Overpopulation Myth: New Study Predicts Population Decline This Century

By Alex Berezow, PhD — August 5, 2020

A new study projects that the world population, which now stands at 7.8 billion, will peak in 2064 at 9.7 billion then fall by 2100 to 8.8 billion. If the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are met, the population could be even smaller at 6.3 billion.

Human overpopulation is one of the biggest myths we keep needing to debunk. The reason is because this belief has an insidious effect, in some cases leading to profound acts of evil.

How so? First, let's start with the obvious. A belief in human overpopulation is often rooted in racism. Today, those who claim the world is overpopulated point to Africa, India, and Southeast Asia -- in other words, places where impoverished people of color live. They never point to New York City, London, or Paris. Back in the 1840s, the English thought that there were too many Irish people, which is why they didn't bother helping to feed them [2] during the potato famine.

Second, a belief in overpopulation is factually incorrect. Humans are not cockroaches or bacteria. We do not reproduce exponentially until the food runs out. Instead, as a nation becomes richer and more developed, people naturally have fewer children, choosing to invest more of their time and resources into raising one or two children instead of ten. That's been the pattern in every rich country around the world, including the United States [3].
Despite this, global population models often projected that humanity would continue growing well into the 22nd Century before peaking at around 11 or 12 billion people and then declining. But some demographers are starting to question this. Last year, Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson wrote a book called *Empty Planet*\(^4\) that claimed that the human population would peak and decline this century, beginning in roughly 30 years. Now, a new study confirms this view.

**The Incredible Shrinking Man**

Published in *The Lancet*, a study from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projects that the world population, which now stands at 7.8 billion, will peak in 2064 at 9.7 billion (95% CI: 8.8 billion to 10.9 billion) then fall by 2100 to 8.8 billion (95% CI: 6.8 billion to 11.8 billion). If the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are met, which include education and access to contraception, the authors project a population of 6.3 billion (95% CI: 4.8 billion to 8.7 billion) by 2100, smaller than it is today.

Shockingly, the paper predicts that some countries will see their populations cut in half or more by 2100. Poland, for instance, currently has a population of just under 38 million and is projected to fall to 15.4 million (95% CI: 12 million to 21 million) by the end of the century. (Part of the reason for the dramatic decline in Eastern European populations is due to emigration.) Even China is expected to shrink by roughly half, from 1.4 billion today to 732 million (95% CI: 456 million to 1.5 billion).

**A Smaller, Older World**

Such a demographic shift will have enormous implications\(^5\). Not only will the world be smaller, it will be older. How do we keep the global economy healthy if there are far more older, retired people than younger, working people? How will we pay for the healthcare of all the elderly people? Will we need an army of robots to take care of them? Japan is already headed in that direction\(^6\).

By now, the overpopulation myth should be dead and buried. There isn't a single scrap of data to support it. Instead, we should focus on reality and the consequences that accompany it.


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