

THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Geoffrey R. Hayes
Research Fellow
East-West Population Institute
Honolulu, Hawaii 96848

Michael J. Levin
Population Division
United States Bureau of the Census
Washington, D.C. 20233

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LEVIN/HAYES/PIRIE

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INTRODUCTION

The 22 island countries and territories discussed in this report are located within a wide band of the South Pacific ocean stretching from approximately 130 degrees east longitude to 130 degrees west longitude, and from latitude 20 degrees north to about 25 degrees south (Figure 1). This area corresponds to what can be termed the "developing" Pacific and thus excludes the relatively industrialized Pacific countries of Australia and New Zealand as well as the state of Hawaii. Some smaller Pacific islands which are formally part of metropolitan countries, such as Norfolk Island (Australia) and Easter Island (Chile), are excluded; but the tiny island of Pitcairn (administered by Great Britain) is included because its population is mainly Polynesian and it shares a number of features with other developing Pacific islands. On both geographical and cultural grounds, the territory of Irian Jaya, the western half of the island of New Guinea, is part of Melanesia, and therefore should be included in the region; but since it is now part of Indonesia it has been excluded. Similarly, the Torres Straits islands, also part of the Melanesia culture area, are not discussed because they are administered as part of Australia.

Although the region comprises only about 20 percent of the entire Pacific Ocean area, by any other standard it is vast. Based on the 200 mile exclusive economic zone concept, the countries and dependent territories of the developing South Pacific have jurisdiction over approximately 29 million square kilometers of ocean. Relative to this immense sea area, however, the land area of the

region is extremely small, totalling only about 551,000 square kilometers or approximately 1.5 percent of the total sea area. The exact number of islands in the region cannot be determined exactly, but estimates of up to 7,500 (not counting the individual islets of complex atolls) have been made (Bryan, 1965). Of these, however, probably fewer than 500 are presently inhabited (Nicholson, 1969). In terms of land area the region is overwhelmingly dominated by Papua New Guinea, whose 462,000 square kilometers accounts for 84 percent of the total land area. At the other end of the scale is miniscule Pitcairn Island with only 5 square kilometers.

The Pacific Islands can be divided into three broad culture areas: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia (Figure 1). At certain points the boundary between these areas is indistinct. Fiji, for example, is normally considered part of Melanesia¹, yet it shares many cultural features with Tonga and Samoa, its Polynesian neighbors. Similarly, the atolls of Tikopia, Ontong Java, Renell and Bellona, which lie within the geographical boundaries of Melanesia, and Kapingamarangi, which is located within Micronesia, are populated by Polynesians who migrated westward from central Polynesia. Colonial and post-colonial migrations have also resulted in ethnic dispersion throughout the Pacific Islands. Thus a considerable Polynesian population—originating in the Wallis and Futuna islands and French Polynesia—has settled in New Caledonia. Immigration from outside the Pacific has also contributed to cultural diversity as Indians, Chinese, Indo-Chinese and Europeans have settled in the larger islands of Fiji, Tahiti and New Caledonia. Labor migration from the Philippines has also produced a changing ethnic profile in the Northern Mariana Islands of Micronesia.

These qualifications aside, however, there is sufficient internal similarity within these three culture areas that they provide a useful basis for comparative demographic and socio-economic analysis. The existence of ecological variation both within and between these culture areas has also made the Pacific islands an excellent ethnographic laboratory (Sahlins, 1957). The potential for comparative demographic analysis remains considerable (Pirie, 1976).

The forms of political organization in the developing Pacific exhibit considerable diversity. With the exception of New Caledonia, which remains an Overseas Territory of France, all the countries of Melanesia are independent sovereign states. In Micronesia, only Kiribati and Nauru are independent: Guam is a Territory and the Northern Mariana Islands a Commonwealth of the United States, while the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau are in the process of becoming self-governing entities in "free-association" with the United States.

In Polynesia, only Tonga, Tuvalu and Western Samoa are sovereign states. French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna are Overseas Territories of France with limited powers of self-government. New Zealand has direct administrative authority over the Tokelau Islands and maintains a relationship of "free association" with Niue and the Cook Islands. American Samoa is an Unincorporated Territory of the United States but with some powers of self-government.

