

# **Public Policy and Strategy**

## **Unit 1 Strategy and the Policy Process**

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## Unit Overview

The aim of Unit 1 is to introduce the concept of strategy, and how and why it is important for public policy. It begins with an historical overview of the origins of strategy and the way the idea has changed and developed over time. Strategic planning and management are discussed as aspects of the policy process, building on some of the ideas covered in our parallel module *Public Policy and Management: Perspectives and Issues*.

We then draw a distinction between strategy as a public policy process, and strategic as a description of complex policy problems, setting out examples of both, and setting the scene for the remainder of the module. The unit ends with an introduction to the case study strategic issue which we will be using throughout the module to illustrate different ideas and methods: demographic change and population dynamics.

## Learning outcomes

When you have completed this unit and its readings, you will be able to:

- define strategy, and what is meant by strategic, in a number of historical and contemporary contexts
- describe the policy process and the role of strategic planning and management within it, and in contrast with strategy in the private sector
- explain why demographic change and population dynamics can be considered a strategic issue and the implications for public policy and government action.



## Reading for Unit 1

Lawrence Freedman (2013) 'Preface'. *Strategy: A History*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press. pp. ix–xvi.

Paul Joyce (2015) Chapter 1 'Introduction'. *Strategic Management in the Public Sector*. Oxford UK: Routledge. pp. 1–21.

Michael Barber (2015) 'Preface', 'Introduction' and Chapter 1 'Priorities'. *How to Run a Government: So That Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don't Go Crazy*. London: Penguin. pp. xi–xiv; xv–xxvi; 1–25.

David S Reher (2011) 'Economic and social implications of the demographic transition'. *Population and Development Review*, 37 (Supplement), 11–23.

## 1.1 The Meaning of Strategy

The victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won.

Sun Tzu (2000 translation)

I still have the dictionary I used during my school days: *The Penguin English Dictionary*, published in 1969, defines strategy like this:

the art of manoeuvring an army effectively; large-scale plan or method for winning a war, battle of wits, contest, game *etc.*

Garmonsway & Simpson (1969)

This view of strategy contains two key features we can trace back more than 2,500 years to Sun Tzu, the Chinese warrior-sage, whose military treatise, *The Art of War* (from which the opening quotation comes) continues to influence political and business gurus to this day.

The first feature places strategy in the realm of conflict: at its most extreme, in warfare and the fighting (or perhaps avoidance) of battle; in more benign circumstances as ways to win a game or contest. Strategy is therefore not an end in itself, but an approach to dealing with a situation of conflict or competition – a means to an end.

The second feature relates to planning or organising at a large scale, with a perspective looking beyond the immediate and into the long term, and taking many different factors into account. In this sense it is distinct from *tactics*, which are the much more immediate decisions and actions employed when fighting a specific battle.

Sun Tzu is the master of expressing these two dimensions concisely, with the long-term interests of the state in mind. Over and over again in *The Art of War* he emphasises the wasteful and ruinous consequences of warfare and conflict, and the desirability of using all means possible to achieve your ends without actual fighting, and through careful analysis, planning, subterfuge and, wherever possible, ensuring the desired end result will be inevitable. He writes from a perspective where competition between political entities is a fact of life, where as a matter of certainty the state will be confronted with challenges which need to be overcome. *The Art of War* dates from a period of Chinese history when many different local states co-existed alongside each other in a continuing round of wars, alliances, conquest and betrayal, out of which the unified Chinese empire eventually emerged.

Sun Tzu's aim was to keep the reader's mind firmly on 'the big picture' goal – stability for the state and prosperity for the people – and to teach the ways in which this could be achieved and maintained in the face of threats and disruption. And, so far as possible, this should be achieved with the least expenditure of resources and avoidance of wasteful and destructive fighting.

In this view, still current in the 1969 definition, strategy is therefore a grand, large-scale enterprise, noble in intent, subtle and artistic in its delivery. In the field of games, both Chess and Go, perhaps the two most difficult games known, are played at the highest level by exceptional people with the ability

to develop, deliver and adjust overall strategies for victory. Sun Tzu is simultaneously spreading a message that the arts of strategy can be taught and learned, but also that they demand wisdom and ability – in other words, leadership. The following section comes from the beginning of *The Art of War*, from the year 2000 translation (there have been many over time):

Sun Tzu said:

Strategy is the great Work of the organisation.

In Situations of life or death, it is the Tao of survival or extinction,  
Its study cannot be neglected.

Therefore, Calculate a plan with Five Working Fundamentals,  
And examine the condition of each.

The first is Tao

The second in Nature

The third is Situation

The fourth is Leadership

The fifth is Art.

