



## Declining Birth Rates Should Worry Us All

**W**hen asked what keeps him awake at night, Elon Musk said America's declining birth rate. Falling birth rates in the U.S. and other developed countries should keep us all awake at night.

Since 2007, the birth rate in the United States has plummeted by 20 percent. This precipitous decline cannot be explained by demographic, economic or policy changes alone.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the postwar baby boom in 1964, the U.S. birth rate began a long period of decline. By 2001 the birth rate had begun to fall significantly, and then it went off a cliff starting in 2007. This trend is continuing and experts see no signs that it will be reversed.

Until 2001, falling birth rates in the U.S. and much of the developed world could reasonably be attributed to urbanization, women's expanded career opportunities and birth control. The sharper drop in the U.S. since 2007, while reflecting those general trends, suggests that something more is going on today. One explanation might be found in an anti-natalist attitude that arose among American elites since the Second World War and gradually permeated the broader culture, now finding its fullest expression among Gen Z youth.

### Population Implosion

**T**oday in 63 countries the size of the population has peaked and is in decline.<sup>2</sup> For a population to replace itself, the fertility rate needs to be at least 2.1 children born per woman. America's fertility rate is now 1.7 children born per woman and is expected to fall to 1.3 by the end of the decade.

The prospects are grimmer for other nations. Taiwan's fertility rate has fallen to 0.865. In Japan the rate is 1.21. In South Korea, where it is 0.72, the total population is expected to *decline by half* by the year 2100. Australia's fertility rate now stands at 1.6. Although fertility rates remain high in Africa, by 2100 97 percent of all countries

will have below-replacement rates if present trends continue. The only countries projected to have a rate exceeding 2.1 are Samoa, Somalia, Tonga, Niger, Chad and Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup>

The rapid drop in birth rates beginning in 2007 caught policymakers and demographers by surprise. Demographers had projected a continuing decline, but it has been much steeper than expected. As the younger population declines, the general population becomes older on average. By 2070 there will be more people in the world over 65 than under 25.

A disproportionately aged population creates serious social and economic problems. A rising older population means escalating costs and diminishing worker-paid tax revenues for seniors' health care, housing and general support. Dr. Natalia V. Bhattcharjee, the co-author of a University of Washington study, observes that the global population trends can be expected to "completely reconfigure the global economy and the international balance of power and will necessitate reorganizing societies."<sup>4</sup>

The dip in birth rates began in the 1960s with the introduction and widespread use of oral contraception—the vast chemical experiment on women commonly known as the Pill. This coincided with another great social change: Women poured into the work force. As young women increasingly pursued higher education and jobs and became less dependent on men financially, they postponed marriage and children. The older the woman, the lower her fertility.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Second Wave feminists devalued childbearing and homemaking.

Governments experiencing declines in fertility rates have responded through an array of policies to encourage having more children. These policies have included tax breaks, subsidies, mandated maternity and paternity leaves, and job protections for families having children. Such policies have generally produced minimal results.

Chinese authorities have proposed incentives to encourage couples to have more babies, including expanded maternity leave, financial and tax benefits for having children, and housing subsidies. More will be needed, though, to encourage births after decades of China's barbaric one-child policy. Previous habits die hard, and high housing prices, stagnant economic growth and a shortage of child care continue to depress childbearing in China as in many other nations.

For the last half decade or so, the South Korean government has been urging families to have more children. The government has invested the equivalent of billions of dollars to promote marriage and birth rates. New policies allowing expectant mothers to work reduced hours and new fathers to take extended parental leave were enacted. For the first time since 2015, South Koreans had more babies in 2024 than in the previous year. Still, elderly South Koreans outnumber the young. Whether the recent increase in births is a blip or the beginning of a reversal in population decline remains to be seen. South Korea still has one of the lowest birth rates of any nation.<sup>6</sup>

### Extreme Feminist Ideologies

One of the challenges to South Korea's pro-natalist policies has come from the militant South Korean feminist movement.<sup>7</sup> This movement is known as 4B and has attracted international attention. The 4B name comes from four Korean words beginning with "bi" (meaning "no"): bihon (no marriage), bichulsan (no childbirth), biyeonae (no dating) and bisekseu (no sex).

4B is an anti-heterosexuality movement that echoes American militant feminists such as Mary Daly, a tenured theology professor at Boston College who died in 2010. Daly espoused "a drastic reduction in the population of males" as an efficient way to effect a "decontamination of the Earth."<sup>8</sup> In her two widely read books, *Quintessence: Realizing the Archaic Future* (1998) and *Amazon Grace: Re-calling the Courage to Sin Big* (2006), she imagined voyages to the 2048 B.E. ("Biophilic Era"), where she communes with a like-minded tribe of unfettered lesbians, "Wild Women" on a "Lost and Found Continent." These fictional women discovered that they could impregnate themselves without males—an act supposedly repressed by the all-male Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the Second World War, a small group of men in philanthropic foundations, universities and government concluded that to avoid another global war over scarce land and resources, the rate of population growth needed to be reduced. These men called for population control through

artificial contraception. Foundations such as the Population Council, established by John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup>, helped establish family planning programs in Asia and later in Latin America.

