

## POPULATION AND INTERSTATE CONFLICTS

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### 1. Introduction

Population trends are in two-way relationships with the entire realm of what is commonly defined as ‘social’; from another perspective demographics constitute an important dimension of society. Yet, most often these relationships are not balanced. Social (in the wide sense, e.g. including cultural, economic and political) determinants of demographic characteristics and population trends are undeniable and often very strong, while complex and not fully explored. Conversely, the evidence with respect to the consequences and impacts of demographic trends is generally weak, the knowledge in this domain is contradictory and incoherent and the conclusions contentious. The lack of positive knowledge does not necessarily preclude strong emotional attitudes: sometimes, the scarcity of arguments provides a fertile ground for grand theories preconceived attitudes, biased diagnoses and irrational political recipes.

The role of population factors in violent interstate conflicts constitutes a clear case in point. Acting as ‘determinants’, wars are intrinsically harmful for population’s health: the troops are being wounded, maimed and killed in combat; the military actions spill the blood of civilians; entire populations flee or are being forcibly dislocated; destruction and war-time bell-tightening cause massive hardships etc.

On the other hand, the population size is relevant for a nation’s military strength. Population size may become crucial if a war compels to draft into the armed forces a high proportion of eligible cohorts. However, differences in population size and growth never played a sizeable role in inciting or preventing international conflicts, neither did they shape the outcomes of wars. It is equally difficult to find straightforward examples of high pressure of population on its living space as a decisive factor of belligerence. However, these two speculative arguments were much too often invoked in the political discourse.

For instance, extreme demographic determinism claims that World War I ended with an extensive redrawing of the political map to better approximate demographic boundaries,

and World War II established a historical precedent for redrawing the political map to reflect massive demographic shifts imposed through force. Although elements of such 'adjustment' may be discerned in the war results, this view grossly exaggerates the significance of demographics as determinants of global conflicts. The way population factors were ideologically exploited to justify aggression is another matter.

## **2. The Demographic Price of War**

It is evident that violent interstate conflicts have had and continue to produce significant – indeed, often tremendous demographic results. Wars cause jumps in mortality, fertility slopes, massive dislocations of population, and distortions of sex and age structures. International armed conflicts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are estimated to have claimed 100 million lives.

In spite of the apparently straightforward notion of what is a war victim, the accurate assessment of a war death toll is a complex matter. Military casualties are difficult to estimate. In addition to assessing the number of killed in combat, there is a need to appropriately apportion deaths during the sanitary evacuation from the battlefield and in the military hospitals; premature deaths due to wounds and injuries; deaths of the prisoners of war due to harsh conditions in detention camps; and the missing in action presumed dead. This is compounded by the ambiguities in classifying the status, and therefore, accounting for the victims among armed resistance and combatants who were drafted but did not take the oath of allegiance.

The task of estimating the number of civilian casualties is particularly daunting. Scores of people fell victims of military operations, repression by occupying authorities, extreme deprivation and harsh living conditions in wartime. However, even reliable vital registration is often missing during the war or the archives are getting lost during the military operations or changes of authority. Demographic modeling is probably the best tool under these circumstances: provided that reliable prewar and postwar censuses and registration data exist, modeling adequately approximates actual wartime population losses. However, the attribution of deaths to war (as opposed to natural causes) involves a number of situation-specific interrelated assumptions, whose validity should be established from independent sources. The resulting estimates of war death tolls differ widely (Table 1).

The estimated number of victims in the World War I is 30 million, and in the World War II – 50 million. During the World War II the USSR lost 26 million lives (14 per cent of its pre-war population), Germany – 6.0–6.5 million; Poland – 5.0–6.6 million, and Yugoslavia – 1.4–1.7 million. Soviet casualties included 8.6 million military personnel killed or fatally wounded in combat (an additional 18.3 million were injured and survived), and 3.7 million prisoners of war dead in the German camps. This constituted more than one third of the 35 million people who have been mobilized for active duty. Besides direct military losses, an estimated 7.6 million civilians vanished in the front line or on the occupied territories: 4 million perished under fire or fell victims of German repression; 2.7 million Jews were exterminated; 900 thousand died during the Leningrad blockade. On the Soviet side of the front line extreme deprivation caused 7.5 million excess deaths.

