



Our Demographic Future:

Why Population Policy Matters to America

by Mark W. Nowak





Negative Population Growth, Inc.

1608 20th Street, NW Suite 200
Washington, DC 20009

Voice (202) 667-8950

Fax (202) 667-8953

E-mail npg@npg.org

Website www.npg.org

Donald W. Mann, President

Sharon McCloe Stein, Executive Director

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Introduction

Although the United States is generally thought of as a leader in social policy, when it comes to demographic policy the U.S. is well behind much of the rest of the world. In 1993, for example, each of 116 countries – about 60% of all nations – had developed and implemented a population policy of some kind.¹ Rather than leave their demographic futures to chance, these countries are following the recommendations developed at numerous international conferences to work actively with international agencies, non-governmental organizations and their own citizens to produce desirable demographic futures. The United States – a signatory to most population documents encouraging the creation of national population policies – is one of the few countries that supports the creation of population policies in principle, but currently is making no effort to develop its own such policy.



Continued population growth is the biggest obstacle to creating a society that is sustainable in the long run.

Why is this so? The simple answer is that most policy makers in the United States consider explicit demographic decision-making anathema to the democratic process. “It is not up to the government to tell people how many children they can have,” reason these legislators. “Childbearing is a deeply personal matter that should be left entirely to the individuals involved.”

The irony here is that by refusing to engage in demographic decision making, policy makers do not escape the task of setting demographic policy – they merely give up the opportunity to set *explicit* policy. Policy makers still make *implicit* demographic decisions everyday – some with enormous consequences – the majority of which occur without the slightest demographic scrutiny.

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Consider that during a typical session Congress might make laws or establish initiatives on family planning and birth control, sex education, teen pregnancy, reproductive rights, immigration, housing, welfare, marriage and taxation. Collectively these issues have a measurable impact on both the childbearing decisions of Americans as well as the demographic trajectory of the nation. But, since few of the policies are explicitly designed to effect

a demographic change (one exception would be the recent changes in welfare law intended to reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing), our political system continues to behave as if demographic decisions can be made, should be made, and are made exclusively by individuals without any influence from government policy.

The Rockefeller Commission: The First Attempt at Demographic Policy

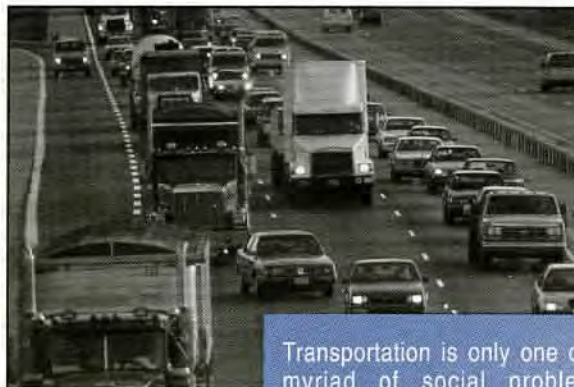
Foresight and Concern at the Highest Levels of Government

In convening this landmark Commission, Nixon was arguing that demography is destiny.

Such has not always been the prevailing view among policy makers. Just over 25 years ago, President Richard Nixon convened the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future to evaluate the challenges posed by continued population growth on our natural and human resources, infrastructure and the activities of the Federal, state and local government.²

In convening this landmark Commission, Nixon was arguing that demography is destiny. Nixon asserted that the

population path of the United States was one of the most crucial influences in determining the needs and characteristics of our nation, and that substantially more attention needed to be paid to it during the construction of public policy. Referring to the milestone birth of the 200 millionth American in 1967 and the Census Bureau's projection that the United States would add another 100 million people to its population in just 30 years, Nixon asked Congress to consider the consequences of such growth:



Transportation is only one of a myriad of social problems compounded by continued growth.

“How will we educate and employ such a large number of people? Will our transportation systems move them about as quickly and economically as necessary? How will we provide adequate health care when our population reaches 300 million?...Perhaps the most dangerous element in the present situation is the fact that so few people are examining these questions from the viewpoint of the whole society...

