



**EXAMEN D'ENTRÉE EN 2^{ème} ANNÉE
AU CAMPUS DE CAEN**

ÉPREUVE D'ANGLAIS

Mercredi 11 juin 2025

16h00 à 17h00

coeff. 2

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The Guardian, May 31, 2025

Are there billions more people on Earth than we thought? If so, it's no bad thing

by Jonathan Kennedy

A study suggests the global population has been undercounted – but we shouldn't let the overpopulation alarmists win the argument

5 (...) A recent study by Dr Josias Láng-Ritter and his colleagues at Aalto University in Finland discovered that UN estimates undercount the number of people living in rural areas by more than 50%. This is because census data in the global south is often incomplete or unreliable outside big cities. Consequently, UN figures probably underestimate the world population by hundreds of millions or several billion.

Many people argue that our planet does not have the resources to support 8 billion people. “Overpopulation” is seen as the root cause of many of the world’s biggest problems. But these concerns are nothing new.

10 At the turn of the 19th century, when there were fewer than a billion inhabitants on Earth, Thomas Malthus was already convinced that “the period when the number of men surpass their means of subsistence has long since arrived”. Malthus’s inability to predict that technology would revolutionise food production did not dent his popularity. On the contrary, as the world population grew, the prophets of doom grew ever louder.

15 Neo-Malthusian anxieties **reached fever pitch** with Paul and Anne Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* – subtitled *Population Control or Race to Oblivion* (1968). This hugely influential, bestselling book warned: “The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death.”

20 These devastating predictions encouraged governments and international agencies to take drastic action. As fertility rates were already falling in most high-income countries, these efforts concentrated on Africa and even more so Asia. USAID funded family planning programmes across what was then referred to as the developing world. Millions of Indian men were sterilised during the Emergency of the mid-1970s. In 1979, the Chinese Communist party introduced the one-child policy and a few years later launched a mass sterilisation campaign, which focused mainly on women. (...)

25 Thankfully, the coercive policies that took place in India, China and elsewhere are no longer in vogue. The new approach to population control focuses instead on women’s empowerment. Educating women and giving them control over their lives has proved remarkably effective at reducing fertility rates. In the 1960s, women had on average five children each. Today, the figure is 2.3 per woman – just over what is needed to keep the population stable. By 2100 the global birthrate is projected to fall to 1.8.

30 According to the UN, the world’s population will peak at about 10.3 billion in the mid-2080s. After this it will stabilise, then fall. The exponential growth that gave Malthusians so many sleepless nights has been halted. That many people will put considerable stress on the Earth’s resources, but if consumption is managed responsibly and sustainable technologies are developed, the world will avoid an apocalyptic catastrophe. (...)

Population growth varies starkly between regions. In most high-income countries, fertility rates are already well below the replacement level. The African continent is projected to account for over half the world’s population growth in the next three decades, with Asia and Latin America responsible for the rest.

35 As the historian Alison Bashford points out, concerns about overpopulation are often not really about there being too many people but too many of the wrong kind of people. Ethnonationalists in Europe and North America see the disparities in birthrates as an existential threat to “western civilisation”. They worry about their countries being indelibly changed by mass migration. But the cold hard truth is that in a few decades our shrinking, ageing societies will desperately need these newcomers to pay taxes and work in healthcare and social care. This vision of the future may be unsettling for some, but the alternative is much worse. (...)

- Jonathan Kennedy teaches politics and global health at Queen Mary University of London, and is the author of *Pathogenesis: How Germs Made History*

I. Reading comprehension (6pts)

In your own words, provide a concise answer in English to the questions below.

- 1) Why are concerns over overpopulation “*nothing new*” (paragraph 2)? (1pt)
- 2) The article mentions two different strategies to control population size. What are they? (1pt)
- 3) Today, is global population predicted to rise or to fall? Justify your answer. (1pt)
- 4) Why does Alison Bashford believe “*concerns about overpopulation are often not really about there being too many people but too many of the wrong kind of people*” (paragraph 9)? (1pt)
- 5) What does the author suggest when he says “*This vision of the future may be unsettling for some, but the alternative is much worse.*” (paragraph 9) ? (1pt)
- 6) Explain the expression “**reached fever pitch**” in paragraph 4? (1 pt)

II. Writing (14 pts)

Write an essay on the topic below (300 words, +/- 10%). Feel free to use examples from other countries or time periods.

Is overpopulation a problem? Why or why not?