

Debate: Is Population Growth, or Poverty, the Main Problem?

Purpose:

Worldwide, human population has just surpassed six billion people. Current projections are that it may reach more than 10 billion people sometime in the next century before finally leveling off. Many people believe that population growth is the main reason for many problems we are facing such as crowding, hunger, poverty, conflicts, environmental degradation and so on. Others think population itself is not a main problem. Instead, unequal distribution of resources contributes to overpopulation as well as many other problems. This debate will familiarize you with the major arguments concerning population growth, its causes and consequences and policy implications. You are expected to gain a good understanding of the three major positions defining current debates on population: the *neo-Malthusian*, the *Cornucopian*, and the *Marxist perspective*.

The Debate:

In this debate you will debate three related questions in front of the United States Congress: 1) Is population growth, or poverty, the main problem? 2) Is aggressive population control needed? 3) Should the U.S. encourage and be actively involved in foreign aid? Conduct additional research for the specific role you choose. You will be assigned to one of three groups, each with a given position on this issue: the *neo-Malthusian*, the *cornucopian*, and the *neo-Marxist view*. At the beginning of the debate, each group will meet to prepare an opening policy statement. The opening statement describes what the group perceives to be the nature of the problem, and what they propose as proper policy measures regarding population control and foreign aid.

The structure of the debate:

Group discussion:	10 Minutes
Group opening statements:	3 Minutes for each group (9 minutes)
Individual statement/Rebuttals/Debate:	30 Minutes
Conclusion:	1 Minute

The Groups/Roles:

Malthusians/Neo-Malthusians: This group argues that population growth represents a serious problem, that active measures should be taken to control population growth, and that foreign aid should be abandoned.

Marxists/Neo-Marxists: This group argues that population control as such is not as serious an issue as the maldistribution of resources. Population control is unnecessary. Instead, wealthy countries should reduce their consumption and resources should be distributed more equitably. Foreign aid is one way to redistribute resources, and the U.S. should actively promote foreign aid.

Cornucopians: This group argues that population growth is good for the economy as well as the environment because of new talents and new technologies it brings with. There is no need to control population growth.

You choose one role in one of these groups. You are expected to write a 1-page position paper that is due at the end of the debate. The paper should generally represent the position you have chosen for the debate and include your main arguments and supporting materials. You do not have to coordinate with your team members on the writing of the position paper.

Grading:

You will be graded on your ability to make well reasoned, well researched arguments. Arguments that are only emotional in nature and not backed up with factual information will receive low grades. You are also expected to turn in your position paper.

Placards:

Before coming to class, make sure you make a sign for yourself so that it is clear to everyone what your role is in the debate.

Debate Role Sign-up Sheet

Malthusians/ Neo-Malthusians:

Paul Ehrlich (author of *The Population Bomb*)
President of the Sierra Club
Director of Family Planning Program in China
Director of United Nations Fund for Population Activity
Garret Hardin
Former Republican Presidential Candidate/ CNBC host Patrick Buchanan

Marxists/ Neo-Marxists:

United Nation Research Institute for Social Development
Karl Marx
Farmer from India
Refugee from Africa
Fidel Castro (President of Cuba)
Young Afghani mother
American volunteer pediatrician for “Doctors without Borders” working in El Salvador
College Activist (UAlbany Socialist Party)
Professor David Harvey (Johns Hopkins University)
Barry Commoner
UN food aid worker in Afghanistan
Subsistence farmer in Sudan (a war-torn African country)

Cornucopians:

Julian Simon (author of *The Resourceful Earth*)
President of World Bank
President of IMF (International Monetary Fund)
UN World Food Program Director
Genetic crop engineer for Monsanto
U.S. wheat farmer
Southern Baptist anti-abortion activist
Wealthy Indian farmer

If you choose the following roles, you may decide which group you want to be in:

Population Geographer
Environmental Studies student
Immigration expert