In the governmental sphere...there is virtually no machinery through which we can develop a detailed understanding of demographic changes and bring that understanding to bear on public policy. ...the planning which does take place at some levels is poorly understood at others and is often based on unexamined assumptions.”³

Rockefeller Commission Dismissed

In executing its charge, the Rockefeller Commission looked at these and other issues, including the effect of population growth on the economy, the ability of the government

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– President Richard Nixon, 1969



One of the areas of greatest concern to the Commission was population growth's impact on the American health care system.

to provide critical services to a growing population and the consequence of growth for education and health care. After two years of analysis, the Commission concluded that “no substantial benefits would result from continued growth of the nation’s population” and that the United States should “welcome and plan for a stabilized population.”⁴

To help meet this goal, the Commission recommended dozens of changes to U.S. policies, many of which were revolutionary, including the adoption of policies designed to achieve and maintain replacement-level fertility (two children per woman) and the imposition of an immigration ceiling of 400,000 a year to keep immigration at its current level.⁵ The Commission also recommended establishing school-based population education and sex programs, promoting adoption, passing the Equal Rights Amendment, providing universal access to contraception (including to minors), liberalizing abortion laws to increase legal access, funding additional contraceptive research, increasing funding for family planning services, gathering more demographic data (including a mid-decade census), strengthening the Office of Population Affairs and creating state-level population offices.⁷

The Commission found “no substantial benefits would result from continued growth of the nation’s population.”

At least two of these recommendations proved politically abhorrent to the conservative Nixon, who responded by dismissing entirely the work of the Rockefeller Commission and removing his support for any of its policy goals and recommendations. Charles F. Westoff, a demographer and the executive director of the Commission, summarized Nixon’s dismissal of the Commission in this way:

“The President’s response issued in May 1972 was a disappointment at every level. After some acclaim for

the importance of the research for government planning, the President reiterated his personal opposition to abortion and disagreed with the recommendation that contraceptive information and services be made available to minors, on the grounds that this would weaken the family. No attention at all was directed to the basic analysis of the costs and benefits of population growth and the conclusion that population stabilization was desirable. In effect, the response was narrowly political and greatly at variance with the concerns about population that the President had expressed less than three years earlier."⁷



Nixon stalled a number of growth control initiatives by dismissing the commission's recommendations.

Aftermath

Nixon's decision to dismiss wholesale fundamentally-sound demographic analysis because of concerns about two policy recommendations was devastating to the population stabilization movement in the United States at that time, and the chilling effects of his decision continue to be felt today.

First, by dismissing the Commission's recommendations, Nixon stalled a number of insufficient, but nevertheless bold, growth control initiatives, such as freezing immigration levels and offering family planning services in conjunction with population education. The United States currently has the one of the highest population growth rates of any industrialized country in the world, a reality that might have been changed had the growth control recommendations of the Commission been enacted.

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Despite the passage of landmark environmental legislation in the 1970s, Congress failed to address the impacts of population growth.

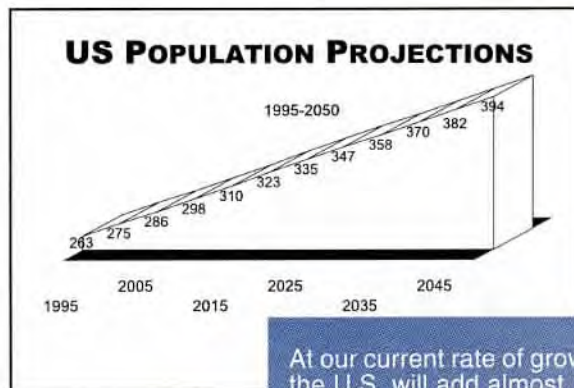
Second and equally damaging, Nixon's action had the effect of moving explicit demographic goals, such as population stabilization, out of the American political arena. Nixon's abandonment of a Commission of his own making discouraged congressional support, prompting policy makers to abandon population policy and focus instead on managing growth through legislation such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

Third, Nixon quelled the desire to pursue rigorous demographic analysis of government policies.⁸ In combination with a pro-growth culture, the United States has pursued an implicit but powerful pro-growth policy. Fundamental to this policy is a tax code that rewards childbearing and an immigration policy that has more than doubled the annual level of immigration since 1970. Together these consequences have put the United States on an unsustainable trajectory.

