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## THE POPULATION OF LATIN AMERICA, 1930–1990

In the sixty years from 1930 to 1990 the population of Latin America more than quadrupled – from approximately 110 million to almost 450 million. Population growth was higher in Latin America than in any other region of the world except, marginally, Africa (see Table 1.1). Though average population density in Latin America remained low in comparison with other areas, this was misleading because of the way in which population was distributed. The bulk of population increase after 1930 occurred in cities. While export-led economic growth in the period 1870–1930 had stimulated the growth of a few cities, principally ports and administrative centres, Latin America was still in 1930 predominantly rural. About 17 per cent of the population resided in cities with 20,000 or more people. During the following half century city populations increased more than tenfold, accounting for two-thirds of total population growth. Internal migration (fed by a high natural increase in the population of rural areas) was responsible for most of the difference between rural and urban population growth and was a major demographic feature of the inward reorientation of the region's economy, which experienced a decline in the share of agriculture and an increase in the share of urban based manufacturing and service activities in total production and employment.

Population trends after 1930 contrasted in several important respects with those of the period before 1930. Immigration had had a significant impact on population increase between 1870 and 1930, although it was concentrated in a few areas: Argentina, southern Brazil, Chile, Cuba and Uruguay. Population growth rates elsewhere were generally lower. After 1930, growth rates accelerated in most countries of the region as a result of higher rates of natural increase. Even before the Second World War, mortality was declining in response to improved living standards and health interventions. Declines came earliest in countries which had experi-

Table 1.1. *Population of the world's main regions, 1930–90*

	1930	1990 <sup>a</sup>	1990/1930
World	2,008	5,292	2.64
Latin America <sup>b</sup>	110	448	4.07
North America	134	276	2.06
Europe <sup>c</sup>	540	813	1.51
Africa	155	642	4.14
Asia	1,069	3,113	2.91

Notes: <sup>a</sup> 1990 estimates based on United Nations assumed growth rates during 1980s.

<sup>b</sup> Latin America includes the Caribbean.

<sup>c</sup> Europe here includes U.S.S.R. and Oceania.

Sources: 1930: United Nations, *The Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends* (New York, 1953) table 2; 1990: United Nations, *World Population Prospects 1990* (New York, 1991) table 31.

enced large immigration flows before 1930. After the Second World War, mortality decline spread quickly to most of the region, so that by the late 1950s death rates were less than half of what they had been before 1930. At the same time, birth rates remained high except in countries that had experienced immigration; in Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba, Chile, and southern Brazil birth rates were already declining by 1950. It was the mid-1960s before fertility decline spread to other countries, and rates were still high in some Central American countries and the Caribbean even in the early 1980s.

The surge in population that resulted from the lag between declines in birth and death rates raises a number of questions about the interrelationship between population and socio-economic change. Theories about fertility and mortality declines based on the demographic transition in Europe link those declines to social, economic and cultural factors, particularly urbanization and increased education. In Latin America and other developing regions, public health interventions accelerated mortality decline at a comparatively early stage of social and economic change, raising the issue of whether interventions to reduce birth rates would be needed to bring birth and death rates back into balance. In the neo-Malthusian view of the question, such interventions are required for countries to escape from a situation in which rapid population growth has an adverse impact on the achievement of levels of social and economic development needed to trig-

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ger fertility decline. Both the rapidity of population increase and the youthful age structure associated with high birth rates figure heavily in the neo-Malthusian assessment of the effects of rapid population growth on economic and social development.

The issues of the adverse effect of population growth on economic development and the measures required to bring about fertility decline have been highly controversial in Latin America. Though a number of Latin American governments have established publicly supported family planning programmes or have adopted permissive policies relating to the activities of international family planning agencies, few have accepted the logic of population control as the basis of those actions. Critics of the neo-Malthusian perspective argue that many of the problems attributed to population growth are really manifestations of the particular social and economic structure that Latin America inherited from its history of political and economic colonialism, exacerbated by the import substituting industrialization strategy of the period after 1950. Much of the emphasis of their critique is on the unequal distribution of wealth and income associated with that structure. Once birth rates started to decline, the debate expanded to the question of the relative roles of family planning interventions and socio-economic change in triggering the decline.

