
BOOKS IN REVIEW

LATIN AMERICAN FERTILITY: DETERMINANTS, POLICIES, AND POLITICS

DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION THEORY REINTERPRETED. By STEVEN E. BEAVER. (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1975. Pp. 177.)

FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING IN METROPOLITAN LATIN AMERICA. By CELADE and CFCs. (Chicago: Community and Family Study Center, University of Chicago, 1972. Pp. 323.)

POPULATION POLICIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A WORLD BANK STAFF REPORT. By THE INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. Pp. 214.)

THE DYNAMICS OF POPULATION POLICY IN LATIN AMERICA. Edited by TERRY L. MCCOY. (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1974. Pp. 410.)

RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD: THE POLITICS OF MEXICO'S NEW POPULATION POLICIES. By FREDERICK C. TURNER. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Foreign Affairs Study 13, October 1974. Pp. 43.)

Although Latin America exhibits many noteworthy characteristics, one of the most striking since the end of World War II has been the breathtaking growth of the region's population. From 1950 to 1975 the total population of Latin America more than doubled, approaching 330 million persons in the latter year. Growth rates are almost uniformly high, with such major populations as Brazil and Mexico manifesting 2.8 percent per year while other nations such as Colombia and Venezuela exhibit unprecedented annual growth rates of 3.4 percent. Actually these figures do not do justice to the true magnitude of the population growth currently being experienced in Latin America. Given the annual rates cited above, the populations of Mexico and Brazil will double every twenty-five years while those of Colombia and Venezuela will double in slightly over twenty years. The population of Latin America as a whole will, by the end of the century, have increased to 644 million, a size only slightly smaller than the combined populations of Europe and North America today.

This phenomenon has been accompanied by increasing concern, both within the region and abroad, giving rise to a number of scholarly studies that explore the social, political, and economic implications of Latin America's rapid population growth. Those discussed here will provide the interested scholar with an excellent introduction to these implications. Their focus is almost entirely on the determinants and consequences of Latin American fertility trends, an emphasis that might seem to be misplaced given that the population growth experienced in Latin America during the last thirty years is primarily the result of the rapid decline in mortality levels, not of a rise in fertility. Indeed, as Arriaga has demonstrated with data from eleven Latin American countries, the "excess" population produced by higher growth rates since the 1930s is almost entirely (83 percent) the result of mortality decline.¹ Increases in fertility have played only a minor role in this growth. For obvious reasons, no one has seriously suggested that a solution to the population growth problems of Latin America lies in a policy of increased mortality; hence, the focus on fertility and fertility control found in the volumes under review.

The issue of fertility policy has generated a considerable amount of controversy in Latin America as these volumes demonstrate. Among European and North American scholars there is reasonably widespread agreement regarding the deleterious effects of population growth on the economic and social development of Third World nations. Chapter 2 of the *World Bank Staff Report* presents a succinct yet reasonably comprehensive summary of this position. Actually, this unanimity of opinion is probably stronger than the quality of the underlying statistical base would warrant. Quantitative studies of the impact of population growth are rare, and those that do exist are often of dubious value, relying on cross-national comparisons of unreliable data,² or maintaining a level of abstraction and aggregation that threatens to obscure totally the explanatory power of the analyses.³

The case against population runs as follows: High fertility rates produce a very young population and result in a "burden of dependency" that falls on the shoulders of the productive population. The needs of this "unproductive" segment of the population reduce markedly the capacity of a society to save for investment in productive capital. Moreover, the quality of investment that does occur in a rapidly growing population is reduced since a higher share must be invested in housing and educating the expanding population while relatively less is left available for more directly productive projects.

Population growth is also held to be responsible for the spread of unemployment as an expanding labor force exhausts the supplies of cooperating capital and a growing body of labor remains unabsorbed into the productive economy. The growing pools of unemployed or underemployed poor in the urban areas of Latin America represent a major political consequence of population growth that remains largely unexplored by political scientists concerned with population trends in the region. Moreover, rapid population growth is often accused of leading to a more unequal distribution of wealth although, as the authors of the *Staff Report* correctly note, empirical studies that demonstrate

the positive correlation of high fertility rates with income inequality do not necessarily demonstrate that high fertility *causes* inequality. Finally, the impact of population growth on a region's ability to produce an adequate food supply has in recent years become a major element in the case for population control.