U.S. fertility during the 1970s was hovering around 1.7 and has since risen to 2.1. Immigration has risen even more dramatically, from approximately 400,000 annual admissions in 1970 to nearly 650,000 annually by 1988. As a result of legalization provisions immigration reached 1.5 million in 1990. Since then, immigration levels have hovered between about 800,000 and one million a year with 916,000 legal immigrants arriving in 1996.⁹ Today immigration has replaced native-born fertility as the driving force behind U.S. population growth. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, immigration will constitute the majority share – nearly 60% – of future U.S. population growth.¹⁰

U.S. fertility during the 1970s was hovering around 1.7 and has since risen to 2.1 today.

Since 1970 our population has grown more than 30%, from 205 million to 271 million. That increase of 66 million people is the equivalent of adding the current populations of California, New York, and Florida, combined. At our current rate of growth, the U.S. will number nearly 400 million people by the year 2050.

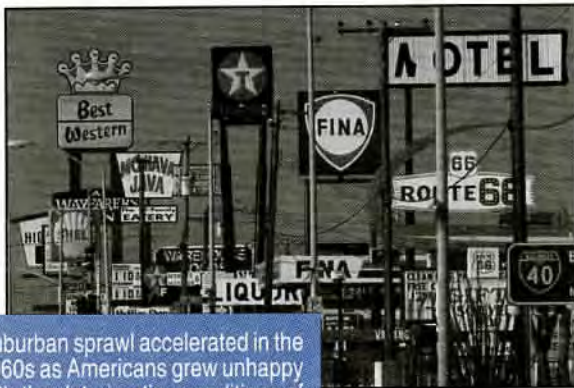


Consequences of Growth

Had the Rockefeller Commission's recommendations been adopted in 1972, the United States would clearly be heading down a different population path. In all likelihood, fertility would be a matter of public discourse, couples would be encouraged to have small families, and immigration rates would be substantially lower. In sum, the United States would be a smaller country, in terms of population, than it is now.

The question is, would this matter? Would life be better now had the Commission's recommendations been adopted? Will life be worse in the future because we dismissed the Commission's goals? The remainder of this paper attempts to answer these questions, first by examining what Nixon and other policy makers three decades ago were concerned about when they considered creating a national population policy. Next, we'll examine what has happened as a result of not adopting such a policy. Finally, we'll illustrate the importance of moving toward a national population policy now to achieve an optimum population size for the United States. In short, we will show that the concerns of the Rockefeller Commission were not only warranted in 1972, but that the need for creating a national population policy today is even more pressing than it was three decades ago.

By the year 2050, the Census Bureau projects a United States' population of almost 400 million people.



Suburban sprawl accelerated in the 1960s as Americans grew unhappy with the deteriorating conditions of large cities.

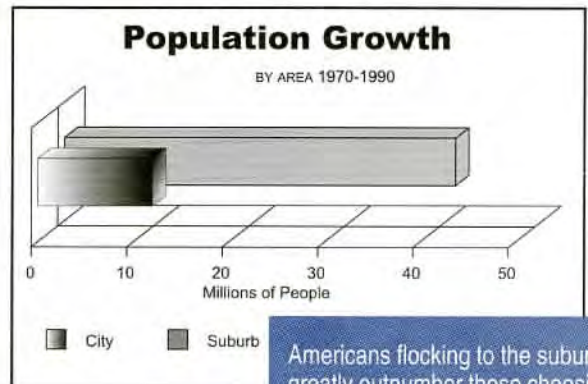
Although the Rockefeller Commission addressed a broad range of issues in their analysis, two primary concerns drove Nixon and other policy makers to explore the possibility of creating a national population policy. The first was a concern about the declining quality of our cities, and the second was a concern about the declining quality of the environment.

Starting in the late 1960s, urban renewal arrived on the political landscape demanding significant attention from legislators. Policy makers were concerned that U.S. cities were becoming more expansive, crowded and unlivable. Policy makers worried that a declining quality of life for urban residents would promote urban sprawl, increased pollution, higher energy consumption and the loss of green space while forcing urban blacks into the poorer and poorer central cities. Senator Patrick D. Moynihan (D-New York) was one of the strongest proponents arguing for a shift in U.S. urban policy, and he believed that continued U.S. population growth would serve only to worsen these problems.¹¹

Policy makers at this time were also very concerned about the state of the environment, and unchecked population growth was seen as a significant threat to environmental quality. During this period numerous articles were written and national and international conferences were held to discuss the interplay between population growth and the environment. In November 1964, President Lyndon Johnson's administration released a policy paper on conservation and natural resources that noted an explicit link between population growth and environmental degradation. The paper pointed out that among other things, "by the year 2000 more than 300 million American will need 10 times the power and 2 ½ times the water we now consume..."¹²

In the 1960s, policymakers were concerned about the environment, and unchecked population growth was seen as a significant threat to environmental quality.