	Military	Civilians	Total
World Total	20.0-21.8	28.3-31.0	50.0-51.8
Europe	16.9-17.2	20.4-28.1	37.4-45.2
USSR	8.6-10.0	11.4-17.4	20.0-26.0
Germany	6.0- 6.5	4.0- 4.8	1.5- 2.0
Poland	0.1- 0.6	4.9- 6.0	5.0- 6.6
Yugoslavia	0.3- 0.4	1.0- 1.4	1.4- 1.7
France	0.2- 0.3	0.3- 0.4	0.6- 0.7
Asia	3.0- 4.5	3.0- 7.9	6.0-12.4
China	1.4- 2.5	0.9- 7.5	2.2-10.0
Japan	1.5- 2.0	0.4- 0.7	2.0- 2.6
Americas	0.3- 0.4	--	0.3- 0.4

Source: Table by A.Vishnevsky in *Population and Sociétés*, 1995, No.5, p.3 compiled from B.Urlanis. *Guerres et populations*. Moscow: Progress, 1972, p. 321; R.L.Sivard et al. *World Military and Social Expenditures*. 14<sup>th</sup> Edition. Washington: World Priorities, 1991, p. 22-25; J.Delmas. *Une hécatombe humaine*. In: *L'état du monde en 1945*. Paris: La Découverte, 1994, p. 45.

Table 1: Loss of life in World War II, estimated range in millions of persons

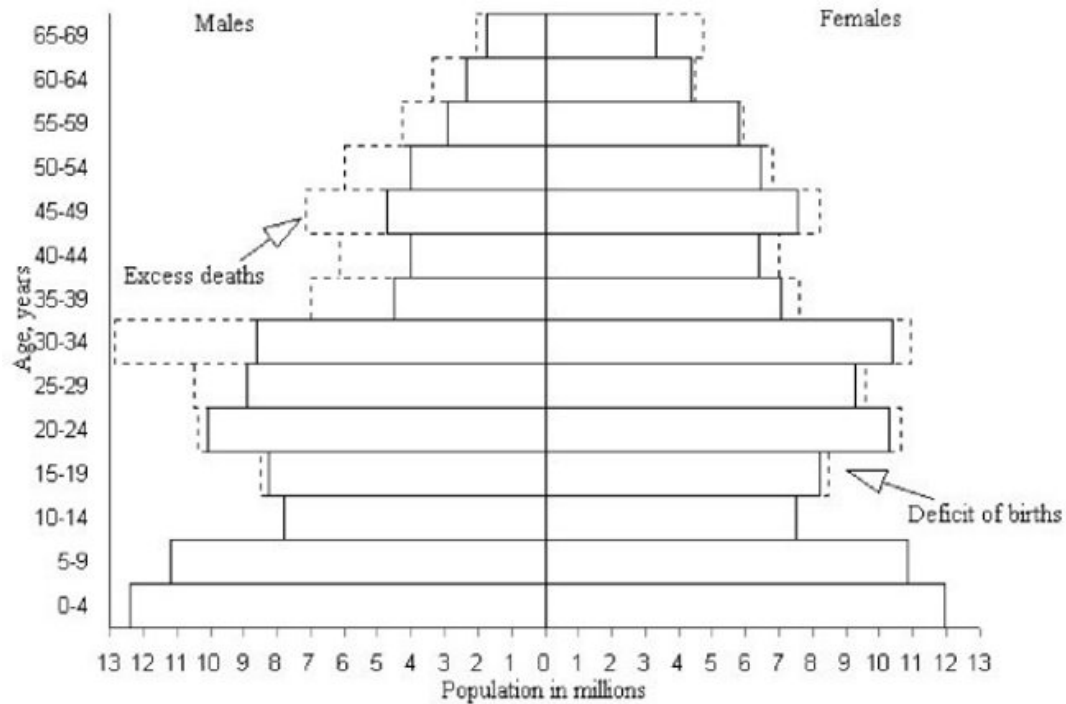
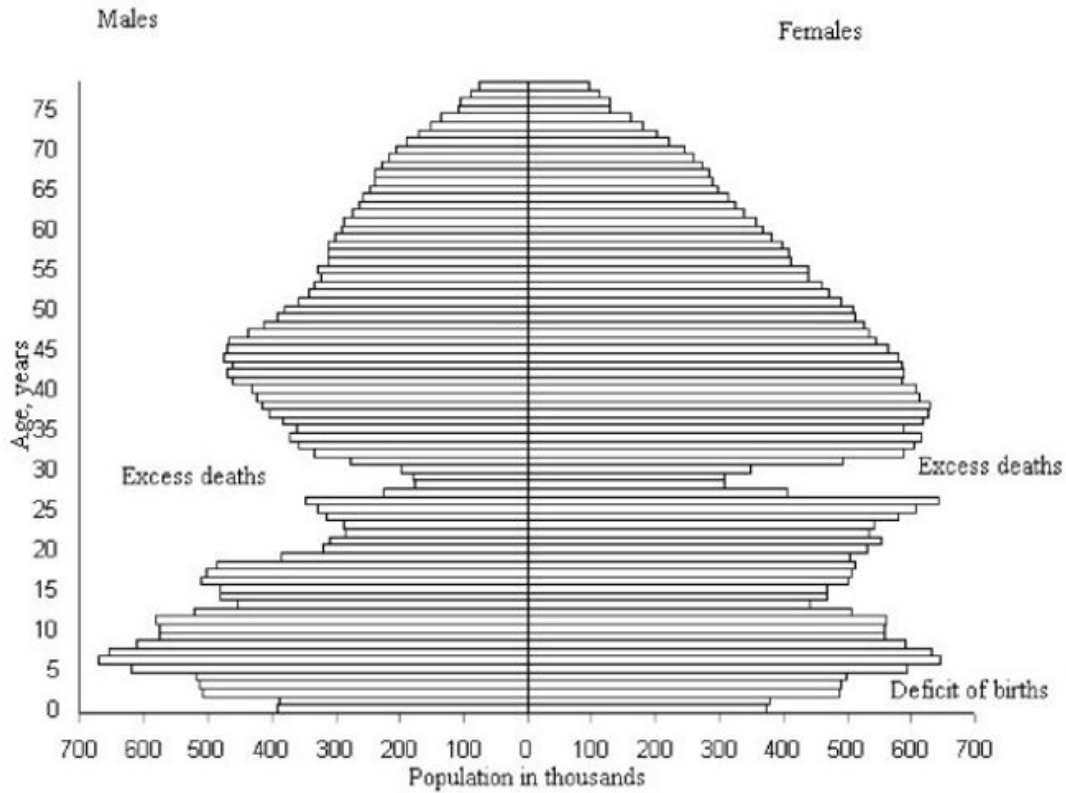
War casualties are age and sex selective: since draft-able male cohorts suffer disproportional losses, major wars leave long-lasting dents in the population's age pyramid and sex composition. These distortions are more pronounced when the armed forces endure most of the losses and relatively less -- when the deadly force is used against the civil population on a massive scale. Human losses of Germany and Poland in the World War II were roughly comparable, but in Germany 60-75 per cent (according to different estimates) of these losses were concentrated in the military, while in Poland at least 90 per cent of war victims were civilians. All loss of life endured by the United States and Canada was confined to military casualties.