Whatever the balance of the argument on the social and economic causes and consequences of high birth and low death rates, their demographic impact is manifest, particularly in the youthful age structure of the region. During the 1930s about 4.5 million children were born annually in Latin America. By the 1970s, this number had doubled. Besides its immediate impact on resource needs in education, there were two important longer term effects of the increased size of younger age cohorts. One was increased fertility; while birth *rates* declined in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of births continued to increase, because the number of women in early childbearing ages continued to increase as an echo of the high birth rates of earlier decades. Demographic change is a slow process. Another effect was the growing demand for jobs. The ages at which individuals typically seek their first regular job, start a family, need additional housing units, and so on, are those of young adulthood (ages fifteen to twenty-four). In 1950, there were about 17 million people in these age categories. By 1975, this number had increased to 31 million, and by 1990 to an estimated 36 million. (Fifteen to twenty-four year-olds in 1990 were born between 1965 and 1975.)

Employment was one of the key economic and demographic issues facing Latin America in the 1980s. One manifestation of the problem was the increased flow of international migration within the western hemisphere. The growing imbalance between the supply and demand for jobs within national economies contributed to an increased internationalization of labour markets in the region.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to more detailed discussion of the questions raised here. It begins with an overview of population growth trends, followed by consideration of the components of population growth: fertility and mortality, and their determinants. Several key population characteristics are then examined (nuptiality, rural-urban residence, ethnicity, educational attainment, labour force participation), before returning to the issue of the relationship between population change and socio-economic development in the region.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The 1930s closed an era during which immigration contributed most to Latin American population growth and ushered in a period of rising natural increase, which accelerated sharply after the Second World War. From 107 million in 1930, the population of Latin America (including the Caribbean) grew to 166 million in 1950, then surged to 448 million in 1990 (Table 1.2). The average annual population growth rate, which had been 2.17 per cent during 1930s and 1940s, jumped sharply to 2.72 per cent between 1950 and 1970 and then declined moderately to 2.25 per cent a year between 1970 and 1990.

Growth rates (also shown in Table 1.2) in eleven of the region's twenty countries followed this overall pattern (increase, followed by decrease in growth rates). In four countries (Argentina, Cuba, Panama and Uruguay) as well as in the Caribbean, growth rates declined from 1930–50 to 1950–70, while rates continued to rise from 1950–70 to 1970–90 in five others: Bolivia, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay. Even in countries where growth rates declined after 1970, their levels remained high: more than 3 per cent a year in Venezuela, for example.

Variation in growth rates had little effect on the rank ordering of Latin American countries by population size. The five largest in 1930 were Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Peru. This order was virtually the same in 1990, except that Colombia had narrowly overtaken Argentina in third place from 1970. The greatest absolute increase between

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Table 1.2. *Latin America: total population and population growth rates by country, 1930–90*

	In thousands				Average annual growth rate		
	1930	1950	1970	1990 <sup>a</sup>	1930–50	1950–70	1970–90
Total	107,408	165,880	285,695	448,076	2.17	2.72	2.25
Argentina	11,896	17,150	23,962	32,322	1.83	1.67	1.50
Bolivia	2,153	2,766	4,325	7,314	1.25	2.24	2.63
Brazil	33,568	53,444	95,847	150,368	2.33	2.92	2.25
Chile	4,424	6,082	9,504	13,173	1.59	2.23	1.63
Colombia	7,350	11,946	21,360	32,978	2.43	2.91	2.17
Costa Rica	499	862	1,731	3,015	2.73	3.49	2.77
Cuba	3,837	5,850	8,520	10,608	2.11	1.88	1.10
Dominican Republic	1,400	2,353	4,423	7,170	2.60	3.16	2.42
Ecuador	2,160	3,310	6,051	10,587	2.13	3.02	2.80
El Salvador	1,443	1,940	3,588	5,252	1.48	3.07	1.91
Guatemala	1,771	2,969	5,246	9,197	2.58	2.85	2.81
Haiti	2,422	3,261	4,535	6,513	1.49	1.65	1.81
Honduras	948	1,401	2,627	5,138	1.95	3.14	3.35
Mexico	16,589	28,012	52,771	88,598	2.62	3.17	2.59
Nicaragua	742	1,098	2,053	3,871	1.96	3.13	3.17
Panama	502	893	1,531	2,418	2.88	2.70	2.29
Paraguay	880	1,351	2,351	4,277	2.14	2.77	2.99
Peru	5,651	7,632	13,193	21,550	1.50	2.74	2.45
Uruguay	1,704	2,239	2,808	3,094	1.37	1.13	0.48
Venezuela	2,950	5,009	10,604	19,735	2.65	3.75	3.11
Others <sup>b</sup>	4,519	6,312	8,665	10,898	1.67	1.58	1.15

