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Is Niger's Problem Over-population?

by DON BOUDREAUX on AUGUST 22, 2005

Post

Inspired by the sad plight of the people of Niger, letters today in two major U.S. newspapers — the [New York Times](#) and the [Christian Science Monitor](#) — repeat the age-old myth that poverty is caused by over-population.

Let's look at just a few facts.

Niger's population density is 9 people per square kilometer. Compare this figure to the population densities of much more prosperous countries:

France: 110 people per sq. km.

Czech Republic: 133

Switzerland: 181

Italy: 197

Germany: 236

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United Kingdom: 250

Japan: 340

Netherlands: 484

South Korea: 493

Taiwan: 636

Hong Kong: 6641

Now let's cheat big-time in favor of the overpopulation hypothesis by counting as relevant only Niger's *arable* land. If all Nigeriens lived only on Niger's arable land, the population density of this land would be 260 persons per square kilometer — much denser than 9 persons per sq. km., but nowhere close to the population density (counting *all* the square kilometers, arable or not) of the likes of the Netherlands, South Korea, and Hong Kong.

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(All facts reported above are calculated from data available at the CIA's [World Factbook](#) site.)



Where's the evidence for the apparently indestructible belief that over-population is a fundamental 'cause' of poverty?

The world needs more scholars of the likes of [Julian Simon](#).

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