

PAKISTAN'S RISING POPULATION CRISIS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Introduction

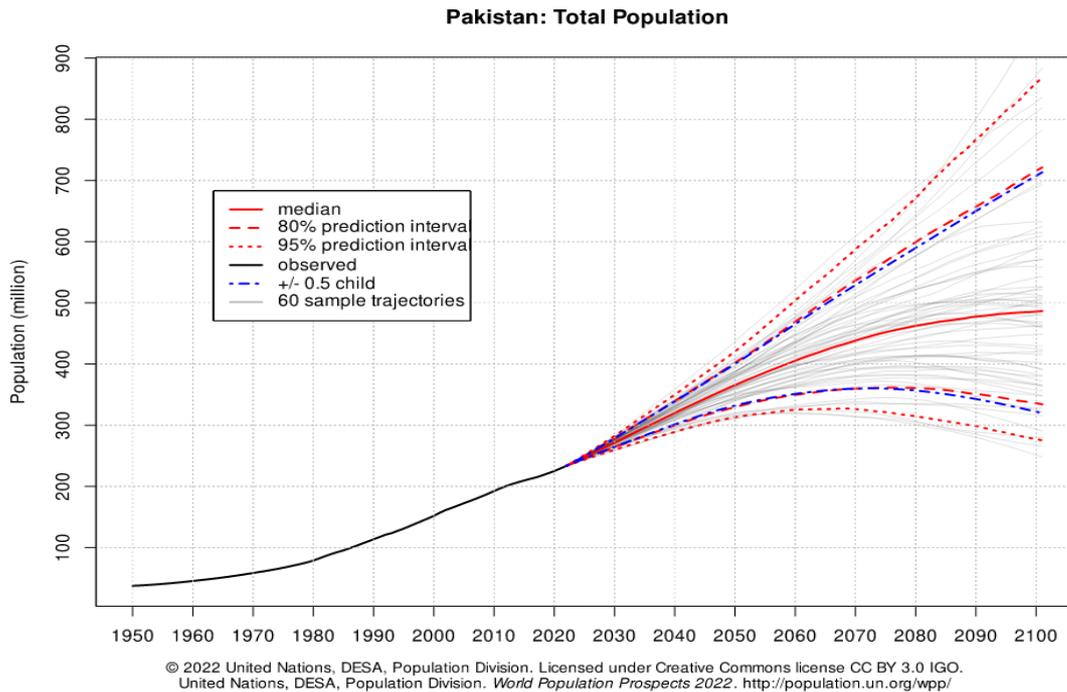
Population growth has always been a central point of concern for many. While many believe that the high population is an asset for Pakistan, unfortunately this is a far stretch from reality. Today, in the 21st century, Pakistan and a handful of its neighbours are the core states under risk of the fallouts of overpopulation. Amongst these are climate change, food scarcity, and insufficient energy and resources.

At the time of its independence, Pakistan had a population of 31 million. However, by the year 1995 the number had risen at a staggering speed and reached 140 million. ¹ Presently, Pakistan has a population size of 225,199,929 with a growth rate of 1.9%.² The United Nations has predicted that at this rate Pakistan will hit the 380 million marker by 2050. ³

1 Gregory Pappas, MD, PhD, Taslim Akhtar, MBBS, FRCP, Peter J. Gergen, MD, MPH, Wilbur C. Hadden, PhD, and Abdul Qayyum Khan, Mphil, "Health Status of the Pakistani Population: A Health Profile and Comparison With the United States", *American Journal of Public Health*, January 2001, Vol. 91, No. 1, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1446517/pdf/11189831.pdf>

2 World Bank, assessed on 30 July 2002, Pakistan | Data (worldbank.org)

3 United Nations, assessed on 30 July 2022, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/586>



Current Situation

While Pakistan faces multiple threats in the forms of hostile neighbouring environments, political instability, economic crisis, mounting debts and constant soaring prices in oil and other commodities, the overcrowding that is surely to occur at this rate will eventually lead to a catastrophe that will contain within itself issues of unprecedented levels.