The economies of the region are also highly diverse. While it is difficult to obtain reliable income statistics for the Pacific islands as a whole, the data in Table 1 and elsewhere (SPC 1981) suggest that per capita income was in the range \$1400-1600 around 1980. Using the

World Bank system of international economic classification (World Bank, 1983), this level of income would place the developing Pacific at the high end of the "lower middle-income" group of developing countries. But the range of per capita incomes in the Pacific is extremely wide. New Caledonia, Guam and French Polynesia all have percapita incomes approaching those of the industrialized Pacific countries of Australia and New Zealand, and this has a considerable impact on the average income levels of the Pacific as a whole. If the high income countries are excluded, per capita incomes in the remainder of the Pacific would probably be around \$1,000.

para Only one Pacific developing country, Western Samoa, is considered by the OECD to be among the "least developed" countries of the world, but as Table 1 indicates, several Pacific countries (Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu) actually have lower per capita incomes than Samoa.

The determinants of income levels and economic structures are complex, but it is clear that high per capita incomes are mainly a function of economies based on mineral extraction (New Caledonia, Nauru) or military expenditures (Guam, French Polynesia). In each of these territories, however, a substantial minority of the population is of European rather than indigenous origin, and this has important implications for income distribution. The low income countries are primarily those independent states which have severed formal ties with metropolitan powers and/or whose natural resources are either extremely limited (Kiribati) or as yet undeveloped (Vanuatu). Most of the middle-income Pacific countries are only able to achieve their present level of living because of substantial inflows of Official Development Assistance (ODA), often from countries with which some political-legal ties remain (New Zealand, United States).

POPULATION ISSUES IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

The study of Pacific Islands populations presents a number of theoretical and methodological challenges (Taeuber, 1965). The predominant theoretical approach to population change over the past several decades is the theory of "demographic transition", first elaborated by Notenstein (1945). Transition theory is a variant of the broader "modernization" paradigm that once dominated social science research on developing societies. This model envisioned societies passing from a relatively static "traditional" state through a dynamic transitional or "intermediate" phase before coming to rest again in another relatively stable condition described as "modernity" (Eisenstadt, Parsons, etc., etc.). The unstable social, political and economic conditions characteristic of many developing countries were perceived as maladies of the transition from one mode of social integration (tradition) to another (modern). The demographic variant of this model sees "traditional" societies as characterized by high rates of mortality, a condition which necessitates equally high rates of fertility if population decline is to be averted. As "modern" medical technology diffuses to such societies, mortality declines while high "traditional" fertility continues apace. The result is rapid population growth which can only be overcome by the further diffusion of "modern" technologies of birth control and Western norms regarding ideal family size.

The conventional transition model has been criticized by Caldwell (1976, 1982) for its ethnocentrism and inability to explain the social and economic factors underlying demographic change. A

number of recent studies have also cast doubt upon the assumption of transition theory that fertility declines automatically with urbanization and economic growth (Eberstadt, 1982; Freedman, 1984).

While it is clear that twentieth century change in many Pacific island populations has followed the course predicted by transition theory, there are several respects in which the explanatory framework of transition theory gives a misleading impression of 19th century population history. Historical evidence suggests that mortality levels in parts of the South Pacific were quite low prior to contact with representatives of European cultures (Pirie, 1971, 1976; Pirie and Groenewegen, 1973). At the same time, however, little evidence has been found to indicate that Pacific islands populations ever increased to the levels that could theoretically be supported given the subsistence resources available on the larger island groups of Samoa, Tonga and Tahiti. This implies that Pacific peoples had developed cultural means by which fertility could be reduced when other checks on population growth (famine, warfare, etc.) were not operative. Ethnographic evidence from a variety of locations indicates that direct methods of population limitation ranging from infanticide to induced abortion and post-partum intercourse taboos were in operation throughout the Pacific (Bulmer, 1971; Firth, etc etc.....). A variety of cultural practices and beliefs, such as the belief that sexual intercourse has a weakening effect on males, would have had the indirect result of limiting family size.

The effects of colonization were initially to increase mortality, the degree varying quite widely across the Pacific depending on local circumstances (McArthur, 1967). In some regions

too, the introduction of syphilis had a depressing effect on fertility. These twin effects would have removed much of the incentive to apply deliberate fertility controls, and it is likely that cultural norms favoring high fertility gradually emerged, or existing ones reinforced, during the colonial era in order to ensure demographic survival. Supporting these trends was the influence of European or European-trained missionaries who viewed indigenous systems of birth limitation as immoral. In time, traditional means of fertility control became erased from cultural memory, and more broadly-based social and cultural changes undermined the less conscious practices (breast-feeding, post-partum intercourse taboo, male-female separation, late marriage, late child-bearing within marriage, etc.) which previously kept natural fertility below potential levels.