Notes: <sup>a</sup> 1990 estimates are based on the United Nations' assumed growth rates during 1980s and may vary from 1990 census figures.

<sup>b</sup> Includes English, French and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries and territories not listed individually in table.

Sources: 1930: CELADE, *Boletín Demográfico*, No. 13, 1974, table 1; 1950–90: United Nations, *World Population Prospects 1990* (New York, 1991), table 31.

1930 and 1990, nearly 117 million, came in Brazil because of its large population base. Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic led in relative growth, with five- to sixfold expansions in population size since 1930.

Declines in death rates that brought the acceleration of population increase were already under way in some countries during the 1930s, but

in most they came after the Second World War. Table 1.3 presents crude birth and death rates for four benchmark periods, beginning with the early 1930s and ending in the early 1980s. Death rates were already comparatively low during the 1930s in Argentina, Cuba, Uruguay, and Panama. For the rest of the region, death rates remained in the twenty to thirty per thousand range until after the Second World War. Some decline is suggested in the years immediately after the war by data for 1945–9, but the big declines came between then and the early 1960s. Data for 1960–5 show that death rates fell during that interval to the low teens or lower in ten more countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela). Countries that lagged behind were Bolivia and Peru in South America as well Haiti and the republics of Central America. By the 1980s, only Bolivia and Haiti had crude death rates that were substantially above ten per thousand.

Generally, birth rates remained very high until the 1960s. In most countries, rates then ranged upwards from forty-five per thousand. There is evidence that birth rates actually increased in several countries between the 1930s and the 1950s, a trend reinforced by increased marriage rates and declining mortality. With death rates in the low teens, this produced rates of population growth that exceeded 3 per cent a year. Again, the exceptions were Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay, which already had relatively low birth rates by 1950, and Chile and Panama, whose rates were below the regional average during the 1950s, though apparently were not declining. Cuba is another exception, because its birth rate increased from 1945–9 to 1960–5. Several other countries also had increasing birth rates during the 1950s, probably an effect of declining mortality on their age structures. However, Cuba's increase from thirty to thirty-five per thousand has been interpreted as a post-revolution 'baby boom'.<sup>1</sup>

After 1960, birth rates started to decline in a number of Latin American countries. Cuba led, with an nineteen-point decline in the crude rate (from thirty-five to sixteen per thousand) between the early 1960s and the early 1980s. Chile and Costa Rica also experienced early declines during the 1960s. By the late 1960s declines were occurring in Brazil, Colombia, Panama and Venezuela, with the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico,

<sup>1</sup> Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Lisandro Pérez, 'Cuba: the demography of revolution', *Population Bulletin*, 36, 1 (Washington, D.C., 1981).