The Tao inspires people to share in the same ideals and expectations.  
Hence, because they share in life and share in death,  
The people do not fear danger.

Nature is the dark or light, the cold or hot, and the Systems of time.

Situation is the distant or immediate, the obstructed or easy,  
The broad or narrow, and the chances of life or death.

Leadership is intelligence, credibility, humanity, courage and discipline.

The Art is a flexible System

Wherein the Sovereign and Officials employ the Tao.

Leaders should not be unfamiliar with these Five.

Those who understand them will triumph.

Those who do not understand them will be defeated.

It is interesting to note that, despite the somewhat obscure terminology, Sun Tzu sets out here the sort of systematic approach to policy formation and delivery that continues to this day. The five 'fundamentals' that need attention include:

- the *underlying values and beliefs* which unite those engaged in the struggle (in his terms the 'Tao', which in current times we might call the ideology or core beliefs)
- *nature*, the context – geography, economic circumstances, the time of year
- *situation*, the challenge to be faced, and readiness of the state to act
- *leadership*, the qualities of those with ultimate responsibility
- and *art*, the capacity of the state system to apply knowledge and tools to the common purpose, including (this being crucial to Sun Tzu's philosophy) a flexibility and adaptability of response founded in understanding.

As you will see later in the module there are different approaches to breaking public policy into component parts, but here, 2,500 years ago, we see a

model which resonates through the years to today. *The Art of War* has stood the test of time due to its intrinsic merits – in particular, its ability to provoke careful thought. It is not so much a set of specific prescriptions (do this, not that), but more a system of strategic thinking which keeps the ultimate goal in mind whilst encouraging disciplined, systematic analysis of evidence on the one hand, and imaginative approaches to action on the other. Quite what Sun Tzu would have made of other applications of his ideas we can only wonder – a quick Google search reveals the following:

- ‘Sun Tzu: The Art of Branding Strategy’
- ‘The Art of War for Dating: Master Sun Tzu’s tactics win over women’
- ‘Sun Tzu: The Art of Agile Software Delivery’
- ‘The Art of War for the Sales Warrior: Sun Tzu’s strategy for sales people’
- ‘Sun Tzu the Art of War and Basketball’
- ‘Sun Tzu’s Art of War for Traders and Investors’


Clearly there is an appeal to the idea of strategy as, in effect, a clever way to win a contest. In his masterly history of strategy, Lawrence Freedman (2013) discusses Sun Tzu, but also traces strategic ideas and behaviour back to the Abrahamic bible and ancient Greece, and even to primate evolution – citing, for example, evidence of alliance building, prediction of the actions of others, and deliberate deception as central to success in chimpanzee politics.

Please now turn to your first reading, the preface to Freedman’s book.



### Reading 1.1

Please study the first reading: the ‘Preface’ to *Strategy: A History* by Lawrence Freedman.

 In your notes for the reading, include the different components of strategy that are identified.

- Do these conform with your own idea of what strategy means?

Share your views on the VLE with your fellow students.

Freedman (2015)  
‘Preface’ in *Strategy: A History*. pp. ix–xvi.

As recently as 1969, as you saw in the dictionary definition, strategy was still defined as being about how to approach wars or games. So why does it qualify as a subject for study in relation to public policy and management? Is this module intended for trainee soldiers or future chess grand masters? Any soldiers or chess playing students are naturally more than welcome to be here, but no, this module is not designed specifically for them. It is aimed at anyone with an interest or role in the design, delivery and understanding of public policy, from the maintenance of the armed forces to the collection of garbage, education of children or building of roads.

The reason is because, as Freedman says at the very beginning of his book:

Everyone needs a strategy. Leaders of armies, major corporations, and political parties have long been expected to have strategies, but now no serious organization could imagine being without one. (p. ix)

From a search on the single word 'strategy' on Google in 2016, at the top of the list of 828 million results comes a more contemporary definition:

'A plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim'.

With the term becoming this broad, the idea of strategy is, perhaps, beginning to reach its limits:

'How to use Wal-Mart strategies to boost your popcorn sales'<sup>1</sup>

says Robert Moore, clearly a smart young American boy scout who has gained some fame for his outstanding ability to sell popcorn for the benefit of his scout troop and community, and has also realised the credibility and seriousness that using the 'S' word adds to a proposition.

Clearly, the term has opened up, and is in wide use in both the private and public (and NGO) sectors, from the most local, right up through nation states, to the largest supranational bodies such as the United Nations. The modern origins of strategy beyond the fighting of wars lie in the adoption of strategic thought and processes in private commerce, particularly by large corporations.

