



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

IMPLICATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE FOR POLICY EDUCATORS

*Dennis R. Henderson
Ohio State University*

It is obvious to even the casual observer that the demographics of United States society are dynamic and sometimes change in ways that were neither foreseen nor totally understood. It is equally obvious, as illustrated by the comments of the previous panelists, that such demographic changes have numerous implications for various segments of our society and, in turn, give rise to a wide array of potential public policy issues.

As policy educators, we need to be ever alert to such issues. But my intent is not to revisit these issues nor to dwell on their relationship to demographic change. Rather, the focus of my remarks is on the implications for how we do public policy analysis and education and to whom it is directed. To do this, permit me to concentrate on three somewhat disjointed, but seemingly interrelated, topics: (1) key groups, or clusters, of demographic trends that appear to be particularly relevant in determining how we *approach* public policy education rather than how we *identify* policy issues per se, (2) implications of these demographic trends for identifying our clientele, and (3) implications for the theories, models, techniques, and methods that we use in the process of carrying on with our policy analysis and education programs.

I do not claim to fully understand, nor have I comprehensively identified, all of the linkages between demographic change and policy education. Some that I do discuss may strike you as wrong, incomplete, and/or misconstrued. Some may make you uncomfortable, or perhaps even a bit bridled. If so, my purpose — to challenge you to begin thinking about the implications of demographic change for how we do our job — has been achieved.

Key Demographic Developments

I have identified five clusters or sets of demographic trends and changes that appear to me to have useful implications for the design and implementation of public policy education programs. While the relationships among all of the factors in each cluster may not be ap-

parent, I believe these will become somewhat more clear in the subsequent discussion.

Those that affect household consumption patterns: The increasing participation of women in the labor force (up from 43.3 percent to 52.6 percent;¹ declining household size (down from an average of 3.14 persons to 2.72 persons); growth in single person households (up from 17.1 percent to 23.2 percent of all households) and single parent households (a doubling of the number of children living in single parent households); and reduced expectation of marriage (an increase from 6.2 percent to 11.6 percent for women and from 9.4 percent to 17.3 percent for men, age 30-34 years, never married).

Those that affect people's interest in public affairs: Significant increases in the number of people attending college, particularly women, blacks, and hispanics (an increase from 18 percent to 29 percent of females, from 10 to 22 percent for blacks, and from 11 to 19 percent for Hispanics, persons 25 or older completing at least one year of college); an increase in the share of total employment in white collar and service jobs (where, it can be hypothesized, people can more readily discuss things with others, including public affairs, than in manufacturing, mining, and farming); and a recent turnaround in the decline in voter participation rates (an increase from 45.9 percent to 48.5 percent of all eligible voters between 1978 and 1982).

Those that affect perceptions of the importance of earned income: The aging population (an increase in median age from 27.9 years to 30.6 years); slowing birthrate (a decline in the average lifetime fertility per woman from 2.5 to 1.8); declining death rate (a decrease from 9.4 deaths per thousand people to 8.6); and an increasing importance of social security and other retirement benefits as sources of personal income. Also significant is an increase in the relative share of the rural population made up of older people.

Those that affect who chooses to live where: The "rural turnaround" of the 1970s, which saw the rate of population growth in nonmetropolitan counties reach 15.8 percent between 1970 and 1980, substantially greater than the 9.8 percent growth rate for metropolitan counties. This was a one decade reversal of trends underway since about 1920. Of particular interest in the 1970-80 reversal is the relatively large movement of retirement-aged persons and "pleasure farmers" to rural areas (the latter term being used to describe a broad category of people who moved to rural residences that included enough acreage to allow some farming-type activities). Also figuring into this cluster has been a decline in the share of farm workers living on farms (in 1982 only 46 percent of all farm workers lived on farms) and in the share of farms operated by someone other than a farmer (in 1982, 45 percent

¹The numbers cited parenthetically refer to 1970 (first reference) and 1982 (second reference) as reported in Population Profile of the United States in 1982, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Series P-23, No. 130.

of all farms were operated by someone whose principal occupation was other than farming).

Those that affect the cultural balance: A significant increase in, or increasing awareness of, illegal immigrants from Latin America; large immigrations of Asian refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos since the early 1970s; an influx of Cuban and Haitian refugees in 1980; and a 3.7 percent rate of growth in the population with an Hispanic origin between 1970 and 1982 compared to a 1.1 percent overall population growth rate.

Implications for Clientele

In this section, I turn to the question of how these demographic developments influence the types of people who are potential students in our policy education programs. My emphasis is on three broadly defined groups which appear to warrant more attention than they have traditionally received. It does not directly touch on traditional clientele who may be candidates for de-emphasis. Although I believe the latter to be an equally relevant issue, I find my own thinking bound up in the traditional difficulty of saying "no" to those with whom working relationships have long been established.

The Professions. Those demographic developments that result in changes in household consumption patterns indirectly change the need and demand for numerous professional services. In the past, I contend, we have been primarily attentive to the implications of consumption changes for production and distributive workers, leading us to examine policy issues such as those dealing with employment opportunities, wages, commodity prices, investment, and technology. With the rate of demographics-derived consumptive change quite possibly accelerating, the traditional policy related issues remain important. But, the indirect impacts on the professions may be more pronounced and less obvious.

An example is illustrative. A declining trend in per capita consumption of livestock products has become well established over the past 15 years, at least in part associated with demographic change. Policy implications for the livestock and feed grain sectors abound, are reasonably clear, and have captured much attention by policy educators. But this also affects the demand for veterinary services to the food livestock industries. Starting with the size and curriculum of public instruction in veterinary medicine and ending well beyond my scope of vision are numerous public policy issues of actual and/or potential concern to this profession. I suspect that with little difficulty similar lines can be drawn in the fields of human health care, mental health, community management, law, and many others.