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Table 1.3. *Latin America: Crude birth (CB) and death (DR) rates for selected five-year intervals, 1930–85*

	(Births, deaths per 1000 population)							
	1930–5		1945–9		1960–5		1980–5	
	BR	DR	BR	DR	BR	DR	BR	DR
Argentina	28.9	11.6	25.2	9.6	23.2	8.8	23.0	8.7
Bolivia	—	—	*47.1	24.1	46.1	21.5	44.0	15.9
Brazil	—	—	*44.6	15.1	42.1	12.3	30.6	8.4
Chile	40.2	24.5	37.0	17.5	31.6	12.1	24.2	6.3
Colombia	43.3	22.5	43.4	20.8	41.6	11.5	29.2	6.3
Costa Rica	44.6	21.5	42.7	13.2	45.3	9.2	30.2	4.1
Cuba	31.3	13.3	30.0	8.7	35.1	8.9	16.0	6.3
Dominican Republic	—	—	*50.5	20.3	49.4	14.8	33.6	7.5
Ecuador	48.5	25.7	45.9	20.0	45.6	14.3	35.4	8.0
El Salvador	46.5	32.7	44.8	22.8	47.8	14.8	38.0	11.1
Guatemala	46.2	31.7	49.1	26.5	47.8	18.3	42.3	10.5
Haiti	—	—	*43.5	27.5	41.9	22.2	36.6	14.5
Honduras	42.0	21.7	44.5	10.0	51.2	18.1	42.3	9.0
Mexico	44.1	26.7	44.5	17.8	45.5	11.3	31.7	6.3
Nicaragua	—	—	*54.1	22.7	50.3	17.1	44.2	9.7
Panama	37.4	15.1	38.3	10.8	40.8	9.6	28.0	5.4
Paraguay	—	—	*47.3	9.3	42.3	8.1	35.8	6.7
Peru	—	—	*47.1	21.6	46.3	17.6	34.2	10.5
Uruguay	22.3	11.6	19.7	9.1	21.9	9.6	18.3	10.0
Venezuela	39.9	21.9	43.6	16.1	44.2	9.1	33.0	5.5

Sources: 1930–35: Andrew Collver, *Birth Rates in Latin America* (Berkeley, Cal., 1965); 1945–49 from Collver, except for countries with (\*), these are from United Nations, *World Population Prospects 1990*, (New York, 1991); figures for 1950–5, 1960–65 and 1980–85 also from United Nations, *World Population Prospects 1990*.

Paraguay and Peru following suit during the 1970s. A few countries that lagged in mortality decline (Bolivia, Haiti and much of Central America) also had lesser declines in birth rates.

In addition to generating very high rates of population growth, a major demographic impact of Latin America's high birth rates was its youthful age structure. Demographic theory tells us that the age structure of a population bears the imprint of the demographic forces that drive its growth. This is borne out in age data for Latin America, which are summarized in Table 1.4. In 1960 the proportion of population under the age of fifteen was 40 per cent or more in all Latin American countries

Table 1.4. *Population under age 15 and age-dependency ratio: 1960 and 1985*

	Per cent of population under age 15		Age-dependency Ratio* (per cent)	
	1960	1985	1960	1985
TOTAL	42.5	37.6	85.3	72.7
Argentina	30.8	30.5	57.0	64.1
Bolivia	42.9	43.8	85.3	88.5
Brazil	43.6	36.4	86.9	68.7
Chile	39.4	31.5	79.0	59.5
Colombia	46.4	37.8	98.4	71.4
Costa Rica	47.4	36.8	102.4	68.7
Cuba	34.2	26.2	64.8	52.7
Dominican Republic	46.7	39.7	98.8	75.2
Ecuador	44.8	41.4	95.4	82.2
El Salvador	45.5	46.0	92.5	97.7
Guatemala	46.0	45.9	94.9	95.5
Haiti	39.4	40.5	80.0	80.9
Honduras	45.1	46.3	90.3	98.5
Mexico	45.4	40.9	94.8	80.2
Nicaragua	47.9	46.8	101.3	97.1
Panama	43.5	37.6	90.5	72.5
Paraguay	47.6	41.0	103.9	80.1
Peru	43.3	39.9	87.8	76.9
Uruguay	27.9	26.8	56.2	60.7
Venezuela	46.1	39.5	94.4	75.1

*Note:* \*Sum of the population under 15 and over 64 divided by the population aged 15–64.

*Source:* United Nations, *World Population Prospects 1990*, (New York, 1991), country tables.

except Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay, and over 45 per cent in areas with higher birth rates – Mexico and Central America, for example. Declining birth rates reduced this proportion, in some cases very substantially. In Costa Rica, the per cent under the age of fifteen dropped from 47 per cent in the 1960 to 37 per cent in 1985.