Much of Freedman's history of strategy traces the adoption by private firms of strategic practices, borrowing openly from military models on the assumption that the open market is analogous to a situation of conflict, with opponents (competitors) to be overcome, marketing 'campaigns' to be fought, and strategic advantage over opponents to be gained through clever manoeuvres. Much of this makes sense, with few situations not benefitting from careful assessment of strengths and weaknesses, detailed planning, and actions planned coherently and with a clear end goal in mind. There is also an extent to which leaders in the private sector like to borrow some of the glamour and prestige which, in some people's minds, stems from images of war and successful combat.

In the field of public policy, the situation is somewhat different. We must distinguish politics from public policy and government. Politics is more often than not a venue for competition if not conflict, particularly in democratic or multi-party systems. Elections are in effect ritualised conflicts, and there is a voluminous literature on political strategy and how to gain more votes than your competitors. The exercise of power is not the same thing. While there may, of course, be conflicts to be fought, for most governments for most of the time the business of ruling is on the one hand more mundane, but on the other more (or at least differently) complicated and difficult from fighting a competitive election campaign or staging a successful *coup d'état*.

Raising the standards of education in a country's schools does not on the whole mean trying to outwit an opponent. There may be tactical conflicts – for example, if the trades unions representing teachers object to the measures the government wants to take. But this is not the core goal of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://popcornGuy.org/2013/06/18/how-to-use-wal-mart-strategies-to-boost-your-popcorn-sales/>

overall strategy. The relevance of strategy for public policy, and how to use strategic ideas and methods in government, is the topic of this module, so let us now look in more depth at public administration itself and the place of strategy within it.

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## 1.2 Public Policy and Strategy

When discussing strategy in the context of public policy it is clear that the meaning has shifted and, perhaps, become rather less precise. While conflict or competition remain relevant, in terms of public policy, and in particular the delivery of services to the public, the challenge is not so much about overcoming a defined opponent, but about making real the goals, hopes and commitments of the government.

It is important here to draw a distinction between the political and the governmental. All states involve political competition. At one extreme, full liberal democracies such as France or Australia involve different political parties or movements, competing with each other for the votes of the electorate. At the other, even in autocracies or one-party states such as China political competition is to be found, between factions or individuals within the Party. Strategy in relation to politics retains its competitive dimension – how to discredit your opponent, how to identify and secure the key locations of power.

In relation to government and administration, however, we are often dealing with something rather different. The challenges are not the same:

- how to bring change
- how to increase the capacity of your bureaucracy
- how to maintain standards while spending less taxpayers' money for example.

Although some conflicts may arise – for example, with businesses that are opposed to increased regulation to drive down carbon energy use – in most other cases there is no clear, well defined opponent that you need to vanquish. If your problem is high unemployment, there is no enemy to deceive. Instead there is the need to address the availability of jobs on the one hand, the skills and locations of the workforce on the other. This module is about strategy in the context of government, and the ways in which intentions can be turned into achievements.

In the classical tradition of 'public administration' there is a division of labour between politicians, who are responsible for policy making, and public servants, who are responsible for the implementation of those policies through a variety of policy instruments.

Changes in the management of public services that were introduced in a variety of countries from the 1980s onwards led to a reconsideration of the role of 'management' as opposed to 'administration' in public services. One aspect of this re-appraisal was structural, with 'service delivery' being sepa-

rated organisationally from 'policy', sometimes in the form of executive agencies, sometimes in the form of contractual relationships with service delivery businesses, whether for-profit or non-profit. Those involved in the service delivery part of public service were to be held accountable for their actions, including their achievement of pre-set targets on outputs and to some degree on the results of their service delivery activities. Market mechanisms were consciously being introduced.<sup>2</sup>

These agencies or contracting bodies therefore looked more like businesses than public agencies – they were given more managerial freedoms, especially with regard to the way they acquired and used assets and the way they hired and managed staff. Their managers looked to business practice to inform their managerial work and, in turn, many business schools turned to research and training for this new breed of public managers.

One aspect of this was an interest in what 'strategic management' would and could look like in the public sector. Business strategy had been taught in the business schools for decades and techniques had been developed for understanding, teaching and practising strategy. The issue was 'how could such ideas and techniques be applied in the newly configured public sector?' The differences between the two sectors were clear – in the private sector profit and shareholder value, in the public sector 'public value'; in the private sector the struggle to find and retain customers in a competitive environment, in the public sector the need to define eligibility for services and ration their distribution.

