we again find European non-socialist countries, those of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, North America, Australia, and New Zealand mixed together among the countries with the lowest levels of mortality.

The phenomenon of importation of medical and public health techniques referred to above explains why some of the regions that appear in the block of high or moderately high birth rates in table 1 move, in the case of mortality, to the group of countries that in general have relatively high levels of living. While the moderately low mortality rates of these backward regions can be seen as a reflection of a certain degree of socio-economic evolution, they have in great measure contributed to a false illusion of progress, and, of more importance, have acted in combination with the patterns of mortality already noted to create the conditions of rapid demographic growth prevalent in these regions of the world today.

3. NUMERICAL IMBALANCE OF THE TWO DEMOGRAPHIC “BLOCS”

The regions with the highest birth rates today have also been historically the most populated. The acceleration of the rate of demographic growth as a consequence of the continuing decline in mortality has not been accompanied by a reduction in the natality rates, stabilized at the levels already described, and has brought about a proportional increase in the populations of these areas in contrast with those of the other “bloc.” While the regions with natality rates above the world average in 1960–65 had an estimated population of 63.7 percent of the world total in 1920, this proportion had increased to 67.2 percent 40 years later in 1960. It is estimated that by the year 2000 it will constitute 75.6 percent of the total.

In table 3 the various regions have been grouped in two “blocs” according to the level of their birth rates in the period 1960–65, using “non-controlled bloc” to denote that part of the world with birth rates above the world average and “controlled bloc” to signify that with rates below it. The total population of the first “bloc” was estimated to be 1,182 million in 1920 and increased to 2,008 in 1960—a 69.9 percent increment. It is estimated that 40 years hence it will be approximately 4,510 million, i.e., a growth of 124.6 percent. These percentages are considerably higher than those that have occurred or are expected to occur in the second “bloc,” which are only 30.5 and 69.2 percent, respectively. In other words, the imbalance between the two blocks tends to grow deeper with the passing of time. In 1960 the “non-con-

TABLE 3
 WORLD POPULATION ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF THE BIRTH RATE IN THE PERIOD 1960-1965
 (in millions)

<i>Region and level of the rate</i>	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
<i>1. 50 and more per thousand</i>									
West Africa	37	44	55	68	86	113	150	202	277
<i>2. 40 to 49.9 per thousand</i>									
Rest of East Asia	22	26	30	38	46	60	77	96	116
South Central Asia	333	371	422	479	580	730	904	1,072	1,252
South East Asia	108	127	150	173	219	283	369	472	603
South West Asia	29	31	37	45	59	77	102	133	168
East Africa	41	47	54	63	75	90	113	143	183
Central Africa	19	21	23	25	28	33	37	51	65
North Africa	35	39	45	53	66	87	116	153	192
South Africa	8	10	12	14	18	23	30	39	51
Tropical South America	46	54	67	84	112	153	205	271	350
Continental Central America	19	22	27	35	47	65	90	125	166
Melanesia					2	3	3	4	5
<i>Total</i>	660	748	867	1,009	1,252	1,604	2,046	2,559	3,151
<i>3. 30 to 39.9 per thousand</i>									
China (Mainland)	475	500	530	560	650	742	843	940	1,034
Caribbean	10	12	14	17	20	25	32	39	48
<i>Total</i>	485	512	544	577	670	767	875	979	1,082
Total, "non-controlled bloc"	1,182	1,304	1,466	1,654	2,008	2,484	3,071	3,740	4,510

TABLE 3 (Continued)
 WORLD POPULATION ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF THE BIRTH RATE IN THE PERIOD 1960-1965
 (in millions)