Nixon was sympathetic to both these concerns, arguing in 1969 that continued growth could only lead to negative consequences: "Look ahead to the end of this century," he said. "There are 200 million Americans now. By the end of the century there will be 300 million. Where are those 100 million going to be? You can't pour them into New York, into Los Angeles, into Chicago and the rest and choke those cities to death with smog and crime and all of the rest that comes with overpopulation."¹³



Americans flocking to the suburbs greatly outnumber those choosing to live in our cities.

Predictions that Came True

But, in fact, that is exactly what we *have* done and just as our legislators were concerned, our communities and our environment have paid the price.

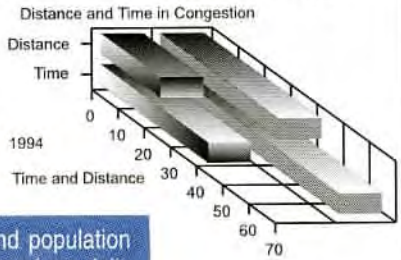
Our Communities

As population growth in our cities has increased, so have congestion, crime and competition for housing. As a result, Americans have taken to the suburbs to find cheaper housing and to regain open space and solitude. Between 1970 and 1990 the nation's central cities grew by only 12 million while the suburbs increased in size by 41 million.¹⁴ One of the costs of this shift has been longer commute times with no attendant decrease in congestion.

In 1975, Americans on average spent 41% of their peak-hour travel time driving under congested conditions. By 1994, that figure had grown to 68%. Americans are also driving farther because of our suburban settlement patterns. In 1975, the average American drove 23 miles in traffic during peak

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Rush Hour Commuting



Suburban sprawl and population growth have lengthened our daily commutes and added more traffic to our congested roadways.

hours. By 1994 that figure had almost doubled to 45 miles.¹⁵

In addition to our settlement patterns, one of our largest implicit demographic policies – immigration – has contributed to declining quality of life for the most disadvantaged Americans. While the overall economic consequences of immigration are debated, virtually all studies agree on one fact: immigration has resulted in the displacement and wage depression of low-skill, minority workers in the U.S. labor market. For those living in the central cities, the double-whammy of high rates of immigration and suburban sprawl have been disastrous.

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Our Environment

Energy. Just as President Johnson's administration predicted, as our population has increased in size, so has our demand for energy. Since 1970, the U.S. population has grown by about 31%¹⁶ while total energy demand has increased by about 36%.¹⁷ For the most part, the United States has met this increased demand through increased domestic production of coal, natural gas, petroleum, nuclear power and, to a much smaller extent, renewable energies.

Starting about 25 years ago, however, domestic production of petroleum began to decline, causing petroleum imports to inch up. Since 1970, annual imports of crude oil have more than quadrupled and imports now supply more of our annual oil budget than does domestic supply.¹⁸ Declining domestic petroleum production means that we face a less certain energy future regarding a fuel that we depend upon for more than one-third of our annual energy needs.¹⁹

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Farmland Loss. In a recent study of farmland loss, the American Farmland Trust found that urban sprawl in the United States was responsible for the destruction of more than 4 million acres of prime or unique farmland between 1982 and 1992, or about 400,000 acres lost every year.²⁰ When erosion and other factors are considered, total farmland loss is close to one million acres annually.²¹



Population growth is the driving force behind the permanent loss of prime farmland in the U.S.

Urban sprawl consumes the best farmland because most cities were built where prime agricultural resources were abundant. As the boundaries of our urban areas expand, the surrounding farmland is paved over. Consider that Texas lost more high quality farmland to development than any other state between 1982 and 1992, accounting for 11.5% of the total loss in the United States.²² During this same period, the three largest cities in Texas – Houston, Dallas and San Antonio – grew by 20%, 33% and 22%, respectively, expanding their boundaries. This rapid rate of growth – two and three times higher than the national growth rate of 10% – explains Texas’ massive farmland loss during the period.²³

Biodiversity. Preserving biological diversity is fundamental to maintaining a healthy environment. Species and ecosystems are interdependent so that the loss of just one species – depending upon its role in the environment – can generate enormous ecological consequences and environmental impact.

