Socratic Seminar Preparation: Human Population Control

**Breaking a Long Silence on Population Control**



**By** [**MIREYA NAVARRO**](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/n/mireya_navarro/index.html?inline=nyt-per)

**Directions: Answer the questions in COMPLETE sentences using evidence from the text.**

Major American environmental groups have dodged the subject of population control for decades, wary of getting caught up in the bruising politics of reproductive health.

Yet, virtually alone, the [Center for Biological Diversity](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/) is breaking the taboo by directly tying population growth to environmental problems through efforts like giving away condoms in colorful packages depicting endangered animals. The idea is to start a debate about how overpopulation crowds out species and hastens *(to cause something to happen sooner than it would otherwise)* [climate change](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/science/topics/globalwarming/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) — just when the world is welcoming Baby No. 7 Billion.

Kierán Suckling, executive director of the center, a membership-based nonprofit organization in Tucson, said he had an aha moment a few years ago. “All the species that we save from extinction will eventually be gobbled up if the human population keeps growing,” he said.

In the United States, the birth rate has fallen steadily since the baby boom, from 3.6 births per woman in 1960 to 2.0 today, or just under the replacement level, at which a population replaces itself from one generation to the next. Yet even at that rate, demographers estimate, the country will grow from 311 million people now to 478 million by the end of the century, because of both births and immigration.

1) Why are some people advocating for controlling human population growth?

**Nine Population Strategies to Stop Short of 9 Billion**

**Worldwatch Institute**

* **Provide universal access to safe and effective contraceptive options for both sexes.** With nearly two in five pregnancies reported as mistimed or never wanted, lack of access to good family planning services is among the biggest gaps in assuring that each baby will be wanted and welcomed in advance by its parents.
* **Guarantee education through secondary school for all, especially girls.** In every culture surveyed to date, women who have completed at least some secondary school have fewer children on average, and have children later in life, than do women who have less education.
* **Eradicate gender bias from law, economic opportunity, health, and culture.** Women who can own, inherit, and manage property; divorce; obtain credit; and participate in civic and political affairs on equal terms with men are more likely to postpone childbearing and to have fewer children compared to women who are deprived of these rights.
* **Offer age-appropriate sexuality education for all students.** Data from the United States indicate that exposure to comprehensive programs that detail puberty, intercourse, options of abstinence and birth control, and respecting the sexual rights and decisions of individuals, can help prevent unwanted pregnancies and hence reduce birth rates.
* **End all policies that reward parents financially based on the number of children they have.** Governments can preserve and even increase tax and other financial benefits aimed at helping parents by linking these not to the number of children they have, but to parenthood status itself.
* **Integrate lessons on population, environment, and development into school curricula at multiple levels.** Refraining from advocacy or propaganda, schools should educate students to make well-informed choices about the impacts of their behavior, including childbearing, on the environment.
* **Put prices on environmental costs and impacts.** In quantifying the cost of an additional family member by calculating taxes and increased food costs, couples may decide that the cost of having an additional child is too high, compared to the benefits of a smaller family that might receive government rebates and have a lower cost of living. Such decisions, freely made by women and couples, can decrease birth rates without any involvement by non-parents in reproduction.
* **Adjust to an aging population instead of boosting childbearing through government incentives and programs.** Population aging must be met with the needed societal adjustments, such as increased labor participation, rather than by offering incentives to women to have more children.
* **Convince leaders to commit to stabilizing population growth through the exercise of human rights and human development.** By educating themselves on rights-based population policies, policymakers can ethically and effectively address population-related challenges by empowering women to make their reproductive choices.

**2)** Which population growth control strategy do you think would be the **most effective** in controlling human population growth? Why?

**3)** Which population growth control strategy do you think would be the **most realistic** in controlling human population growth? Why?

**Ten reasons why population control is not an answer to climate change**

By Simon Butler

Advocates of population control say that one of the most effective measures we can take to combat climate change is to sharply reduce the number of humans on the planet. This wrongly focuses on treating one symptom of an irrational, polluting system rather than dealing with the root causes.

People are not pollution. Blaming too many people for driving climate change is like blaming too many trees for causing bushfires.

The real cause of climate change is an economy locked into burning fossil fuels for energy and unsustainable agriculture. Unless we transform the economy and our society along sustainable lines as rapidly as possible, we have no hope of securing an inhabitable planet, regardless of population levels.

Population-based arguments fail to admit that population levels impact the environment in a very different way in zero carbon emissions.

The world is not experiencing runaway population growth. While population is growing, the rate of this growth is in fact slowing down. This is mostly due to rising urbanization and marginal *(small)* improvements in women’s access to birth control technology. The rate of population growth peaked at 2% annually in the 1960s, and has fallen consistently since then.

According to the UN the average number of children born per woman fell from 4.9 in the late 1960s to 2.7 in 1999.[2] A December 2008 assessment from the US Census Bureau predicts a steady decline to 0.5% annual population growth by 2050.[3]

Between 1950 and 2000 world population increased by 140%. Experts predict a rise of 50% between 2000 and 2050 and just 11% in the 50 years following that.

In contrast, the rate of greenhouse gas emissions is rising out of control. Polluting technology, rampant consumerism and corporate greed are driving this increase – not population.

4) Do you agree that controlling human population growth will not solve environmental problems? Why or why not?

Rubric:

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| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Answers are in complete sentences.  Thoroughly develops a thoughtful answer with analysis from the article. | Answers are in complete sentences.  Develops an answer with evidence from the article. | Answers are not in complete sentences.  Develops an answer with out evidence from the article. | Student provides an incoherent answer that does not address the question. |

**Homework:**

**Write 3 questions about population controls that can be used to generate discussion during the Socratic Seminar. They must be different than the questions you answered above!**

1)

2)

3)

**Research a country that is implementing (putting in place) a population control strategy. Write one paragraph explaining what the strategy is and another paragraph that summarizes if it’s resulting in a reduction of population:**