### Origins of Anti-Natalist Culture

Other population-control advocates such as Hugh Moore, founder of the Dixie Cup paper cup manufacturer, promoted harsher and more coercive measures to reduce population growth—government-supported sterilization, assisted suicide, extra taxes on families with more than two children, and even the notion of contraceptives in public water supplies.

American elites within government and the private philanthropic sector joined with the United Nations and other international agencies to spread population-control programs, especially in Southeast Asia, from the 1950s to the 1970s. USAID population-control efforts under the fanatical Reimert Ravenholt came under fierce criticism by feminists for his agency's coercive policies in Southeast Asia, which included distribution of an intrauterine device banned in the U.S.

In the 1970s, abetted by Paul R. Ehrlich's 1968 book *The Population Bomb*, population-control advocates turned to environmental activism to warn the world of coming wars, famine and social unrest as consequences of overpopulation. Second Wave feminist activists further energized the population-control movement through demands for expanding abortion rights and gay rights.

These activist movements arose separately with their own histories and trajectories, but contributed to a growing anti-natalist culture. Their advocates shared a self-image as crusaders for a better and healthier world. While facing at times intense resistance in what became known as the culture war, they affected politics and gained influence in educational, media and cultural institutions.

What emerged was an anti-natalist ethos embedded in a hyper-individualized culture. Anti-natalism should be seen not merely as the hidden hand of vague social forces such as modernity and urbanization, but as a direct result of American elites pushing a cultural agenda. This agenda includes easy access to abortion and contraception, expansive sex education/indoctrination in the classroom, LGBTQ rights, and a mentality of entitlement to promiscuous sex without the need for marriage.

Gen Z (those born in the late 1990s or early 21<sup>st</sup> century) is now experiencing the full effects of this 75-year cultural shift.<sup>10</sup> Birth rates among women in their 20s have been

falling since the mid-1990s, accelerating in the Great Recession of 2008 and continuing during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the long, gradual decline in *teen* births in the U.S. during that period is a positive development, the same cannot be said for women in their 20s. Births have fallen for women both with and without college degrees and cannot be ascribed solely to economic factors. More young people, especially young women, simply don't consider marriage and children a high priority. *Only 45 percent of young women say they want to have kids at some point in their lives, while 57 percent of young men (between 18 and 25 years old) say they want to be fathers.*<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, marriage rates are dropping across demographic lines, with the exception of Asian Americans. *In 1950, close to 80 percent of American households were married couples. Since 2010 the share has fallen to around half.* In addition, men and women are marrying later on average—about age 30 for men and 29 for women.<sup>12</sup>

Attitudes toward this decline in marriage and childbirth break along political lines. Conservatives are worried about it, while only a fifth of liberals say it is worrisome.<sup>13</sup> Progressives who claim to care about “community” should be concerned. The fact is that married couples are much, much more involved in their communities than singles.<sup>14</sup> Married adults are far more likely to attend community meetings, undertake volunteer work, and visit a library. People who are married tend to be happier and healthier. And obviously, it is preferable for children to be raised by married parents. The U.S. percentage of births to unwed mothers is far too high—40 percent.

## Generation Z Culture

If a strong marriage rate is a measure of a happy and healthy community, prospects for Gen Z don't look good. Not only are Gen Zers postponing marriage; substantial numbers say they don't want to marry or have children at all.

Political polarization among the young has not helped matters. More than half of all single young women report that they will not date a Trump supporter, while nearly 4 in 10 young men (18-25 years old) say they are less likely to date someone who identifies as a feminist.<sup>15</sup> The latter preference may be prudent, but young non-feminist women can be hard to find, especially in large cities.

Some young women have become so extreme in their political filtering that they have taken vows of celibacy and identify as “self-partnered.”<sup>16</sup> This phenomenon is part of

the so-called “heteropessimism” movement, in which young women are declaring that heterosexual sex violates a woman's privacy, freedom and self-determination. This movement might be dismissed as silly, but, shockingly, 28.5 percent of Gen Z women identify themselves as LGBTQ+.<sup>17</sup>

Other factors that could be depressing rates of marriage and childbearing include the erosion of organized religion, high U.S. student debt and higher costs of housing and cars. There is also a wider smorgasbord of enticing ways for young adults to spend their time and money instead of on children, such as travel, entertainment, restaurants, gambling, gaming and online pornography. Children bring heavy costs in return for deferred gratification and profoundly satisfying, non-materialistic rewards.