A literature emerged. John Bryson's *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* appeared in 1988 in the USA (the fifth edition in 2018 is one of your key texts); Paul Joyce's *Strategic Management for Public Services* was published in the United Kingdom in 1999, followed by *Strategic Leadership in the Public Services* in 2012, and *Strategic Management in the Public Sector* (the second of your key texts) in 2015. Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes published *Exploring Public Sector Strategy* in 2000. These books delved into the application of techniques used in the business schools and in some businesses for the problems and challenges faced by public managers.

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### 1.3 Public/Private Differences

There are some obvious differences between what might be defined as 'core' public service functions and businesses – assuming that the public service core includes tax collection, delivery of basic services such as policing, regulation and public health, provision of financial management for public money and policy advice for politicians. The differences include the following:

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<sup>2</sup> There is much more discussion of the history of public administration and the move to managerialism in the CeFIMS module *Public Policy and Management: Perspectives and Issues*.



- there is no 'bottom line' or profit calculation in the provision of core public services
- there is (normally) no competition to provide the services
- governance arrangements do not include shareholders
- success does not result in big financial rewards
- the consumers of services do not pay for the full cost of them at the point at which they are consumed; rather, through taxation.

Once one or more of these conditions is relaxed, certain aspects of private sector strategic management appear more relevant to the public sector. The most obvious is the trading entity – public bodies that engage in trade, such as agricultural marketing, running state theatres or opera houses, national sports stadiums or state railways, look more like private enterprises. They have customers who pay; they can compare their costs with their revenues and produce a 'bottom line', and they may be in competition with other providers of similar goods and services in the private or non-profit sectors. Of course, the 'bottom line' may not be a perfect measure of success – there may, for example, be a subsidy for a state railway, which distorts the transport 'market'. If the service, such as a post office, is a monopoly, then profits made will depend on the price the postal service is allowed to charge.

The other assumption that may not always apply is the public monopoly – once competition is introduced, the strategic management problem changes. For example, where the state monopoly on postal delivery is relaxed, the post office has to be concerned with retaining customers, thinking about its price and quality as compared to its rivals.

The major constraint on public bodies that does not apply to private companies is their reliance on legal statute as their reason for being. While a company can make strategic decisions about the products and services it supplies and the markets in which it sells them, public entities have these choices made for them, and laid down in statute. The prison service cannot decide to make more profits by building holiday resorts; the state schools cannot diversify into fashion houses. For some, this restriction in scope is enough to persuade them that the differences between the public and the private are so great that strategic management is inappropriate.

In addition to the two categories 'public' and 'private' there are hybrid types of organisation that have some characteristics of the private and some of the public. They include social enterprises that are set up to deliver services funded by taxation but managed by Boards of Directors and owned with charitable status. They also include state-owned enterprises that are owned by government but operate under commercial rather than administrative law.

In other words, the nature of the environment, including the institutional environment has a big influence on the choice of strategic management *process*. The same is true of the strategy or policy process in the public sector – if the environment is very stable, the task unchanged, the technology fixed,


then elaborate processes of strategic planning are unlikely to produce worthwhile results.



### Reading 1.2

Please read the first chapter of *Strategic Management in the Public Sector* – the introduction.

Joyce (2015) Chapter 1  
'Introduction' in *Strategic Management in the Public Sector*. pp. 1–21.

 Note in your own words the key points Joyce makes about strategy broadly, and planning and management more specifically. Make sure you understand why he argues that:

- Strategic planning and management in the public sector is not the same as in the private sector, even though there are areas where concepts and models have saliency for both.
- Planning and management are not the same thing and should be seen as conceptually distinct, even when both are at times combined in the same function or organisation.
- Whilst strategy, policy or decision-making models, particularly linear, logical frameworks, have some value as thinking tools, they are overly reductive and in particular, do not reflect the messy reality of evolving circumstances, and neglect the diversity of skills and actors needed for successful implementation.

The particular context for Joyce's book is 'modernisation', used on his first page in relation to 'modernizing public policy-making' and 'modernizing government'<sup>3</sup>. The implication is that current governmental systems are 'old fashioned' or, to use one of the innumerable catch phrases in this field, are 'not fit for purpose'. A system is in place, but, for one reason or another, is not considered able to deliver the goals of the government. Its configuration into separate ministries may no longer match the way society and the economy operates, for example, or the systems in use may reflect old technologies that no longer work or are over staffed in relation to the productivity of new methods.

It is important to bear in mind that modernisation is not the only reason governments need strategies, and that as a term it may be a mask for something else. In the UK, modernisation of the governmental system took conscious hold in the 1980s during a Conservative government (*ie* right ring), was accelerated during the 1990s and particularly in the 2000s by a 'reforming' Labour government (*ie* left wing), and continued by the coalition which came to power in 2010 – twenty years or more endeavour aimed at slimming down the scale and functions of the state and focusing its efforts more explicitly on the delivery of specified government objectives. This was a period of unambiguous modernisation.