Unfortunately, rather than preserving biodiversity in the United States, human population growth and activities are threatening it. The intensification of modern agriculture, degradation of water quality in critical aquatic habitats and contamination of the environment with toxic substances have

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Our ecologically sensitive coastal areas have shouldered the brunt of the nation's population growth – growing 50% faster than our interior.

all played a role, but the primary cause of biodiversity loss in the United States is habitat loss and fragmentation resulting from growth-driven development.²⁴ The U.S. coastal regions, which are particularly biologically rich, have also been particularly vulnerable to development. Between 1970 and 1994, the population of U.S. coastal counties (excluding the Great Lakes region) grew 50% faster than the population of the nation's interior counties.²⁵

The consequences for U.S. wildlife have been severe. In 1987, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed 376 species as endangered or threatened while 315 were considered possibly extinct. Today 1,119 species are listed as endangered or threatened with 500 considered extinct.²⁶ A recent study by the World Conservation Union found that 29% of the nation's 16,000 plant species are at risk of disappearing forever.²⁷

Biodiversity loss in the United States reflects a global trend. At least one out of every eight known plant species on the planet is currently threatened with extinction,²⁸ and the future

U.S. Population Growth
NPG Path vs. Census Bureau actual

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
NPG	203.21	208.2	213.75	218.86	222.97	225.73	226.93	227.12	228.96
Census	205.05	215.97	227.73	238.47	249.91	263.03	274.63	285.98	297.72

NPG recommendations are used for comparison because the Rockefeller Commission

looks even worse. In a poll conducted by New York’s American Museum of Natural History, 70% of biologists said they believed a “mass extinction” was underway and that up to 20% of all living species could disappear within the next 30 years due to human activity.²⁹

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Where We Might Have Been Going

At least one lesson should be clear from the demographic aftermath of the Rockefeller Commission: our “hands off” approach to demographic policy has been anything but, and the resulting massive growth and its consequences should put to rest the notion that we are better off *not* planning our demographic future than planning for it.

The chart below³⁰ illustrates where we might be today if we had adopted a population policy in 1970 based upon NPG’s recommendations to encourage a gradual transition to an optimum population of 150 million.³¹ Pursuing such a goal would have meant reducing immigration to 100,000 a year, accompanied by incentives to temporarily reduce fertility from 2.0 in 1970 to 1.5 by 1985. After 2005, incentives would encourage fertility to gradually rise back to replacement level by 2050.

Growth: 1970 to 2050
 Bureau actual and projected growth

2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
223.96	226.64	225.76	223.76	220.38	215.88	210.82	205.81	201.52
297.72	310.13	322.74	335.05	346.90	358.26	370.00	381.71	393.93

Commission recommendations would not have succeeded in stabilizing the U.S. population.

The NPG projection is compared with the current middle series Census Bureau population projection, which approximates our actual demographic trajectory.³² Under the Census Bureau projection, fertility is assumed to continue its recent rise from 1.7 in the 1970s to 2.1 today, reaching 2.3 in 2050. Immigration is assumed to remain steady at 800,000 annually.³³ The rise in fertility is due primarily to the influence of the higher fertility rates of Hispanic immigrants, and the immigration rate of 800,000 approximates the prevailing rate of 800,000 to one million annually.

The differences between projections are dramatic. Instead of a population of 263 million in 1995, the U.S. population would have been only 226 million, a difference of 37 million. As we move toward the ends of the projection, the population differences become enormous. Under the NPG projection, the U.S. population would peak at 227 million in 2010 and decline thereafter, reaching 202 million by 2050. Under the Census Bureau projection, which captures current trends, the United States' population will rise to 394 million by 2050 – a difference of 192 million people from the NPG scenario – and the population will still be growing.

Where We Ought to Be Going

We must look to the future and enact policies today that will enable us to achieve an optimum population size tomorrow.

Obstacles to Stopping Growth Remain Formidable

Looking back is certainly instructive, but the policy implications of doing so are limited: we can't turn the clock back to 1970 in order to follow a different demographic path. We can, however, look to the future and enact policies today that will enable us to achieve an optimum population size tomorrow.