Given the unsuitability of policies designed to increase mortality, primary attention has been given to fertility reduction as the only possible means of population control. This emphasis has led to new studies that attempt to assess the determinants of fertility levels in Latin America and to numerous calls for the adoption of fertility control programs throughout the region. Two recent studies are particularly interesting because they address the issue from radically differing methodological perspectives. Stephen Beaver studies Latin American fertility trends from a "macrohistorical" point of view, in which an explicit attempt is made to compare and contrast the fertility experience of Europe and North America with that of the nations of Latin America. The volume authored somewhat clumsily by the Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía (CELADE) of Santiago, Chile and the Community and Family Study Center (CFSC) of the University of Chicago⁴ reports, on the other hand, the findings of nine interview surveys conducted with women in major Latin American urban centers between 1964 and 1966.⁵ These surveys were components of a "coordinated effort to obtain for different, typical Latin American areas (rural, urban, and highly urbanized) as complete a picture as possible of: (a) levels and trends of fertility; (b) attitudes and opinions toward desired family size and family planning; and (c) the use of contraceptives, attitudes toward their use, and means of communicating about them." The work under review is the report of the first phase of that ambitious program. The CELADE-CFSC volume is, therefore, markedly different in orientation from Beaver's approach, being explicitly microanalytic and ahistorical in focus. Together the two books provide a useful and comprehensive view of Latin American fertility patterns and trends.

Beaver's study of Latin American natality is presented in the framework of a general theoretical and empirical study of the "demographic transition." This is the name that social and economic demographers have applied to the decline in fertility and mortality experienced all over Europe and North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The demographic transition is both an historical event and a theory of demographic change, and it has been the subject of intense debate in recent years. As Beaver rightly points out, demographic transition theory "is not a set of logically interrelated propositions from which testable empirical statements can be formally derived." Rather, it is a collection of observations, assertions, and generalizations about the European and North American fertility decline that remains unintegrated and unrefined. Moreover, European demographic history alone contains enough anomalies to bring the theory into question as an explanation of European fertility decline, let alone as an explanation of possibilities for such decline in Latin America.

Beaver's goal is to distill the main themes of demographic transition theory and to formalize and respecify the theory so that it may be applied to Latin America. He identifies three main themes in the demographic transition

theory literature: (1) socioeconomic development of a society leads to a decline in aggregate fertility; (2) mortality levels affect natality, but without any apparent impact on the ultimate family size desired or thought to be ideal; (3) natality decline is caused by the implementation (not discovery) of some type of birth control. By reviewing the demographic histories of Europe and Latin America he finds some support for the first theme in the Latin American context. However, he also cites studies suggesting that demographic transition theory is inappropriate for Latin America because Latin American mortality levels declined much faster than in Europe and much more rapidly than the rate of economic development in the region would suggest. Moreover, even though Latin American economies have grown more rapidly since 1950 than in Europe during the demographic transition, the general trend of fertility in the region since 1930 has not been down but upward. Beaver's discussion of the existing literature on European and Latin American fertility is not particularly rigorous. This is disappointing since his contribution is primarily a formalization and extension of that literature, and a particularly careful and extensive analysis of precursors is definitely in order.

Chapters 4 and 8 of the monograph present a revised theory of demographic transition in Latin America and empirical tests of that revision. Beaver's theoretical and empirical work is highly aggregated and very much in the sociological tradition of dealing with the social correlates of individual behavior. Indeed, he makes explicit his intention to deal with *societies* as the theoretical units of analysis and, by making this explicit, he disclaims any culpability in perpetrating "ecological fallacies" by making inferences about individual behavior from aggregate data. His disclaimer is unconvincing; aggregate fertility rates are, after all, nothing more than summarizations of individual fertility behavior. If it is ultimately the determinants of this individual behavior that we wish to understand, the distortions that arise in such extreme aggregations of social, demographic, and economic data must be of particular concern. Moreover, the policy implications to be drawn from aggregate analyses of this type are often not very helpful, and useful policies designed to affect individual fertility behavior will not often be forthcoming from these sorts of exercises.

Nevertheless, Beaver's empirical work using cross-sectional and longitudinal data from the larger countries (population greater than 500,000) of the Latin American region has some interesting implications. It suggests, in part, that the direct, lagged effect of rising urbanization, education, and levels of living as measures of development, is to reduce natality. Moreover, it suggests that while the immediate short term effect of a general mortality decline is to raise natality, the longer term effect is to reduce natality. However, Beaver is unable to associate rapid mortality declines with rapid natality declines. His analyses of cross-sectional data give no evidence that rapid mortality declines result in increased rates of natality decline. The data do, however, provide some support that the rate of natality decline is associated with the pace of economic development.

On the whole, Beaver is optimistic. He finds strong and fairly general

support for the major themes of demographic transition theory, and the rapid pace of economic development in Latin America, coupled with the sharp declines in mortality experienced there, leads him to expect "widespread and precipitous natality decline" in the region. Nevertheless, he argues, because of the region's exceedingly young age structure, the potential for population growth remains enormous and the expectation of early and rapid declines in natality "should in no way be interpreted as a recommendation to reduce effort toward providing adequate contraceptive technology to all who wish it."