Depopulation remained the predominant theme of Pacific population studies throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century (Ward and Moran, 1959). As immunity to imported diseases increased, and public health measures were instituted by colonial administrations, mortality rates fell, sometimes dramatically. Declines occurred earliest in such Polynesian populations as American Samoa, Western Samoa and the Cook Islands, and in Fiji. Elsewhere in Melanesia, however, mortality remained at high levels until well after World War II, especially in those areas of the western Pacific affected by malaria.

... recent pop history, 1960s on...

CH 2 POP SIZE AND GROWTH

POPULATION SIZE

The 1982 mid-year population estimates reported in Table 3 indicate a total population of 5,107,700 in the developing Pacific Islands—approximately 0.1 percent of the world's total. The population of the Pacific is overwhelmingly dominated by Melanesia, which contained 84.2 percent of the total with Micronesia and Polynesia making up only 9.5 and 6.3 percent respectively. The largest population in Melanesia, and therefore in the Pacific as a whole, is in Papua New Guinea which had 3.1 million inhabitants in 1982, 61.2 percent of the region's total.

Because such a large proportion of the region's population is in Papua New Guinea, the characteristics of Papua New Guinea's population play a major role in determining the patterns of change exhibited by the population of the region as a whole.

The largest populations after Papua New Guinea are Fiji's 658,000 (12.9 percent of the total), Solomon Islands' 243,000 (4.8 percent), western Samoa's 157,000 (3.1 percent), French Polynesia's 153,800 (3.1 percent) and New Caledonia's 145,000 (2.8 percent). These six countries and territories in total contain 88 percent of the region's population while the remaining 12 percent is distributed across the other 16 political units.

A notable contrast between Melanesia and the rest of the Pacific is the comparatively large national populations of Melanesia. In Micronesia and Polynesia, eleven out of 17 countries and territories have populations under 50,000, and nine have populations less than 20,000. Even at the national level, therefore, these are

micro-populations, and their small size has important implications for demographic analysis as well as the substantive issues of population dynamics and socio-economic development.

POPULATION GROWTH

According to the latest United Nations estimate, the population of the world was growing at the rate of 1.7 percent annually during the 1975-80 period (Demographic Yearbook 1981:163). During the same period, the population of the Pacific region was growing at 1.8 percent, slightly above the world average. Compared to other developing regions, however, the rate of population growth in the Pacific is moderate. Substantially higher rates are reported for Africa (2.9 percent) and South Asia (2.8 percent), while Latin America's rate is 2.5 percent (U.N. Demographic Yearbook, 1981:163). The Caribbean region had the same rate of growth as the Pacific Islands, 1.8 percent.

The rate of growth in the Pacific region appears to have increased slightly in recent years: in the 1976-81 quinquennial it was 2.1 percent compared with 2.0 percent during the previous five years (table 2). The higher rate has continued up to 1981-82, the latest period for which Pacific-wide data are available.

Increasing rates of population growth in Micronesia and Polynesia appear to be responsible for the slight increase in the rate of growth for the Pacific as a whole during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Micronesia, increased natural growth in the Federated States of Micronesia and Kiribati is the most likely cause of population growth there. In Polynesia, on the other hand, a slow-down of

emigration following the establishment of more restrictive immigration laws in New Zealand is responsible for the higher rate of growth.

Population growth rates in the Pacific vary more widely by country than by culture area. Countries presently experiencing "explosive" population growth include Northern Mariana Islands (4.3%), Solomon Islands (4.1%), Wallis and Futuna (3.9%), Federated States of Micronesia (3.3%) and the Marshall Islands (3.0%). "Fast" growth rates are apparent in Nauru (2.4%), American Samoa (2.3%), Kiribati and Papua New Guinea (2.1%), Fiji, Guam and Tonga (all 2.0%), French Polynesia (1.9%) and Tuvalu (1.6%). The remaining countries have either moderate, low or negative growth rates. New Caledonia shows moderate growth of 1.2 percent while Western Samoa has a low rate of 0.7 percent. Tokelau is stable while Palau (-0.3%), Cook Islands (-1.1%) and Niue (-3.9%) have negative growth—mainly because of high rates of out-migration.