In doing so, however, we need to be aware that some of the policies that would be required would generate substantial resistance from policy makers, just as they did during the 1970s. Rather than craft a modified domestic population policy, Nixon rejected the conclusions of the Rockefeller Commission outright because his opposition to liberalized access to abortion and contraception was absolute.



A sustainable US population of approximately 150 million would help preserve our natural environment.

Immigration policy was just as controversial. Although the Rockefeller Commission proposed the adoption of policies that would lead to the eventual stabilization of the U.S. population, the Commission did not recommend a necessary reduction in immigration to meet that goal. Why? Because passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 was perceived as part of civil rights legislation (the Act ended the much-maligned quota system, replacing it with a system that gives preference to family members), and the Commission did not want to be perceived as attempting to roll back civil rights.

Certainly access to abortion and contraception are issues that continue to divide Congress today, and their inclusion in any demographic policy would likely generate significant opposition. Immigration rates today are more than double what they were in the 1970s, so more substantial reductions in immigration would be necessary today to achieve population stabilization, and an even more acrimonious fight would ensue over such a proposal.

Challenging Pro-Growth Attitudes Fundamental

But perhaps the greatest opposition to the creation of a national population policy will not be in response to specific

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Communities, such as Seattle, Washington, have begun to question continued growth and its impacts on the region's future.

policy proposals, but simply to the idea that growth is something that must be controlled. For two centuries we have fostered pro-growth attitudes, and these views have become central to our understanding of progress.

Businesses measure success through growth, and thus the business community heralds reports that the U.S. population has increased: more people

mean more customers. Religious communities generally favor growth, perceiving large families as blessings. The political community adores growth because enlarged districts bring the possibility of additional votes and re-election. Growth also means increased political power: growing states may gain political representatives; shrinking states will surely lose them.

Grassroots Activists and Public Opinion Receptive to Change

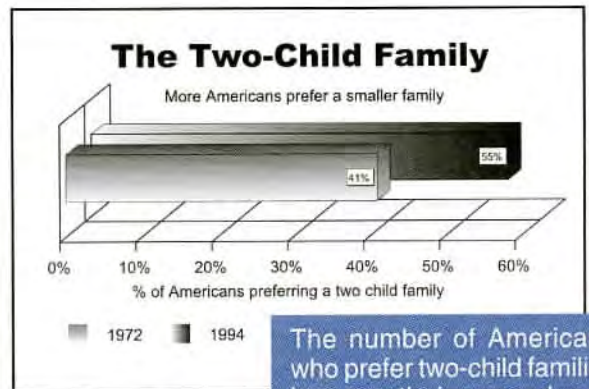
Although opposition to the creation of a national population policy will be substantial, we cannot afford to back away from difficult choices simply because they are difficult. Nixon's decision to dismiss demographic analysis because it raised controversy has kept the United States on an unsustainable population path. Rather than continue down this road it is time face our difficult choices and to join most other nations in taking an active role in determining our demographic future.

The good news is that some U.S. communities may already be questioning our pro-growth policies. The same cities that herald their higher-than-average growth rates are implementing initiatives to fight suburban sprawl. Communities that embrace growth are looking for relief from traffic, school overcrowding and a declining urban quality of life. Pro-growth

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communities want to know how they can permanently protect their open space and water, and coastal communities are looking to reverse declines in their fisheries.

Even more encouraging, direct measures of public opinion reveal that Americans show a growing preference for small family size in the United States. According to the General Social Survey, the percentage of Americans who prefer two-child families has increased from 41% in 1972 to 55% in 1994, with declines in the percentage of Americans who prefer substantially larger families.³⁴



The number of Americans who prefer two-child families has greatly increased over the past two decades.

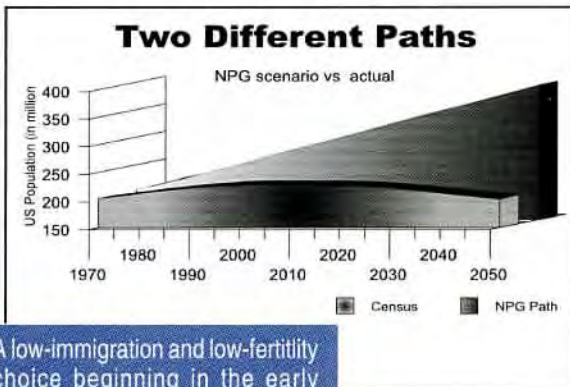
An Optimum and Sustainable Population – More Needed Than Ever

The desire of Americans to ameliorate the consequences of growth combined with evidence that communities are looking for sustainable solutions to over-development and urban sprawl indicates that the United States may be ready once again to pursue a much-needed domestic population policy.