The 'Brexit' vote by the UK electorate in June 2016 to leave the European Union<sup>4</sup> brought an entirely different strategic imperative: working out how

<sup>3</sup> Joyce (2015) p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The loss of the Brexit referendum is an excellent example of a failed *political* strategy by a ruling party which included the holding of a referendum in their pre-election proposals to

to disentangle the UK's more than forty-year membership of the EU and integration in its unified economy. There are few examples of a larger strategic shock to an established liberal democracy than this, short of war. Across the whole of UK government strategic planning swung into action, with results which will not be evident for perhaps years to come. For the purposes of this module, however, the point here is that contemporary strategic planning and management in the public sector is not always about modernisation – although on many occasions it is.

Experience that does come from modernisation is found in your next reading, from the second book provided to you, Michael Barber's *How to Run a Government*.



### Reading 1.3

Please read the Preface, Introduction and Chapter 1 of *How to Run a Government*.



Note in your reading how this author contrasts with Joyce.

- How much do you think Barber's views are generally applicable to all sorts of governments, and how much are they limited to the particular circumstances of the UK in the 2000s?

Barber (2015) 'Preface', 'Introduction' and Chapter 1 'Priorities' in *How to Run a Government*, pp. xi–xiv; xv–xxvi; 1–25.

Barber has produced a somewhat populist account of the learning he took from his time working at the centre of government at a period of relative prosperity, and where the government itself was secure in power with large majorities and somewhat ineffective political opposition. This was just the sort of modernising situation envisaged by Joyce, where a government (or at least Prime Minister) with a strong view of what the country 'needed' was on a mission to attain specific goals, and in a mood to tackle what were seen as deficiencies in the 'delivery' system.

Barber is keen to add to the literature on the 'science of delivery', the (in his view) neglected field of how government works in practice. The approach advocated in the book is, however, strongly strategic, with its emphasis on clarity of vision, detailed use of data and analysis, flexibility in delivery to enable the achievement of end goals, and conspicuous leadership – all traits that Sun Tzu would recognise. There are even examples of the use of surprise to neutralise opposition, such as the deliberate avoidance by the central 'delivery unit' of taking credit for success.

An important feature of Barber's approach remains the separation of planning from management, strategy from execution – in his case, to the level of functional separation of the two tasks between different people and institutions within government. This contrasts with Joyce's view that planning and management tend to be less distinct in the public sector than the private sector.

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the electorate on the assumptions that a) they were unlikely to win the election, and b) even if they did, there was no chance they would lose a referendum.

Some of this comes from the scale and complexity of government. Even at a very local level, the responsibilities of governing institutions can be diverse and complicated – a city local authority may, for example, be responsible for health, education, traffic, planning, environmental conditions, arts and culture, economic development. A broad range of expertise will be needed; there will be many different relationships with other interested parties; policies in one area will interact with those in others; higher levels of government may help or hinder local action. At the level of the nation state the situation is likely to be many times more complicated and much larger in scale.

Barber's narrative reads at times like a tale from the times of Sun Tzu, with mastermind strategists in a tent at the centre, carefully plotting ingenious ways to overcome the enemy of ineffective government. While at times this will be what occurs, at other times and in other circumstances the strategic needs will be somewhat less glamorous. This does not in any sense remove the need for strategic thinking and planning, which in practice may be more difficult to achieve in less obviously pressured circumstances.

In a classic article from 1959, Charles Lindblom coined the term 'The Science of "Muddling Through"', examining the frameworks within which public administrators took decisions, and demonstrating the great complexity inherent in public policy systems as they work to coordinate the use of resources, money, information, regulations and so on in pursuit of interlocking goals. From the point of view of the strategist within the public sector ideas of network management (Klijn *et al*, 1995) and the interplay of 'policy subsystems' (Howlett *et al*, 2009) are important distinctions from norms of management in the private sector, and help define the spaces within which strategic issues are addressed, and effective responses planned and delivered. We will return to these issues later in the module.

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## 1.4 Strategic Issues

So far we have been considering strategy as a process or action: something that people or groups do. The adjective derived from strategy as a 'thing', is the idea of something being 'strategic'. At its simplest, and in definitions online and in dictionaries, strategic is taken to mean 'relating to a strategy', but, as you have seen with strategy itself, the term *strategic* has come to signify something more important, deeper or more insightful.

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### Exercise 1.1

Think about the following terms and quotes and write down what you think they mean, and in what sense they might be strategic. Share your ideas with your fellow students on the VLE.

