

Record: 1**Title:** How 'Demographic Fatigue' Will Defuse the Population Bomb.**Authors:** Hager, Mary**Source:** Newsweek; 11/02/98, Vol. 132 Issue 18, p12, 1p, 1 color**Document Type:** Article**Subject Terms:** POPULATION forecasting
DEMOGRAPHIC transition
WORLDWATCH Institute (Organization)
BROWN, Lester
OVERPOPULATION**Abstract:** Argues that human population growth is destined to slow in the early 21st century. Reasons behind Thomas Malthus' predictions of disaster associated with unchecked population growth; United Nations demographers' world population predictions; Worldwatch Institute president Lester Brown's identification of signs of faltering growth in some countries that were expected to have the greatest population increases; Explanation of demographic fatigue. INSET: Countdown 2000.**Lexile:** 1200**Full Text Word Count:** 714**ISSN:** 00289604**Accession Number:** 1201657**Database:** MAS Ultra - School Edition**Section:** THE MILLENNIUM NOTEBOOK

HOW 'DEMOGRAPHIC FATIGUE' WILL DEFUSE THE POPULATION BOMB

IT WAS 200 YEARS AGO THAT ENGLISH cleric Thomas Malthus warned that unchecked population growth could lead to famine, disease and conflict. His reasoning was simple: populations tend to increase faster than food supplies. So far, the world's farmers have managed to overcome short water supplies and depleted croplands to feed a population that has more than doubled in the last half century. United Nations demographers predict that the global population could climb from its current 5.9 billion to as high as 11.2 billion in 2050. But at least one expert on global population sees signs that the scenario predicted by Malthus is already coming true--with a twist.

In a report on demographic trends conducted by the think tank Worldwatch Institute, Lester Brown, president of Worldwatch, identifies signs of faltering growth in some of the countries that were expected to have the greatest population increases. Populations in 32 countries--all in the industrialized world--have stabilized because of declining birthrates. Some, including Russia, Italy and Germany, are even losing populations. But in a handful of developing countries where population growth is slowing, the cause isn't something to celebrate: it isn't increased education or family planning. The population is growing more slowly now because more people are dying.

The trend is called, chillingly, "demographic fatigue," and it's beginning in many of the developing countries that have experienced soaring birthrates and sharp population growth for several decades: India, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Nigeria. Governments are having

trouble dealing with feeding, housing and educating an increasing number of children, while at the same time confronting the falling water tables, deforestation and soil erosion that rapid population growth brings. In these conditions, any new threat--infectious disease, drought or famine--can become a full-blown crisis.

AIDS is a case in point. The most recent World Health Organization estimates calculate that one quarter of the adult populations of Zimbabwe and Botswana are infected with the virus that causes AIDS, with Zambia, Swaziland and Namibia not far behind. In other words, these countries stand to lose at least one quarter of their adult populations in the next decade from AIDS alone, a situation unparalleled since the bubonic plague swept through Europe in the 14th century.

Disease is far from the only threat to overburdened societies. U.N. projections show India may add 600 million more people by 2050, overtaking China as the world's most populous country. But India already faces serious water shortages. A recent report from the International Water Management Institute shows that recent growth in food production and population has been based on unsustainable use of water. So far, the government has taken no steps to manage resources.

Social unrest is also increasing. One example is the longstanding conflict between the Tutsis and the Hutus in Rwanda, where population pressures reduced cropland to a point where it could no longer feed those who lived on it. Demands on the world's fisheries and shared water resources are likely to spark similar conflicts. Already the waters of the Nile are so heavily used that little reaches the Mediterranean, so any increase in demand or shift in allocation will also increase tensions.

The bottom line, says Brown, is that human population growth is destined to slow, one way or the other. Developing societies will either recognize problems on the horizon and act to encourage smaller families--or unchecked births will have their price in rising death rates.

PHOTO (COLOR): Mass transit: India is one nation ripe for population problems

~~~~~

By MARY HAGER

#### COUNTDOWN 2000

If you need to know exactly how much time is left between now and the millennium, this sampling of Internet sites can help:

<http://www.alchemy.on.ca/countdown/countdown.html> This site will give you precise data on the time remaining until 2000. You can customize it to ignore seconds, if you like.

<http://www.spiders.com/cig-bin/cntdwn.pl?Millenium-2001> Get a countdown to 2000 or 2001 at this address, or request a calculation of just how long you have been alive.

[http://home.concepts.nl/~vliet\(underscore\)pr/cntdown.html](http://home.concepts.nl/~vliet(underscore)pr/cntdown.html) The flickering display box at this site changes constantly as it shows only the number of seconds until the 21st century.

<http://www.ironhorsevineyards.com/> The Iron Horse Ranch and Vineyards page offers a twinkling image of a glass of bubbly with its countdown. Champagne, anyone?

---

Copyright of Newsweek is the property of Newsweek and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.