The first step would be to adopt as an explicit target, the goal of reducing the U.S. population to a sustainable and optimum size of not more than 150 million people.

The Rockefeller Commission anticipated that if the appropriate demographic conditions were achieved within 20 years, the U.S. population would stabilize at 278 million. Today's population is nearly that size already, and it is clear that such a large population cannot be sustained indefinitely. Rather, NPG advocates that we prepare for a slowly declining population size, resulting in a sustainable population of

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A low-immigration and low-fertility choice beginning in the early 1970s would have led to a far more sustainable population size today.

not more than 150 million people. This population size would be sufficient to provide all the goods and services needed by U.S. residents while improving quality of life and substantially reducing our impact on the environment. To achieve this demographic goal, two conditions would need to be satisfied:

First, enact an all-inclusive cap on immigration of 100,000 a year. Since

immigration will be the largest contributor to future U.S. population growth, this is a critical first step in shifting the country to a sustainable demographic path. Reducing immigration will also reduce overall U.S. fertility, since first-generation immigrants tend to have larger-than-average families. As we have seen, the Census Bureau projects that if current trends continue, U.S. fertility will increase over the next 50 years primarily due to the influence of immigration.

While reducing immigration poses a difficult political issue, it might be useful to ask whether the United States could achieve its demographic objectives without changing the level of immigration. Such an effort would be possible, but to reach it we would have to offset the contribution of immigration through much lower fertility rates. Three considerations argue against this approach.

First, even considering the political difficulties involved, it is far easier to achieve immigration reduction than to achieve fertility reduction, since immigration can be regulated directly by Congress. Policy makers can only indirectly influence fertility rates.

Second, even if we were able to achieve a population size of not over 150 million without adjusting immigration lev-

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els, we would then need to reduce immigration to stabilize the population at that level, unless we were willing to maintain dramatically reduced fertility rates to support high levels of immigration.

Third, large fluctuations in fertility rates will present age structure problems, just as the baby boom now poses a crisis for Social Security. Large fluctuations in immigration rates would have a much smaller consequence for the U.S. age structure.

The demographic reality is that ultimately immigration rates would need to decline, and doing so now moves us toward our optimum population much more reliably than trying to do so later.

Incentives to achieve a voluntary and temporary reduction in fertility to below replacement level

Reducing our population size and stabilizing it at not more than 150 million would require that U.S. total fertility be maintained at below replacement level, but only for several decades. A gradual decline in fertility to no lower than 1.5 children per woman, followed by a slow increase back to replacement level (2.1), would be ideal in terms of achieving a “soft path” to an optimum population. This soft path to an optimum population is illustrated in the chart at the bottom of pages 12 and 13, under what the U.S. population would have been if NPG’s recommendations regarding immigration and incentives to reduce fertility had been adopted in 1970.

A variety of options are available to help achieve this goal without inappropriately involving the government in individuals’ childbearing decisions.

A gradual decline in fertility, followed by a slow increase back to replacement level, would be ideal in terms of achieving a “soft path” to an optimum population.

First, the United States could increase its support for contraceptive research and access. Every year, nearly six million women in the United States become pregnant, and nearly 50% of these pregnancies are unintended.³⁵ Eighty-five percent of teen pregnancies are unintended,³⁶ and births to teens account for nearly 13% of all births.³⁷ Simply addressing these issues would result in a substantial decline in fertility. In addition, the United States could abandon incentives for increased childbearing by, for example, restructuring the dependency tax deduction.

By advocating a smaller population, the United States could begin to influence cultural and institutional biases toward growth, as well. Local communities that felt free to endorse the idea of growth *control* rather than growth *management* might reinforce couples' decisions to have small families, and vice versa. Finally, additional research could reveal how our economic policies might influence childbearing decisions.