This optimism is also to be found in the CELADE-CFSC volume. Although the surveys reveal the existence of "explosive" population growth in the nine urban areas, they also reveal, according to the author, great potential for dramatic declines in fertility. In particular the surveys suggest that women in these urban areas exhibit strong preferences for small families (46 percent of all women desire three or less children), late marriage, greater spacing between children, and extended postponement of pregnancy after marriage. Moreover, the surveys reflect strong motivations in favor of the practice of family planning and, surprisingly, "adequate" or better knowledge of contraception and contraceptive techniques (63 percent of women surveyed) among a strong majority of the respondents. As the author states, "the inference is almost unavoidable that the potential for fertility decline in Latin American metropolises is very great indeed."⁶

Moreover, the surveys are described as suggesting that the types of policies needed to exploit this potential are easy to implement and can be expected to be particularly effective. In the body of the book (chapters 5 to 11) this theme is developed and expounded in great detail. Multivariate analyses of a number of aspects of reproductive behavior and attitudes (e.g., contraceptive use, desired and ideal family size, motivation for family planning, knowledge about family planning, etc.) are conducted, and the explanatory power of such factors as social and economic status, demographic background, social-psychological attitudes and motivations, religiosity, family structure, and family size preferences is assessed. What is significant from the author's point of view is that social-psychological factors are by far the most important variables in the explanation of differentials in fertility behavior and attitudes. These factors are of a type that can be easily manipulated or changed by special programs of public education, persuasion, and contraceptive distribution and which do not require basic changes in the social, economic, and cultural environment within which Latin American women find themselves.

To one who would believe them, these are heartening findings. They are consistent with many of numerous KAP fertility surveys⁷ conducted all over the Third World since the end of World War II. Fertility surveys of the type reported in the CELADE-CFSC study have formed the intellectual and documentary basis for the implementation of more than fifty family planning programs in Third World nations and for the massive shift in United States foreign aid policy during the late 1960s. Family planning has become a major element in U.S. foreign aid policy and even though the funds allocated for this have remained a

relatively small share of total aid, the political significance of the U.S. position on family planning has become increasingly salient.

From the perspective of the mid-1970s, the optimism of the CELADE-CFSC study appears somewhat misplaced. With the remarkable exception of Costa Rica there is little if any evidence that urban fertility rates have declined appreciably in the ten to twelve years since the surveys were made. Indeed, fertility surveys of the type reported here have come under increasing attack with respect to methodology and usefulness,⁸ and it has more than once been suggested that they are more effective in measuring the preconceptions of the researchers than the attitudes and practices of the subject populations. Particularly lacking in this study is a well-articulated model of the fertility process. Survey responses are collected and grouped according to whether they represent "social-psychological attitudes or motivation," or "demographic background," or "religiosity," and so on. These factors are then used to explain attitudes toward family size and contraceptive behavior without much attention being paid to the underlying nature and structure of the fertility decisions and nondecisions being made by thousands of urban couples in Latin America. Particularly troublesome is the use of attitudinal and motivational data both as dependent variables and as explanatory variables in the analyses. One often gets the feeling that the social-psychological variables do so well in explaining fertility attitudes and practices because they are in some sense alternative measures of these various attitudes and practices. If so, the optimism produced by the findings in this volume should be considerably muted, because our understanding of the factors that produce attitudes favoring small families and effective contraceptive practice is not of a precision to warrant the expectation of an early and precipitous fertility decline in Latin America.

Nevertheless, this study is a valuable addition to the literature on Latin American fertility. It describes a collection of data sets that, with a more extended analysis, might provide even more insight into urban fertility than the CELADE-CFSC volume has produced, and it represents an essential first reading for any scholar interested in using the CELADE data sets for further research.

The increasing emphasis on population problems and family planning programs placed by representatives of the industrial nations and particularly the United States culminated in 1974, designated World Population Year by the United Nations. The focal point of World Population Year was the World Population Conference and the independent but concurrent Population Tribune, both of which were held in Bucharest, Romania. The primary purpose of the conference was to discuss and adopt a "World Population Plan of Action."

The outcome of the conference was a shock to many of the representatives of the industrial nations. Third World nations led by Argentina, Egypt, and India initiated a largely successful effort to deemphasize population as a central factor in the host of problems facing them. Instead, the focus of the resulting plan was shifted to emphasize the central importance of socioeconomic development, the role of neocolonialism and imperialism, and international trade inequities in the maintenance of low levels of living in the Third World nations.

The conference itself brought out the profound and perhaps overriding importance of the political element in the population issue. It accentuated the feeling of many of the representatives of Latin American nations that the industrialized world's attempt to emphasize population and family planning programs was nothing more than an attempt to substitute these programs for the development aid and real income transfers that were the actual needs of the Third World nations. The final plan of action almost totally rejected family planning as a viable approach to population policy.