FOOTNOTES

1. The United Nations Demographic Yearbook places Fiji in Polynesia for the purpose of its macro-regions classification.

Chapter 4

POPULATION COMPOSITION

AGE COMPOSITION

The age structure of a population is an important aspect of demographic change and one with serious implications for the social and economic conditions of a developing country. Young populations usually require heavy investment in educational facilities, diverting resources from other types of investment which might show more immediate economic results. At the same time, a young population foreshadows a rapid increase in the labor force, often placing strains on an economy's capacity to absorb workers. The demographic consequences of a youthful population are also serious: even if the rate natural increase declines, a high proportion of young people will produce a population "momentum" which will ensure rapid population growth rates in the future. Of course, an aging population also raises problems, increasing demands for medical services and a shrinking labor force among them. In the Pacific Islands, however, these are not yet serious issues.

The population of the Pacific Islands region is, in aggregate, among the world's youngest. Because census years vary so much between countries, it is impossible to cite precise aggregate statistics, but a reasonable estimate of the proportion of the region's population below 15 years of age is 43-44 percent, while the median age is probably around 19 years. The age structure of the Pacific region is therefore similar to that of Central America and Southwest Asia (the "Middle East"), where 44 and 42 percent, respectively, are under 15 years of age (Medeiros Kent and Haub, 1984).

The only major regions of the world to have a more youthful population than the Pacific Islands are East and West Africa where fertility levels remain extremely high, and where the proportion of the population under 15 years is 45 and 47 percent respectively.

In three Pacific Island countries, however, the populations are among the youngest to be found anywhere in the world: Marshall Islands, Western Samoa and Solomon Islands. In the Marshall Islands, the median age in 1980 was 14.8 years and the proportion of the population below 15 years of age was 50.5 percent (table 6). Jordan is the only other country in the world with such a large proportion of its population under 15 (Medeiros Kent and Haub 1984). In Western Samoa, the median age in 1976 was 15.7, but this may have increased in recent years as fertility has declined. The Solomon Islands median of 16.1 years, on the other hand, may have dropped since 1976 because fertility has remained high. The Wallis and Futuna Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia also have extremely youthful populations with median ages just under 17 years.

The least youthful populations in the Pacific are those which have substantial European minorities because of the presence of military bases (Guam) or a large scale foreignⁿ economic operations (New Caledonia). The exception to this is Tuvalu, only 33.4 percent of whose population in 1979 was under 15 years of age and which had a median age of 21.4 years—even higher than New Caledonia's (table 6). This age structure appears to be the result of a severe reduction in fertility since the mid-1960s produced by a vigorous family planning program. There is some indication that the initial momentum of this program was lost after 1973 (McRae 1980) and fertility may have increased in recent years producing a somewhat younger population.

Another indicator of the age structure is the dependency ratio. Where populations are young, dependency ratios will be high. The dependency ratio for the Pacific region as a whole ^{in the early 1980s} is probably close to Papua New Guinea's 80. In other words, there are 80 persons under 15 and over 64 for every 100 aged between 15 and 64. [There are five Pacific populations (table 6a) which have dependency ratios above 100—indicating more "consumers" than "producers". In most of these cases, and in the Pacific as a whole, dependency ratios are high because of the large proportion of young people in the population. In other words, "youth dependency" is high. But the high dependency ratios of Niue and the Tokelau Islands are partly a function of an increasing proportion of elderly in these populations which is evident in their high "aged dependency" ratios. Another territory with a high aged dependency ratio is Palau. What these three territories have in common is age-selective emigration which tends to favor the young and increase the proportion of elderly. Of course, fertility decline in recent years has also contributed to this process.

There is little doubt that aging in the Pacific Islands raises a great many qualitative problems in the wake of social change (Mason nd, 1981), but it cannot be argued that the aged represent a quantitative problem as yet. Out of Papua New Guinea's approximately three million population in 1980, slightly fewer than 47,000 were aged 65 years and over—less than two percent of the total (table 6). In the Pacific as a whole there were probably only about 100,000 people aged 65 and over in the early 1980's, or about 2 percent of the population. Only in a few countries (Palau, Tokelau and Niue) do the aged comprise more than 5 percent of the total population (table 6). The absolute number of elderly will clearly increase in the Pacific Islands for the next century, but in the short term these numbers

will remain miniscule by comparison with the increased number of children and young adults.