- 'UK launches nuclear skills strategic programme'
- 'The Panama Canal: America's strategic artery'
- 'Pakistan tensions loom over India-China strategic economic dialogue'
- 'New plan for Dublin city puts emphasis on housing strategy'

- '13 Strategies for Fighting Climate Change While Reducing Inequality and Unemployment'
- 'Tunisia takes on extremism with new 'terrorism' strategy'

The websites from which these quotes are taken are provided in the References listing at the end of this unit.

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Given the frequency with which phenomena are described as strategic, this module includes discussion of the sort of strategic issues that are of importance to governments. Another term for the largest scale of such phenomena is 'megatrends' – big, long lasting, internationally significant. The following have all been defined by one source or another as a megatrend or, in the view of this module, as strategic issues needing, by definition, strategic responses by governments:


- urbanisation – including city growth, rural depopulation, social order (and the need for a city like Dublin to take a strategic view of its housing provision)
- climate change – including energy and resource use, mitigation of the causes and adaptation to the effects (and the need for strategic responses to also take account of inequality and unemployment)
- changes in global economic power relationships – including globalisation, sovereign debt and supra-national institutions (such as the USA's interest in keeping open the Panama Canal, and the improving economic links between China and India)
- technological change – including ICT, robotics and artificial intelligence (and the need for a country to possess the highly specialist skills to run a nuclear energy programme)
- social change – including 'culture wars', feminism, human rights, extremism (and a country adopting a strategy to tackle terrorism)
- demographic change – including migration, population ageing and changing health demands.

All of these involve change of one form or another, all link in obvious and more subtle ways with the others, and all of them command the attention of governments and authorities at different levels. In this module we will be using the last of them – demography and population – as a case example to illustrate strategic planning and management actions in public policy. We begin with an introductory reading on the 'demographic transition'.



#### Reading 1.4

Please study the article on demographic transition by David Reher.

 Note in your reading the issues which relate most clearly to the policies and work of governments and public services within countries, as well as issues with a transnational dimension.

Reher (2011) 'Economic and social implications of the demographic transition'. *Population and Development Review*, 37 (Supplement), 11–23.

In this reading, Reher discusses how fertility (birth) and mortality (death) rates relate to each other in different societies at different times. At its

simplest, the demographic structure of a society is a function of the rate at which people are being born compared to how many are dying. In historical times worldwide, relatively high birth rates – *ie* the number of children being born per woman – produced a lot of new babies, but many died in infancy, and in general adults did not live very long either. In such circumstances, the overall size of the population was relatively stable – a lot of births counterbalanced by a lot of deaths in any given year.

The demographic ‘transition’ is a phenomenon which began in the early industrialising countries – the UK, Northern Europe, the USA, where mortality rates began to fall. Better public hygiene (particularly clean water), better health technologies and improved material circumstances brought fewer deaths, both amongst children, and for older people falling ill. The general pattern described by Reher is of a transition period where falling mortality took place while fertility remained at relatively high levels.

This situation led in many countries to rapid population growth for a period, with, in many cases, significant economic and social consequences. In most cases, after a period of time fertility rates also began to fall. New technologies and changes in social attitudes provided conditions where women became able to control their fertility, at the same time as the increased likelihood of survival meant that, to put it bluntly, fewer babies were needed to ensure continuity of the family. The end of the transition comes when fertility falls to low levels and more closely matches the mortality rate, event to the extent that in some countries, such as Japan, the population actually begins to fall.

Crudely, the transition pattern is shown in the following graphs.

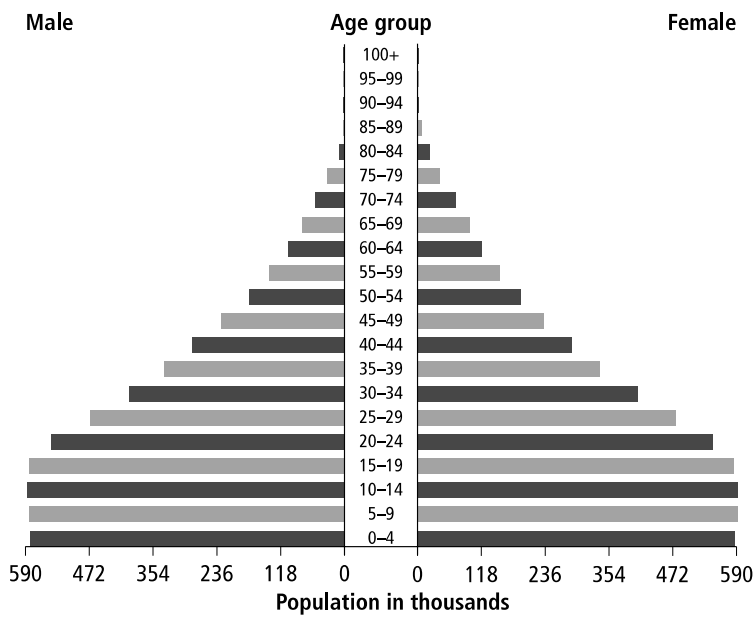
### **1. High fertility + high mortality = slow population growth**