In the Soviet Union World War II claimed twenty million male deaths (20 per cent of the entire male population) and 6 million female deaths (6 per cent). Particularly hard hit were the male cohorts born in 1900-1926: they lost one-third of their pre-war strength. Deep and lasting impacts of World War II on the population sex and age distributions are clearly visible in the most hard hit countries of Soviet Union, Poland and Germany (Figure 1). The Holocaust does not show up in the age pyramids precisely because its goal was the indiscriminate extermination of Jews.

During large and lasting military conflicts many families – particularly in their prime reproductive periods, -- are being separated, and the wartime economic hardships force people to postpone childbearing. As a result, fertility levels typically fall. Subsequently, fertility not only recuperates, but the postponed births often temporarily inflate birth rates above their prewar levels. Initial irregularities in the size of successive cohorts are maintained through their reproductive life and cause ups and downs in the annual number of births; this is replicated, albeit on a smaller scale, in the following generations. The succession of the wartime baby bust and post-war compensatory baby boom produces a series of secondary and tertiary waves. The 'demographic echo' of wars outlives the living memory of war participants (Figure 1).

Massive population movements within and across national borders typically accompany

wars. In the Soviet Union tens of millions of internal refugees were evacuated to the East in 1941-1942 with the retreating Red Army. Although most of them consequently returned on the liberated territories, many stayed in the Urals, Siberia and Central Asia.