Data might suggest that anti-natalist elites have won the cultural war. However, some within Gen Z are pushing back against the culture of isolation. By some measures, church attendance among Gen Z has begun to stabilize or increase, especially among young men. This is the case in the U.S. as well as the U.K.

Christianity offers an antidote to a culture in disarray. It will take prayer and evangelization by the whole Christian church for a counter-revolution to succeed. The young know that the current culture has failed them, and as they look for an alternative, Christ awaits with open arms.

The future of the world belongs to those who show up. To show up, they must first be born.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://econofact.org/the-mystery-of-the-declining-u-s-birth-rate>. The birth rate is the total number of live births in a year per 1,000 people in a population.

<sup>2</sup> These countries include 28 percent of the world's population. They include countries such as China, Germany, Japan and the Russian Federation. In 48 other countries the population is projected to peak within the next 30 years.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/11/global-birthrates-dropping>.  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/world-population-prospects-2024>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/focus/2025/03/07/south-koreas-baby-bump>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/15/4b-south-korea-feminist-movement-donald-trump-election-backlash>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://chicagoreader.com/arts-culture/mary-on-the-contrary/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/08/style/4b-movement.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://econofact.org/the-mystery-of-the-declining-u-s-birth-rate>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/shortreads/2024/02/15/among-young-adults-without-children-men-are-more-likely-than-women-to-say-they-want-to-be-parents-someday/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://usafacts.org/articles/state-relationships-marriages-and-living-alone-us/>;  
[https://uvamagazine.org/articles/the\\_marriage\\_crisis](https://uvamagazine.org/articles/the_marriage_crisis).

<sup>13</sup> <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-societal-cost-of-the-marriage-decline>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/10/marriage-and-divorce.html>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-romance-how-politics-and-pessimism-influence-dating-experiences/>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/16/style/women-trump-4b-movement-heteropessimism.html>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/611864/lgbtq-identification.aspx>.

## A Tribute to Cardinal Mindszenty on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Death

**T**his month we celebrate the life of Venerable Joseph (József) Cardinal Mindszenty, a man of courage and of God, who died on May 6, 1975. As Archbishop of Esztergom in Hungary from 1945 to 1973, and as a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and the Primate of Hungary, he stood heroically against fascism and communism.

During World War II, he was imprisoned by the pro-Nazi Hungarian government. When a Soviet puppet regime was imposed in his country following the war, he was arrested, tortured and given a life sentence because of his opposition to communism. Freed by the freedom fighters in the failed Hungarian uprising in 1956, he sought political asylum in the U.S. embassy in Budapest, where he was to live for the next 15 years. In 1971, he was allowed to leave the embassy to live in exile in Vienna, where he died four years later.

Having been declared “Venerable” by the Vatican in 2019, Cardinal Mindszenty is being considered for beatification (the next step on the path to sainthood) with strong support from the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Hungary as well as Hungary’s ambassador to the Holy See.

As Pope Pius XII asked crowds gathered on February 20, 1949 following the conviction of Cardinal Mindszenty in a show trial: “Do you want a Church that remains silent when She should speak; that diminishes the law of God where She is called to proclaim it loudly?” Cardinal Mindszenty refused to remain silent in the face of tyranny. At great personal cost, he proclaimed that the Church represented a higher law—God’s law—on earth.

This belief in a higher law and a transcendent order inspired the founders of the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation (CMF), whose work the Cardinal blessed, and continues to inspire the *Mindszenty Report*, now in its 67<sup>th</sup> year of publication.

*The Mindszenty Report fervently supports the beatification of Cardinal Mindszenty and encourages prayers for his intercession.* To attain beatification in his case, evidence of a miracle (typically an unexplained cure of an illness or infirmity), believed to result from his intercession, is needed.

On April 6 this year, Hungary’s new Consul General to Chicago, Balázs Martonffy, visited St. Louis, Missouri and met with CMF’s volunteer president, Liza Forshaw. They are pictured here in CMF’s office next to a bust of our namesake, Cardinal Mindszenty, a hero for all seasons.

Visit our website, [www.mindszenty.org](http://www.mindszenty.org), for more information about Cardinal Mindszenty, his letter blessing CMF’s work, CMF’s history, and our current activities including a speaker series at Saint Mary of Victories Church in St. Louis, where Cardinal Mindszenty celebrated Mass in 1974.



*Hungarian Consul General Balázs Martonffy in the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation’s office on April 6, 2025*

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