This is the historical, pre-industrial situation which does not really exist any longer. While high fertility remains the case in many, particularly poor, countries, in most, mortality levels have fallen to allow population numbers to begin to grow. Haiti, with a 1.4% annual growth rate, is one of the closest to the historical pattern, as shown in the population pyramid below<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> A population pyramid illustrates the age and sex structure of a country's population and may provide insights about political and social stability, as well as economic development. The population is distributed along the horizontal axis, with males shown on the left and females on the right. The male and female populations are broken down into five-year age groups represented as horizontal bars along the vertical axis, with the youngest age groups at the bottom and the oldest at the top. The shape of the population pyramid gradually evolves over time based on fertility, mortality, and international migration trends. (CIA, 2016)

**Figure 1.1 Haiti, population per age group 2016**

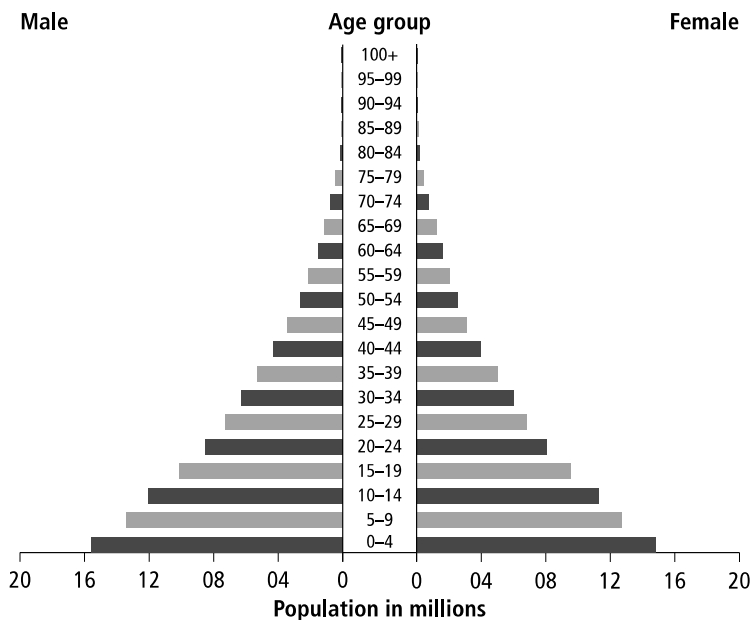


Source: CIA (2016)

**2. High fertility + reducing mortality = rapid population growth**

More usual amongst many poor countries is the situation where fertility remains high, but mortality has fallen, leading to the rapid growth in numbers identified by Reher as bringing the potential of a demographic dividend, a pattern visible in Nigeria, which has double Haiti’s growth rate at 2.8%.

**Figure 1.2 Nigeria, population per age group 2016**

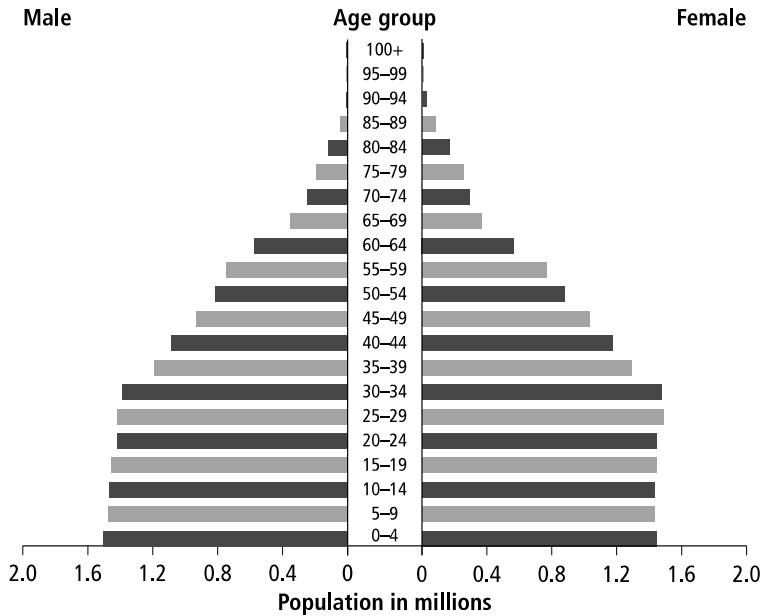


Source: CIA (2016)

### 3. Reducing fertility + low mortality = slowing population growth

Morocco by contrast displays the third stage where fertility is falling along with mortality, but with continued more moderate growth of 1.5%.

