Because of the inexorable power of demographics to shape the future, much about the story of human life on earth through 2050 has already been determined: births through 2010, working-age populations in 2030, and the elderly in 2050. The three figures that accompany the world map focus on the three most populous nations (China, India, and the United States) and the most populous nations of Africa, Latin America, and Western Europe (Nigeria, Brazil, and Germany).

2010–2030 WORKERS OF THE WORLD SHIFT
The working-age populations of 2030 have already been born. In that year, the populations of people between the ages of 20 and 59 will be larger in many countries than they were in 2010 but smaller in several important others.

FERTILITY FALLS
From 1950 through 2010, fertility rates fell sharply in most major countries, with the United States as a notable exception since 1980.

FEWER WORKERS IN RELATION TO ELDERS
Even in Brazil, India, and the United States, despite their growing working-age populations through 2050, the people of working age will account for declining fractions of the national populations by then because of their longer life spans.

THE RISE OF THE OLDEST OLD
In many countries, the skyrocketing populations of those 85 and older will have far fewer working-age people per capita on whom to depend.

GROWTHS AND DECLINES OF WORKING-AGE POPULATIONS, 2010–2050

SOURCES—For all illustrations on this spread: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision, medium variant. For map only: Global Demographic Change and Its Implications for Military Power, Libicki et al., RAND/MG-1091-AF, 2011, www.rand.org/t/MG1091. For only Taiwan on the map: United States Census Bureau, International Data Base.