

Cruncher

'Feminised' democracies — a

By Rosa Brooks

When it comes to the demography of gender, the developed and developing worlds seem to be moving in opposite directions. What are the implications of this for global stability?

IN 1998, Francis Fukuyama published a short article in *Foreign Affairs* called *Women and the Evolution of World Politics*. He began with a gruesome tale of violence among male zoo chimpanzees ("toes and testicles littering the floor of the cage") and moved briskly into a socio-biological account of human conflict (men are naturally aggressive; women are nicer).

In prosperous Western democracies, Fukuyama went on, we can expect women to move into increasingly powerful political positions, bringing less aggressive conflict-resolution techniques with them. But in poorer, undemocratic states, aggressive males will continue to hog the power. This, Fukuyama speculated, may have national security implications. Will the "feminised" democracies of the future (call them "girlie states" in honour of Arnold Schwarzenegger) be

any match for states in "those parts of the world run by young, ambitious, unconstrained men"?

Fukuyama's crude generalisations about gender and aggression earned him a drubbing from the scholarly community. But he was right to worry about a future in which the globe is divided not merely by wealth but by the demographics of gender equality.

Consider two divergent global trends. The first, as Fukuyama suggested, can be seen mainly in the developed West, where women have made great strides towards achieving social, economic and political equality with men. In some historically male sectors, women are outperforming their male peers. Studies suggest that female investors earn "consistently higher returns" than male investors, for instance. Women will make up an estimated 58 percent of the entering class at US colleges next fall, and in Britain, women get more medical

and law degrees than men.

But a very different trend is shaping the developing world. In some societies, a resurgence of religious extremism is eroding women's gains. And in developing Asian states, where sons have traditionally been valued over daughters, many women are literally being

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erased from the demographic map.

Demographers call them the "missing women". Some are victims of female infanticide; some are aborted when ultrasounds reveal their sex; some die young because of poor nutrition and medical care. The result is increasingly skewed sex ratios in much of Asia. In China and India,

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— a glimpse into the future

which together account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population, there were 106 men for every 100 women in 2000, and the increasing availability of sex-selection technologies may further widen the gap. In 2002, for instance, China recorded 116 boys born for every 100 girls.

When it comes to the demography of gender,

traditional roles: back to home and hearth and away from parliament. That's not likely to be good because high levels of gender inequality correlate strongly with high levels of poverty and conflict.

Exacerbating the situation, cross-cultural research suggests that when a society finds itself with a "surplus" of young men — many of whom will be, of necessity, unmarried — it can expect higher rates of crime and conflict. And that conflict can spill outwards. Large groups of disaffected, unattached young males make notoriously good recruiting pools for terrorists and other militant groups. In the developed world, there's more to

cheer about. Because increased opportunity for women seems to translate into more prosperous and stable societies, what's not to like — unless you're Fukuyama — about a future in which the power elite may look more female than male?

Given the declining number of men seeking higher education, perhaps it will soon be women

who dominate public life, while men — less educated and less productive — will be relegated to the sidelines.

But a shortage of men — even just a relative shortage of men with the skills that lead to high earning power — can be as destabilising as a surplus of men. (A classic example is the African American community, in which black women's economic and educational gains have dramatically outpaced those of black men.)

Will all those undereducated first-world men of the future go contentedly home to change diapers while their high-powered wives run the world? Or will they engage in still unimaginable forms of global mischief?

Neither biology nor demography is destiny. Maybe we'll find some creative solutions: a boom in global match-making, perhaps, pairing high-achieving "surplus" Asian men with Western women. But unless we take the changing demographics of gender as seriously as we take other emerging global trends — such as weapons proliferation and climate change — the future could be as dangerous as a cage full of Fukuyama's furious male chimpanzees. **COURTESY LA TIMES**

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the developed and developing worlds seem to be moving in opposite directions. What are the implications of this for global stability?

In the developing world, things look bleak. When a society faces a shortage of women of reproductive age relative to the number of young males, social pressures push women into the most