**Figure 1.3 Morocco, population per age group 2016**

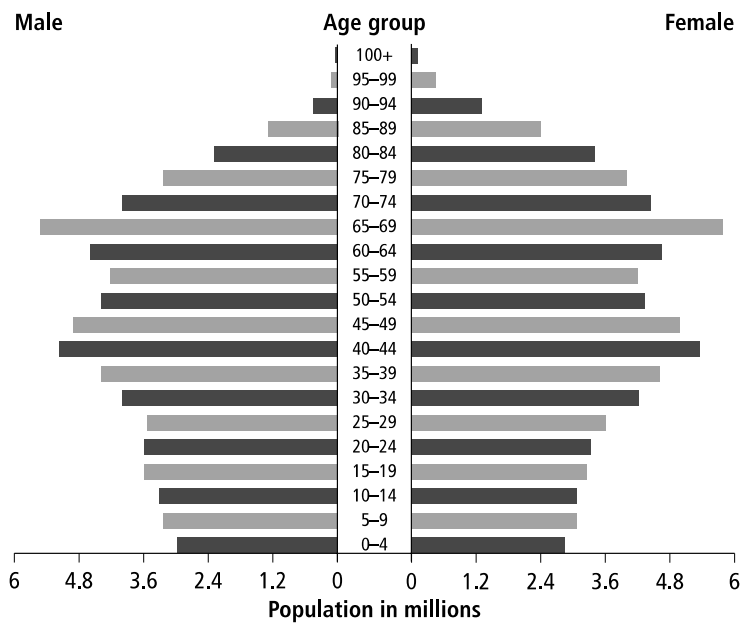


Source: CIA (2016)

### 4. Low fertility + low mortality = very low or negative population growth

The Japanese population pyramid illustrates the final stage of very low fertility and mortality, illustrating clearly how few children are being born compared to the numbers of women in peak ages for reproduction – Japan’s population is currently shrinking at 0.2% per year.

**Figure 1.4 Japan, population per age group 2016**



Source: CIA (2016)



Reher's article explores these issues in some depth, pointing out a number of economic and social (and hence) political implications within nation states. One area touched upon which has additional significance is the role of migration. All countries to a greater or lesser extent experience migration, whether it be the outmigration to North and South America from Southern Europe in the early 20th century, caused by unsustainable growth of population in poor rural areas, to in-migration into Northern Europe in recent years from poor young adults from middle Eastern and African countries with fast growing populations and low economic growth.

For governments and public policy, demography is therefore a quintessentially strategic issue:

- It is of a large scale – millions, if not billions of people, with their own motivations, beliefs, needs and aspirations.
- It is long lasting – the number of people and the ratios of different ages and genders changes over time, but slowly, and inexorably. Newly arrived migrants need to be accommodated in receiving countries, and bring with them their economic potential but also their fertility potential. Outmigration from 'sending' countries may deplete the numbers of the most productive and best educated citizens and lead to depopulation and eroded social and economic capital.
- Its implications are far reaching – affecting the potential of and demands on the economy; the need for health and care provision; the number of types of services of all sorts needed over time; the roles of and opportunities for different sorts of people; relationships between states.
- It is intrinsically connected to other major issues in complex and ever-changing ways – for example, many of the countries with the fastest growing populations are also those most likely to experience negative consequences from climate change such as desertification or rising sea levels.
- As we progress through the module we will be looking at specific demographic and population issues in more depth, exploring how governments have identified issues, adopted strategies, and sought to influence trends.

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## 1.5 Conclusion

This opening unit has attempted to show you the deep historical origins of the idea of strategy, rooted in sophisticated statecraft from a time of frequent conflict between political entities. You have seen how strategy is about planning how to achieve long-term goals in complicated circumstances, and how the idea has become adopted in the public sphere, even though on many occasions the goals of government arise from different pressures and challenges from warfare or commercial competition.

We have then gone on to consider similarities and differences between public and private strategic planning and management, and also noted that the distinction between the two is not always clear cut.

Finally we have noted that as well as being an operational idea, strategic issues as currently viewed imply and reinforce the idea of large scale and long duration. We have begun to explore the complexities and ramifications of something as simple as the natural process of new people being born and others dying.

In the next unit we look at the context within which strategic planning and management in the public sector takes place, and how the planning process takes it into account.

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