Region and level of the rate 4. 20 to 29.9 per thousand	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Soviet Union	155	179	195	180	214	246	278	316	353
North America	116	134	144	166	199	227	262	306	354
Temperate South America	15	19	22	27	33	39	46	53	61
Australia	5	7	7	8	10	12	15	16	18
New Zealand	1	1	2	2	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Total</i>	292	340	370	383	458	527	605	696	792
5. Less than 20 per thousand									
Japan	55	64	71	83	93	101	111	118	122
Western Europe	101	109	113	122	135	144	152	164	173
Southern Europe	83	93	103	108	117	126	133	142	149
Eastern Europe	80	89	96	88	97	105	114	122	128
Northern Europe	62	65	68	72	76	79	81	82	84
<i>Total</i>	381	420	451	473	518	555	591	628	656
Total, "controlled bloc"	673	760	821	856	976	1,082	1,196	1,324	1,448
THE WORLD, total	1,855	2,064	2,287	2,510	2,984	3,566	4,267	5,064	5,958

Source: United Nations "Provisional Report on World Population Prospects, as Assessed in 1963," ST/SOA/SER.R/7 (1964).

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trolled bloc" had 1,032 million inhabitants more than the "controlled bloc." In the year 2000 this difference is expected to widen to 3,062 million.

Of course the differences between the two "blocs" are not only of a demographic nature. They also imply differential levels of education, of health, of nutrition, of income; in general, differential levels of living. It is recognized that within the various regions and the countries included in them there are also significant differences among the diverse groups composing their populations. What seems irrefutable is that, wholly or partly and by using different procedures, about one-third of the world population has successfully applied deterrents to its reproduction.

4. THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICA

As can be seen in table 3, Tropical South America, Continental Central America, and the Caribbean are included in the "non-controlled bloc" while Temperate South America, with a natality level below the world average, appears in the other "bloc." This is due to the reproductive behavior of the populations of Argentina and Uruguay, which represent notable exceptions in the general pattern prevailing in the rest of Latin America. Apart from these two countries, indications of an incipient demographic transition seem to exist only in Cuba and Chile.

When the level of mortality is examined, on the other hand, all the regions comprising Latin America show rates below the world average. This fact accounts for the rates of demographic growth that have allowed its population to double in periods of 25 years or less in some cases.

The evolution of the annual rates of demographic growth in the different regions cited above can easily be linked to what has happened in them regarding natality, mortality, and international immigration. It is estimated that in the 1920–30 period Latin America grew at an annual rate of 1.8 percent (see table 4) with Temperate South America as the fastest growing region, mainly as a result of international immigration. Around 1962 the rate for the whole of Latin America had risen to 2.8 percent, and the differences between regions had widened. Due to the decline in its birth rate and the reduction of international immigration, Temperate South America grew at an annual rate of only 1.9 percent, while Continental Central America reached the unprecedented level of 3.3 percent, which does not seem to be the maximum expected. Population projections, which take into consideration the region's past evolution and present level of fertility, estimate that the annual rate of growth will reach 3.5 percent in the period of 1970–80.

Well known as they are, it seems unnecessary to repeat the demographic consequences of high birth rates such as those cited in table 2 for most of Latin

TABLE 4
 ANNUAL RATES OF GROWTH OF THE
 POPULATION BY SUB-REGIONS (PER CENT)

<i>Region</i>	1920–30 to 1970–80		
	<i>1920–30</i>	<i>1960–65</i>	<i>1970–80</i>
<i>Latin America, total</i>	1.8	2.8	2.8
Tropical South America	1.8	2.8	2.8
Continental Central America	1.4	3.3	3.5
Temperate South America	2.4	1.9	1.8
Caribbean	2.0	2.3	2.4

Source: Carmen A. Miró, *La Población de América Latina en el Siglo XX* (Document submitted to the First Panamerican Assembly on Population, Cali, Colombia, August 1965).

America. One result has just been discussed: high and progressively increasing rates of growth. The others are age structures with a predominance of children and young adults and heavy emigration from the rural to the urban areas. Consequences of an essentially economic and social nature are also produced, and these have political repercussions.