The drastic accumulation of population will evidently result in rising global warming and pollution, decrease in valuable land, increasing diseases and exhaustion of non-renewable resources. Pakistan relies heavily on agriculture, however, there is a defined limit to the physical features a state can expand upon to feed and shelter its population. With the current levels of population growth, famine and water scarcity are likely to become a thing of concern as an increase in the number of people also increases the demand for food, land, water, fuels, and infrastructure. Another matter of concern is the demography of the population of Pakistan, which shows that 74.22% of the population is below the age of 35.⁴ This is a worrying number as the unemployment rate below the age of 35 is 59.7%⁵ which creates a burden on the middle age group to sustain the adolescent population and economy.

4 Pakistan Bureau of Pakistan, assessed on 30 July 2022, https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/census_reports/ncr_pakistan.pdf

5 Finance Division, Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-2019, Chapter 12, assessed of 31 July 2022, https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_19/12-Population.pdf

The population explosion in Pakistan can be analysed under social, economic, and religious causes. Pakistan, at 3.4%, has one of the highest fertility rates in the world due to inadequate implementation of population planning by successive governments.⁶ This paired with a very low rate of contraceptive use and family planning, has contributed to increasing the population in the country. A restrictive and misunderstood role of contraceptives and child planning in the society under the guise of religion by some religious scholars has also resulted in many women being unaware of their rights and wellbeing.

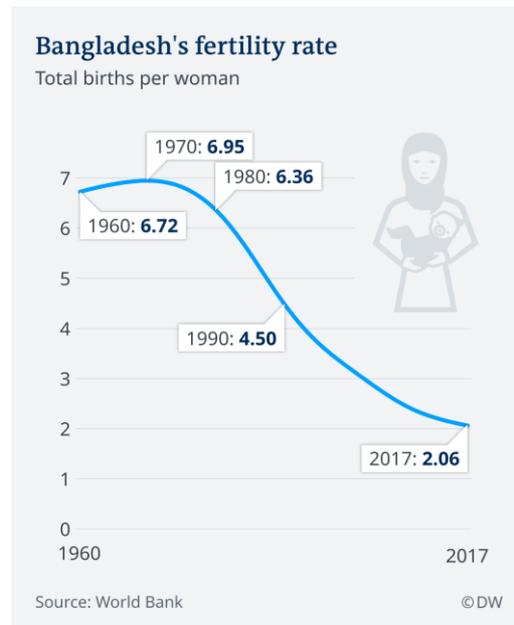
Lessons from the region

The example of Bangladesh is one that can illustrate well the possible outlooks to the looming crisis of overpopulation as well as present specific methods and strategies that can assist in controlling the population of Pakistan. The social, religious, and economic similarities present between Pakistan and Bangladesh puts Pakistan in a better position to draw possible strategies that it may also be able to put in action.

Bangladesh, like Pakistan, was facing the dangers of overpopulation in the 1970s. However, their policy makers chose to prioritise the issue and designed social awareness campaigns and programmes that communicated the risks of overpopulation. Bangladesh introduced family planning and contraceptives through the media and physical campaigning to educate women on the importance of fewer children for a better economy and their personal health. Collectively, these policies have altered the fertility rate of Bangladesh from 6.95% in the 1970s to 2.06% in 2017.⁷

⁶ World Bank, Fertility Rate, Total, assessed on 31 July 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=PK>

⁷ Mary McDavid, "Population Control in Bangladesh, 5 February 2021, <https://sites.psu.edu/ear100hspr2021/2021/02/05/population-control-in-bangladesh/>



Sourced from Penn State University

Conclusion

Pakistan is now at a crucial position in time which requires strong and thorough policies to be introduced at individual and national level. Individually the public, both adults and youth, need to be educated on the drawbacks of overpopulation and the importance of the use of contraceptives and family planning. These are some of the major initiatives that need to be put in place on a large scale. However, population control cannot be addressed in a matter of years but requires many decades worth of efforts, research, and policing. Thus, at the national scale, parties must align their strategies in the hope of overcoming this population threat so that policymakers may be able to create better and equal opportunities for all. Further actions can also include setting up family clinics and creating awareness amongst women about their rights.

With a high population growth rate, Pakistan will certainly experience dramatic declines in per capita availability of arable land, water, and forest resources. Any further lag on this important issue will further deepen the economic and political crisis in the country and also fuel insecurity challenges over scarce resources. Hence, the solutions devised by the policymakers need to be comprehensive and integrated if Pakistan is to achieve sustainable progress and prosperity.