Age structure is one of the principal ties between demographic processes and socio-economic changes. One measure of the potential economic and social impact of age structure is the age-dependency ratio, which is a



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rough approximation of the ratio of consumers in an economy (those under the age of fifteen and aged sixty-five and over) to those who both produce and consume (individuals in ages between fifteen and sixty-five), usually expressed in percentage terms. In theories about the effect of rapid population growth on economic development, a high dependency ratio is viewed as a threat to economic growth because it drains resources away from productive investment and puts pressures on social services used by younger and older people (education and health services being two that are often cited).

In 1960, dependency ratios were 80 to 90 per cent in most Latin American countries, and in some cases (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Paraguay) they were over 100 per cent. This compares to a recent estimate of 60 per cent for the United States. (The U.S. ratio has been rising since the 1970s because of increases in the proportion of the population over the age of sixty-five.) Declining birth rates in Latin America brought reductions in the dependency ratio. Costa Rica provides a dramatic illustration, with the ratio falling from 102 in 1960 to 69 in 1985. Significant declines also occurred in other countries, but rates were rising in some, including those where emigration of individuals in the young adult ages had an offsetting effect, as in several Central American countries. For Latin America's lower fertility countries (Argentina and Uruguay), population dynamics were producing an aging population, so that their dependency ratios were rising in response to increases in the proportion of population aged sixty-five and over. In Cuba, the aging effect was offset partially when the 1960s 'baby boom' cohorts reached working ages. Other Latin American countries will eventually experience this aging effect. Adequate assessment of the impact of dependency requires separation of the youth and old age component; as the experience of Europe and North America show, the needs of the two groups are distinct, and are often in competition for scarce public service resources.

Summing up the main features of Latin American population growth over the past six decades, three sub-regional patterns emerge from the data. The *first* pattern reflects the experience of countries with earlier and more gradual declines in birth and death rates, and generally lower overall rates of population increase. This group includes Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay, with Chile and Panama as borderline cases. The *second* group consists of countries whose death rates declined rapidly during the 1950s, and which also experienced declining birth rates after 1960. Brazil, Colom-

bia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela fit here. Peru and Ecuador are borderline cases because of their delayed declines in mortality, but appear to be catching up with fertility decline. On the whole, the second group experienced two decades of very rapid population growth after the Second World War, but shows definitely slower growth during the 1970s and 1980s. The *third* group consists of Bolivia, Haiti and four Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), all late starters in mortality decline and still well behind the rest of the region in fertility declines. These countries have experienced the highest and most sustained population increase in the region in the post-war period.<sup>2</sup>

#### MORTALITY DECLINE

In 1930, with death rates still generally high, life expectancy was low for Latin American populations compared to Europe and North America. In most countries for which data are available, life expectancy at birth was around thirty-five years, a level attained by north west Europe before 1850 and by the rest of Europe around 1900. There was also considerable variation within the region. Life expectancy in Argentina and Uruguay more closely approximated levels in Southern Europe at the time. Costa Rica and Cuba were also above average, with life expectancies over age forty, while much of the rest of Central America and the Dominican Republic lagged behind with life expectancies below age thirty.

After 1930, gains in life expectancy accelerated and intraregional differences narrowed. Underlying both trends was a weakening of the link between living conditions and mortality brought about by the spread of public health measures and new means of prevention and treatment of infectious diseases. The main demographic consequence of these changes was an acceleration in the rate of population growth, because death rates were declining while birth rates remained high. As noted earlier, birth rates increased slightly as a consequence of mortality decline because of increased survival of mothers-to-be from birth to the end of the childbearing ages.

Differences in living conditions accounted for most of the variation in life expectancy in Latin America before 1930. Countries which had experienced rising living standards during the export-led growth period and

<sup>2</sup> Sergio Díaz-Briquets, *Conflict in Central America: The Demographic Dimension*, Population Trends in Public Policy Paper No. 10 (Washington, D.C., 1986).