The point: As professional policy analysts and educators we may have a tendency to define our potential clientele too narrowly, thus

excluding groups to whom we can be of considerable service. To exclude professionals in other fields is probably a natural response — we tend to be discipline oriented, generally to economics, and give relatively little thought to what we can gain from other disciplines. I suspect that many of us even feel uncomfortable in asking the question, “What can we do for other professionals?” Yet, recent personal experience in seminars with the veterinary medicine faculty at my university has convinced me that our perspective as policy educators is both needed and appreciated by other professional groups.

The General Public. I suppose we all would claim that our policy education efforts, if not directed at the general public, at least do not exclude this rather ill-defined group of people. However, I suggest that there are compelling reasons why we should put forward a concentrated effort to reach a broader cross section of the country’s population than whatever “spillover” results from attention directed to our traditional clientele.

Demographic trends are strongly suggestive of a turn toward broader public interest in public affairs. Increased voter participation, improved education levels, and more people in work environments that foster personal interaction are, I believe, obvious factors. Immigration also figures in as many refugees are escaping regimes of political repression.

The aging, particularly retirees, present a unique opportunity. Increasing numbers of retired people are highly educated and have vast experience as observers of, and participants in, the political process, at the very least as voters. They have time to devote to public affairs, and are facing an increasing number of years of active (but not wage earning) life. They have proven themselves to be effective in influencing public policy. Witness the singular success of retired persons regarding social security. In addition to constituting a very viable and potentially influential clientele group for policy education, this group offers many potential resources that can be tapped for direct support of our policy education programs.

One other group of persons, which perhaps gets lost in the broad categorization of the general public, deserves to be lifted up for special attention. These are the illegal immigrants. Demographic data suggest that this group is becoming relatively more important as part of the overall population. It clearly provides a source of low-cost labor to much of agriculture, other than the highly mechanized field crop and livestock enterprises of the types that characterize Midwest farming. A public policy of illegal immigration would seem to be tailor-made in support of labor intensive agricultural enterprise. Indeed, this may have all the necessary ingredients to fit into the framework of this afternoon’s session dealing with policy education on controversial issues.

Policymakers. Perhaps it seems prosaic to include this group in my

list of nontraditional clientele for policy education. No doubt all of us have included policymakers under the “audience” heading of our plans-of-work at one time or another.

Yet, I feel compelled to include them here for two reasons. First, as we become increasingly aware of the impacts of demographic change on the evolution of public policy issues and options, we have a responsibility to help policymakers, as well as others, better understand these demographics-policy issue linkages. Second, and perhaps more important, it gives me the opportunity to remind us that the functions of the policymaker are different from that of the policy educator. Ours is the task of recognizing and abstracting policy issues so that they can be understood and addressed in an alternative and consequences framework, and of conveying as accurately as possible the abstract consequences of abstract options to these abstract issues. Theirs is the task of compromise — of compromising between real conflicts among real people. To the extent we do our job well, their job is not necessarily easier, but it should be done better. The policy educator’s job does not substitute for the task of the policymaker.

Implications for the Policy Education Process

Just as demographic developments seem to suggest different clientele opportunities for policy education, so do they point to some different considerations regarding how we approach the task of policy analysis and education. Obvious are the implications for involving all relevant clientele groups in both planning and implementation, which is nothing more than the sound program development procedures that have served us well historically.

Less obviously, but to my way of thinking considerably more important — and difficult, is the need to reassess and probably revise the social values that we assume when defining issues, developing policy alternatives, and assessing consequences. There are a number of demographic trends that, along with other factors, point to fundamental changes in what people want from their social system. These include:

- Traditional rural values, including agricultural fundamentalism, have undoubtedly been permanently altered by the “rural turnaround” of the 1970s even though that reverse migration now appears to have been transitory. Many people with nontraditional views of what rural society should be moved into rural communities and have stayed — even if more have not followed — at least long enough to influence values and beliefs. Clearly, large numbers of retired persons and pleasure farmers value nonproducing lifestyles more than the values associated with agricultural fundamentalism. One wonders, for example, how consistent the new “hybrid” rural values are with policies favoring family farms.

- Many nationalistic values, such as the work ethic, acceptance of property rights, and the existing distribution of resource ownership, are certainly challenged and no doubt modified by immigration, migration, educational advancement, and other cultural developments. Obviously, illegal immigrants do not accept the existing work rights of citizens. Little imagination is required to think of numerous other examples.
- The increasing share of the population with some form of “income guarantee,” including retired people with social security and other pensions and others with income entitlements of various types, undoubtedly increases the relative importance of nonpecuniary factors as influences in motivating human behavior.

These implied changes in values cast serious questions on the relevancy of widely accepted and generally received tools for economic analysis of policy issues and alternatives. For example, pareto optimality conditions for welfare maximization depend upon acceptance of a given distribution of property rights. The efficiency objective so often, at least implicitly, assumed in policy analysis is clearly based upon maximization of pecuniary gains. Value changes cast serious questions on the relevancy of both the maximizing and efficiency criteria.

The challenges to policy analysts and educators are significant. We must learn how to identify changes in social values and devise methods to incorporate nonmaximizing and subefficiency goals into the behavioral functions of our analytical and descriptive models. This means that we must challenge traditional theories and develop new conceptual frameworks that yield equal or even improved predictive accuracy without the use of an assumed efficiency maximizing social objective function. If we are successful, we might also see a reduction in the gap between the abstract and the compromise.

*THE CHANGING FACE OF
AGRICULTURE*

