

# **“Deconstructing the Population Control Movement In the Third Worlds in the 1950s And 1960s: A Three-Sphere Approach”**

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## **Extended Summary**

### **Research question:**

The main idea of this study is to explore the dynamics and processes of change in public policy in the field of demography. For his purpose, the global population control movement in the 1950s and 1960s, in which the most part of the developing countries reached a consensus to change their population policies, was chosen as a case study and the following research questions were posed.

*What were the dynamics and processes of change in public policy in the field of demography in the case of the shift in population policy in the developing world from pronatalism to antinatalism in the 1950s and 1960s? And how was the ideology of population control produced, interacted, interinfluenced and interrelated between the lines of global hegemony, national interest, and individual claim?*

### **Theoretical framework**

This study offers a holistic approach that attempts to link the global initiation of the population control movement, the nationalities' own interests, and the claims of families and women for the birth control.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the population control movement of the 1950s and 1960s was analyzed in three spheres: global, national and individual.

The global sphere represents the hegemonic body; US-based foundations (mainly Rockefeller and Ford Foundations) and global institutions (UN, USAID, IMF, World Bank, IBDR) from which the ideology of population control originated and disseminated into the developing world in the 1950s and 1960s. The national sphere represents the governmental bodies of developing countries, where legislation, investment, and implementation of antinatalist policies took place. And the individual sphere is the families and women of the developing world, who decide on fertility behavior.

In order to demonstrate how these three spheres interacted, interrelated, and interinfluenced each other to produce and shape the population control movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the study utilizes Amartya Sen's "capability approach," a normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being (Sen, 1979), and extends it to include the following assumptions;

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-The theory basically states that the direction of individual decision is to maximize the “quality of life” based on one’s capability and functioning, which is also applicable to the fertility decision.

-In the individual sphere, the rational fertility decision made by the woman and the family should be based on an assessment of whether or not an additional child will serve the quality of life. Parents may choose to have a child (based on the cultural, religious and social norms or security, economic and moral value) or may perceive it as a burden on their life quality (time-consuming, budget deficit, etc.).

-This “quality” assessment can also be applied to the global and national spheres, depending on the changing perception of the population. In the global sphere, population can be desirable if it helps to exploit the quality of the international sphere (through new markets or cheap labor, etc.), or undesirable if it creates obstacles (e.g. burden in obtaining scarce resources, security and immigration issues etc.).

-Similarly, in the national sphere, governments might pursue a pronatalist agenda if the increase in population supports to improve their quality (e.g. as voting power, cheap labor, for economic or military purposes for further expansion, etc.) or support antinatalist policies if the additional population limits or reduces the government’s capability to function (such as internal migration that worsens allocation of resources, ethnic or class conflict, political unrest, etc.).

And in contrast to many scholarly works dealing with the changing population policies of the era, which almost unanimously assume that population control movements in the developing world were a by-product of the global hegemonic configuration of the post-World War II world (Connelly, 2008, Bashford 2014), this study argues that there was no straightforward diffusion between these spheres in population control, but rather a “quality” based vibrant interaction, interrelation, and interinfluence while maintaining relative autonomy. And the global population control movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the developing world was, this study argues, an implicit and fragile consensus between all spheres that population control/birth control served to improve their quality. And the aim of the study is to demonstrate these conditionalities in each sphere that led them to embrace population control ideology.

### Methodology

The study aims to integrate diverse academic literature on population control, many of which present an isolated focus on the global, national or individual sphere to respond the research question.

As far as the global sphere is concerned, the scholarly works on the subject has focused on many different aspects of the movement, such as the inception of the population control ideology (Hartmann, 1997), its politicization in the context of the Cold

War (Szreter, 1993), the political orientation of demographers either by changing the scope of demographic transition theory (Hodgson, 1983) or through KAP surveys to create an “unmet need” for contraception (Bradley and Casterline, 2015), its introduction to developing world through modernization and development discourses (Escobar, 2004) and through transnational coalition networks (Hartmann and Unger, 2014), but mostly lacking the representation of national and individual needs and agendas. The main contribution of this study is therefore to give agency to these spheres.