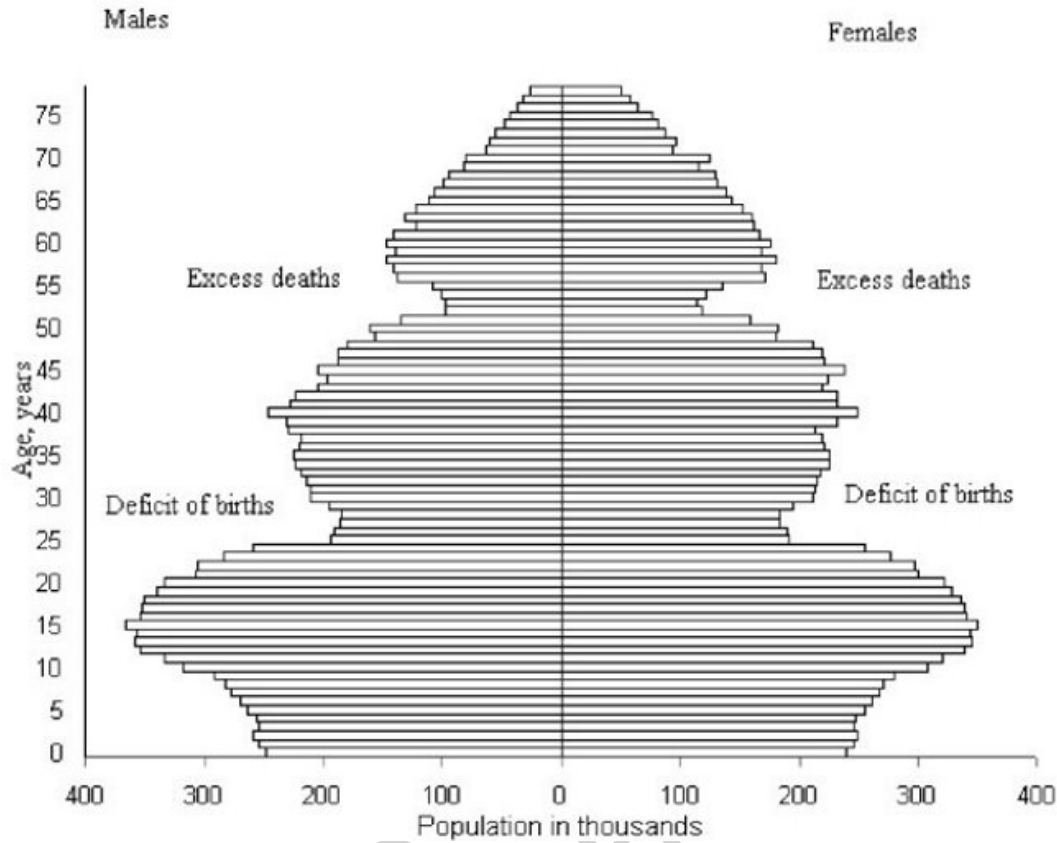


Figure 1: Population by sex and age: Poland Germany and USSR

The tragic fate of 2.2 million people, summarily punished by the Soviet regime as alleged ‘traitors’, is also connected to the war, although it cannot be justified by a military necessity. In September 1941 1.2 million ethnic Germans and, between October 1943 and November 1944, 1 million inhabitants of seven autonomous republics or regions that had been briefly captured by the German army were forced onto train convoys of cattle wagons and shunted off to Siberia and Central Asia.

During the war, approximately 8.7 million Soviet citizens were moved to the *Reich* and its allies, including more than 3 million prisoners of war and an equal number of forcibly relocated *Osterbeiter*. In 1945-1946 4.2 million Soviet prisoners of war and civilians were repatriated -- often forcibly. As a result of the war and re-definition of national boundaries 9.7 million ethnic Germans (15 per cent of the 1946 census population) were relocated in Germany from former German territories or from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

The development of military technology is the essential, albeit not unique, cause of the increasing deadliness of warfare. In World War I, the use of automatic weapons was a major factor of protracted operations involving millions of troops and resulting in heavy casualties. In World War II, the massive use of air force, long-range artillery and tanks made it possible to implement the strategies of ‘total war’ by equally targeting the military and the civilian populations. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated

that overwhelming technological and economic might does not ascertain a quick victory but often leads to a protracted campaign with continuing massive loss of life, as was the case in Vietnam in and Afghanistan.

Arguably, the fear of complete and irreparable destruction from the use of nuclear weapons had been instrumental in deterring the adversaries in the Cold War from launching a direct military attack against each other. Nuclear arms made the looming danger of a third world war terrifying. Authoritative studies and simulations estimated that a one-megaton nuclear weapon would have killed 11-25 percent of dwellers of a major city and would have injured another 16-25 percent. Limited mutual preemptive strikes against military targets in East and West Germany were expected to cause 10 million civilian deaths. And the death toll of the global all-out war with the use of about half of the accumulated nuclear arsenal would probably range from 750 million to 1150 million; an additional 340 million to 1100 million would be injured.

Recent use of a new generation of military technology in high-precision military campaigns (as against Iraq in 1992 and Yugoslavia in 1999) whereby war goals were achieved by precisely targeted air strikes do not necessarily prove that the trend towards increasing deadliness of military conflicts has reversed. While the victorious force has in fact suffered marginal casualties, its adversaries – both military and civilian, were severely hit. Furthermore, even a prompt victory in the high-tech military campaign war does not preclude the ensuing guerrilla-type warfare from claiming numerous victims.

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