For instance, a first-of-its-kind study conducted in 1990 reveals that the personal exemption for dependents in the United States increases fertility. The study found that a \$50 increase in the tax value of the exemption leads to an additional 6 to 12 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age.³⁸

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An Optimum Population Is Still Achievable

The good news is that about two-thirds of current U.S. biologic growth (net natural increase, births minus deaths) is due to population momentum from the baby boom. That is, pre-1970 fertility which we can do little about – the large majority of women from this generation have already completed their families or are reaching the end of their child bearing years. Actually, most women in this generation have been quite responsible regarding their family size, with total fertility

of about 1.8 births per woman. In fact, overall U.S. total fertility has been (and barely remains) below replacement level since 1973. The bottom line is that if it were not for high immigration, population momentum would be exhausted and the natural increase component of U.S. growth would end by sometime in the first half of the next century.

Were the United States to immediately enact an all-inclusive cap on immigration at 100,000 a year and provide incentives to voluntarily and gradually reduce fertility to sub-replacement levels, we could see U.S. population growth stop by 2050. Once growth stops, the U.S. would then begin a very gradual transition to a smaller, sustainable population. NPG President Donald Mann has outlined the path to an optimum population in a position paper "Why We Need A Smaller U.S. Population and How We Can Achieve It." Although the path outlined in this paper begins in 1990, we could still easily follow a similar course and end up with a stationary and optimum population of no more than 150 million by sometime shortly after 2110.

Conclusion

While our nation would have been better off had we been able to move toward an optimum population nearly 30 years ago, it is not too late to set our path right today. In urging Congress to consider the problem of population growth, Nixon said "When future generations evaluate the record of our time, one of the most important factors in their judgment will be the way in which we responded to population growth."³⁹

Unfortunately, policy makers 30 years ago weren't up to the challenge. Now more than ever, we need dedicated activists working together with NPG to establish policies that will stop our unsustainable growth and begin the transition to a sustainable optimum population.

"When future generations evaluate the record of our time, one of the most important factors in their judgment will be the way in which we responded to population growth."

– President Richard Nixon, 1969

Notes

1. United Nations, *Global Population Policy Database 1993*, (New York: Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Population Division, 1995), p. 197.
2. Richard M. Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Problems of Population Growth (July 18, 1969)." *Public Papers of the Presidents*, No. 271, (Washington, DC: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives, 1970), p. 527.
3. Richard M. Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Problems of Population Growth (July 18, 1969)." p. 526.
4. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, *Population and the American Future*, (US Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1972), p. 110.
5. Given a fertility level of 2.1, an immigration level of 400,000 a year would actually be too high to achieve the Commission's goal of population stabilization. This figure was politically motivated, as we discuss later in this paper.
6. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, pp. 141-147.
7. Charles Westoff, "The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future: Its Origins, Operations and Aftermath," *Population Index*, Vol. 39 No. 4, (Princeton, NJ: Office of Population Research, Princeton University, October 1973), p. 501.
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9. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Immigrants Admitted by Major Category of Admission: Fiscal Years 1994-96," 1998 (via www).
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15. U.S. Council on Environmental Quality, *Environmental Quality: 25th Anniversary Report*, Washington, DC, 1995, p. 516.
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19. *Annual Energy Review 1995*, p. 9.
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21. *Farming on the Edge*, p. 18 (see note 33).
22. *Farming on the Edge*, III. Major Findings.
23. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996* (116th ed), Washington, DC 1996, Tables 28, 43.
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30. The following total fertility rates were used in the calculation of the NPG population projections: 1970-2.00; 1975-1.80; 1980-1.65; 1985-1.50; 1990-1.50; 1995-1.50; 2000-1.50; 2005-1.50; 2010-1.57; 2015-1.63; 2020-1.70; 2025-1.77; 2030-1.83; 2035-1.90; 2040-1.97; 2045-2.03; 2050-2.10.

31. We use the NPG recommendations for one simple reason: the Rockefeller Commission recommendations would not have succeeded in stabilizing the U.S. population. The NPG recommendations will protect the U.S. environment and quality of life by moving the nation toward an optimum population.
32. Figures prior to 1995 are based on actual data. The middle series population projection begins in 1995.
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About the author. Mark W. Nowak is an environmental writer and a resident fellow of Negative Population Growth. Formerly executive director of Population-Environment Balance, his writing has appeared in national newspapers, magazines and environmental journals, and he has contributed to several books on population, immigration and the environment.

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