In the national sphere, twenty developing countries, where population control policies were legalized before 1970 (India, Pakistan, South Korea, China, Tunisia, Turkey, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Jamaica, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Morocco, Taiwan, Dominican Republic, Ghana) were analyzed in terms of the conditionalities that reduces these government’s capability to function and forced them to switch to antinatalist policies. To this end, the secondary literature of each of these countries was tracked and seven key categories were identified: Malthusian concerns, rapid urbanization, famines, ethnic conflicts, military coups, economic crises and developmentalist and modernist discourses. And the countries were evaluated on the basis of these categories.

As for the individual sphere, which required intensive research on the family and women at both macro and micro levels, one of these twenty countries, the Turkish case, was chosen as a sample. And the structural changes that forced Turkish women and the family to reduce their fertility level in the 1950s and 1960s were elaborated in terms of changing family structure, women’s empowerment, changing demographic structure such as increasing marriage age, and changing value of children.

### Key Findings

- The US-led population control coalition has gone to great lengths to spread the ideology of population control in developing countries and to persuade them to adopt anti-natalist policies in a variety of ways (400 KAP surveys around the world, development of national family planning programs, technical and financial assistance for birth control, establishment of population institutes in certain countries, etc.), including the use of hard and soft power by global institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (e.g. population control as a precondition for financial aid), which proved successful only when population growth was a burden on these countries (e.g., Sukarno’s Indonesia and Menderes’s Türkiye were pro-US governments and desperately needed US financial aid but were deeply reluctant to implement population control) (Furtuna, 2023, 80-82).
- The conditionalities of each country that forced the governments to switch to antinatalist policies in the 1950s and 1960s are demonstrated as below. Yet the

legalization and implementation of population control is no guarantee of its success, which depends on the individual sphere.

Country	Malthusian Concerns	Rapid Urbanization	Famines	Eugenic Ethnic conflicts	Military Coups	Economic Crisis-Need for Financial aids	Developmentalist / Modernist discourse
India							
Pakistan							
South Korea							
China							
Tunisia							
Turkey							
Egypt							
Sri Lanka							
Singapore							
Kenya							
Malaysia							
Nepal							
Jamaica							
Iran							
Bangladesh							
Indonesia							
Morocco							
Taiwan							
Dominic							
Ghana							

<b>LEGEND</b>	Malthusian Concerns	Rapid Urbanization	Famines	Eugenic /Ethnic conflicts	Military Coups	Economic Crisis , Need for Financial aids	Developmentalist / Modernist discourse
	Pop increase Below 20%	Below 20%	no	no	no	no	no
	20%-29%	20%-29%		Ethnic			
	30%-39%	30%-39%	yes	Eugenic	yes	Need for financial aid	Developmentalist
	40%-49%	40%-49%					
	Above 50% + scarce res.	Above 50%				Economic crisis	Modernist

- Türkiye's Family Planning program, launched in 1965, was among the weakest implementation of all twenty countries (Lapham, Mauldin 1984), and the modern contraceptive methods offered by the government (IUDs) were not favored by Turkish families and women to the desired extent (due to health concerns and cultural / religious bias), yet the population declined beyond the most optimistic projections driven by the increase in traditional methods and abortion.
- In the Turkish case, the population growth already began to decline as early as the mid-1950s, a decade before the Population Planning Law was promulgated in 1965, as a result of a series of structural changes triggered by post-World War II conditions. (US Marshall aid for agricultural mechanization and road construction, had changed the country's Soviet-style economic model, which also changed the land regime, eroded the patriarchal family structure, triggered internal migration which also increased the female literacy and the age of marriage and reduced the economic

value of children, etc.) (Furtuna 2024). Thus, the individual sphere, the Turkish family and women had their own motivations and tools to limit their fertility, ironically not triggered by the US-led population control movement but by the US Marshall Aid a decade ago.

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