The collection of essays edited by Terry L. McCoy presents an interesting and illuminating insight into the political dimension of population policy that dominated Bucharest. Containing sixteen essays (half of them written expressly for the volume) and an informative introduction that presents a brief survey of the demographic situation in Latin America, the volume provides a wide range of views on a number of issues. J. Mayone Stycos assesses the impact of nationalism, Marxism, and anti-Americanism on population policies in Latin America, while Thomas G. Sanders explores the relationship between the Catholic Church and population control. Axel Munding assesses the factors that determine elite attitudes toward population and population control, and Terry McCoy traces the involvement of a wide variety of external institutions and organizations in the population and development policies of Latin American nations.

The second section of the book contains a variety of views both from within and outside the region on the issue of population control. We find juxtaposed the views of Robert S. McNamara and Pope Paul VI concerning the necessity and desirability of active intervention in the reproductive cycle. Jorge Iván Hubner Gallo exposes the "population explosion myth" and traces the origins of the myth to "North American, English, or Latin American sociological and demographic experts" and to hidden but "powerful economic forces." José Consuegra analyzes "Birth Control as a Weapon of Imperialism," and suggests that "the population explosion thesis can be seen as a new diversionary tactic directed at impairing the work of those who denounce the contradictions and structural inequities of our underdeveloped economic systems as the only sources of misery, exploitation, and dependency of their peoples." What is striking in these particular selections and in the rhetoric of the Bucharest conference, is the similarity of the views of Latin American Marxists and many conservative representatives of the Catholic Church. Population control would seem to represent perhaps the only issue that can generate such agreement among normally antagonistic points of view.

The McCoy volume ends with a series of essays that present case studies of population policies in a number of Latin American countries. Of particular interest is the chapter by Germán Bravo that outlines the manner in which population policy was integrated into national economic planning efforts. Bravo describes the process by which the Colombian Catholic Church changed its position from outright hostility to "sympathetic openness" on the population question. McCoy closes the volume with a description and analysis of Mexican

public policy regarding fertility and population growth. His essay should be read in conjunction with Frederick C. Turner's brief monograph, which presents an illuminating discussion of the factors that led the Mexican government abruptly to abandon an essentially pronatalist policy and adopt in its place a policy of "responsible parenthood." Of particular interest are the implications of the low profile adopted by the United States government with respect to Mexican population issues. Turner suggests that the United States facilitated the turnabout in Mexican population policy by not imposing either its ideas or its funds onto the scene.

Finally, for those scholars desiring a brief but comprehensive discussion of the current status of population policies in the Third World, the *World Bank Staff Report* provides an excellent introduction. Written in a style that belies its group origin, the *Staff Report* addresses a number of issues of interest and importance. Included are chapters detailing the types of fertility policies currently being followed in countries throughout the Third World, the actual effectiveness of family planning programs as growth reduction policies, the use of economic incentives and disincentives in national family planning programs, and the problems of organization and delivery of family planning services in administratively underdeveloped regions. Notable by its absence is any attempt to discuss the political impediments to the successful implementation of fertility reduction programs. To the extent that sentiments such as those expressed in the McCoy volume and at Bucharest really do impede the successful implementation of these programs, a discussion of their effects is both timely and necessary if population policies are ever to be effectively compared with other governmental policies designed to facilitate economic and social development.

In sum, the volumes reviewed here provide an up-to-date view of the field of population as it relates to Latin America. This is not to say that any of them represents the last word on the connection between population and economic and social development. However, they will assist the reader to develop a firm grasp of the strengths and weaknesses in our understanding about the relationship between population and development in Latin America.

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NOTES

1. Eduardo E. Arriaga, "The Nature and Effects of Latin America's Non-Western Trend in Fertility," *Demography* 7, no. 4 (November 1970):487.
2. See Nathaniel Leff, "Dependency Rates and Savings Rates," *American Economic Review* 59, no. 5 (December 1969):886-95, and the associated comments in the *American Economic Review* 61, no. 3 (June 1971):469-80.
3. See Stephen Enke, "The Gains to India from Population Control," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 42 (May 1960):175-81.
4. The actual author of the CELADE-CFSC volume is Donald J. Bogue, who acknowledges "responsibility for organizing the chapters, for directing the processing of

- data, for analyzing the results and for writing the manuscript.”
5. The cities are: Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Caracas, Panama City, Rio de Janeiro, San José (Costa Rica), and Quito and Guayaquil (Ecuador).
 6. P. 244.
 7. KAP stands for “Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice” of family planning.
 8. See John Cleland, “A Critique of KAP Studies and Some Suggestions for Their Improvement,” *Studies in Family Planning* 4, no. 2 (February 1973):42–47; Jack Reynolds, “Evaluation of Family Planning Program Performance: A Critical Review,” *Demography* 9, no. 2 (February 1972):69–86.