It can generally be accepted without proof that an increasing rate of demographic growth will inevitably produce a greater need for capital investments in order to achieve a determined level of production per inhabitant. There is, however, nothing inherent in a high rate of population growth that automatically generates a greater availability of funds. The present rate of growth of the Latin American population even contributes to the scarcity of funds necessary for promoting economic development. As a means of judging the impact of these rates on the economy, it is sufficient to note that Spengler⁶ has estimated that four percent is the proportion of national income needed by a developed country to meet the needs created by an annual population growth rate of one percent. The proportion would necessarily be greater for Latin American countries. By limiting the availability of capital, rapid population growth is one of the factors impeding the opening and development of new areas, which many would like to see populated, and causing instead the displacement of the population toward areas that already have services such as those found in cities. We are not, of course, implying that the solution to Latin America's problem of underdevelopment can be reduced to simplistic terms, e.g., that a reduction in the rate of population growth would be sufficient to overcome all the problems. It is only one of the necessary conditions to which others of an economic, social, and political nature would have to be added.

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In addition to the problem discussed above, the age structure peculiar to Latin America's population creates other difficulties. These include the necessity of applying increasing rates of investments to fulfill the needs of children and adolescents, especially those relating to their education. The number of dependent people (minors and old people) grows in proportion to the number of people able to work, creating a situation in which the urgency of attending to the needs of the former reduces the availability of capital for directly productive ends. It also increases the difficulty of attending to the demands for work of a growing proportion of young adults who seek to enter the labor force.⁷ Among the positive aspects of the age structure found in most Latin American countries, the following have been mentioned: greater geographical and occupational mobility of an essentially young labor force disposed to adapt itself to change, and a growing number of potential consumers able to create a greater demand for investment.

Finally, the heavy migration to large cities confronts Latin America with a complex set of economic, social, and political problems. As the displacement of people takes place with little or no relationship to the labor needs of the large cities, many of the migrants must live in entirely marginal conditions with regard to employment, housing, education, health, and other public services. The city, unable to give adequate attention to the needs of its new immigrants, must witness the ravage of its periphery by the growth of unhealthy slums, continuing growth in the ranks of its unemployed and sub-employed, the deterioration of its transportation services, and the multiplication of the problems connected with the administration of public services. This explains in part why the city, usually a seat of political power, becomes a focal point of social movements seeking to modify the present adverse circumstances.

At the other extreme, emigration tends to aggravate the already unsatisfactory conditions in rural areas and small cities. As those who emigrate are generally persons of working age, of a higher educational level, and with more favorable attitudes toward change and progress, the relatively more backward communities are increasingly deprived of their more dynamic and enterprising elements. At the same time, the dependency rates of minors and old people to the group potentially able to work becomes even more unfavorably unbalanced.

The way in which Latin America succeeds in overcoming some of the adverse consequences mentioned above depends to a great extent upon the courage with which the need for changes is confronted.

NOTES

1. The number of induced abortions in 1959 was 1,099,000, representing a rate of 677.1 per 1000 live births. Masabumi Kimura, *A Review of Induced Abortion Surveys in Japan*. (Paper No. 43, IPU Conference, 1961.)

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2. Andras Klinger, *Demographic Factors of Abortion Legislation in Some European Socialist Countries*. Document A.1/1/E/88.
3. David M. Heer, "Abortion, Contraception, and Population Policy in the Soviet Union," *Demography*, 2, (1965) 531-539.
4. Carmen A. Miró, *Some Misconceptions Disproved: A Programme of Comparative Fertility Surveys in Latin America*. (Document prepared for the International Conference on Family Planning Programs, Geneva, August 23-27, 1965.)
5. For example, it is estimated that the mortality of Tropical South America at the beginning of the century was around 30 to 35 per thousand; that of Russia before 1910 was approximately 30 per thousand, and that of Ceylon in 1921-25 was estimated at about 28 per thousand.
6. Joseph J. Spengler, "Population and Economic Growth," in *Population: The Vital Revolution*, ed. Ronald Freedman (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1964).
7. Recent calculations by ECLA estimate the number of young people under 20 years of age who would enter the working population during the year 1965 to be about 3 million. It is presumed that this number will exceed 4½ million annually in 1980.

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