ETHNIC/RACE COMPOSITION

The ethnic composition of the Pacific Islands is a graphic reflection of the history of several hundred years of colonial involvement in the islands. The complex themes of depopulation, missionization, foreign trading and settlement, indentured labor and plantation economies, military conflict, bases and weapons testing facilities, etc., are all reflected to a degree in the present ethnic/race composition of the islands.

With the exception of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, *however*, published census data do not adequately reflect the ethnic complexity of Pacific populations. In Papua New Guinea, for example, neither race nor ethnicity appear on the census questionnaire and only the citizenship of the population is determined. Elsewhere in the Pacific the number of part-Islanders is probably understated by the use of broad ethnic categories. To a degree this reflects a cultural tendency to emphasize inclusiveness rather than differences, and is thus indicative of the social insignificance of ethnicity in the societies concerned; but it is also likely that, except in the obvious case of Fiji, and in the U.S. Territories, the importance of ethnicity is not sufficiently recognized by census takers.

In the Pacific region as a whole, Pacific Islanders and part-Islanders remain an overwhelming majority of the population—probably in the order of 86-87 percent in the late 1970s. In some countries, however, the indigenous population forms only a minority of the population. The extreme example is New Caledonia where Melanesians were only 43 percent of the

total in 1976 with European/Caucasians, Vietnamese, Indonesians and Polynesians making up the balance (table 8). Similarly, the population of Fiji in 1976 was 44 percent Fijian and almost 50 percent "Indian". In Micronesia, the outstanding example of an ethnically foreign population outnumbering an indigenous minority is Guam: only 44 percent of Guam's population in 1980 could be classified as "Micronesian".

In Polynesia, however, there are no countries in which Polynesians are other than a substantial majority. In French Polynesia, about 11 percent of the population is European/Caucasian and about 5 percent Chinese, but Polynesians and part-Polynesians still comprise 83 percent of the total. Elsewhere in Polynesia, Polynesians and part-Polynesians are from 95 to 98 percent of the total population.

Of the three major indigenous cultural groups in the Pacific, Polynesians are the most dispersed geographically. Minority Polynesian populations can be found throughout Melanesia and Micronesia, but very few Melanesians and Micronesians have been reported outside their own culture area. The largest concentration of Polynesians outside Island Polynesia but within the developing Pacific is in New Caledonia (15,962) where they comprised 12 percent of the total in 1976. The presence of this group is a result of modern immigration from the other French Territories of Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia.

In the Solomon Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, however, the Polynesian population reflects pre-historic immigration from central or eastern Polynesia.

The largest single ethnic minority in the Pacific Islands is the "Indian" population of Fiji which numbered about 300,000 in 1976—equivalent to about 7 percent of the region's population. The most

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ubiquitous minority is the European/Caucasian group, representatives of which can be found in every Pacific country or territory—even if census data do not show it (table 8). Despite centuries of European colonization, however, "Europeans" remain a small minority (less than 3 percent) in the Pacific region as a whole. The largest concentrations in absolute numbers, as well as in proportion to the total, are in New Caledonia (38 percent) followed by Guam (20 percent) and French Polynesia (11 percent). It is significant that all three of these territories are dependencies of foreign powers and contain military installations.

Chinese and other Asian populations entered the Pacific Islands as indentured labor—brought to the Pacific colonies of European powers from their possessions in Asia to work on plantations, in mines and as domestic servants. These processes account for the Chinese population in French Polynesia and the Vietnamese population of New Caledonia. A population of 4,652 Chinese was also reported in Fiji in 1976, and 1,385 were reported in Guam in 1980 (table 8). At present, however, the Pacific Chinese are out-numbered by the Filipinos, 22,500 of whom lived on Guam and a further 1,700 in the Northern Mariana Islands at the time of the 1980 census. U.S. Census Bureau 1984 ((unpublished data)) It is also notable that 5,111 Indonesians were reported in the 1976 census of New Caledonia.

Providing broad categories are employed, Polynesia outside of French Polynesia, and Micronesia outside of Guam appear to be ethnically homogeneous. But 21 percent of the population of French Polynesia was reported as demie (part-Polynesian, part-European) in 1977, and substantial part-Polynesian populations also exist in the Cook Islands and American Samoa. Although Micronesia is largely homogeneous by race outside of Guam, there is considerable ethnic dispersion throughout the region because of

intra-regional migration. Thus significant numbers of Palauans, Marshallese, Trukese and other Micronesians were reported in the Northern Mariana Islands in 1980 (US Census Bureau 1984).

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