

## Failed States: The Demographics of Decline

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In 1798, alarmed by the squalor and turpitude of English slums, Thomas Malthus published a book whose implications have reverberated through the ages, conquering today's environmental movement, informing the cognitive architecture of most intellectuals since his time, and suffusing nearly everyone's assumptions about the effects of population growth. In his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, Malthus claimed that food resources could not keep up with the world's burgeoning population growth, generating shortages that would result in mass starvation. To address this portentous situation, Malthus made a recommendation that continues to endear him to the likes of contemporary abortion proponents and United Nations family-planning functionaries alike: Limit the reproductive activities of the lower classes so they do not produce more children than they can support. Absent that, expect famine, disease, and natural catastrophes to accomplish what "intelligent planning" does not—a natural thinning of the population to bring its numbers into sync with nature's resources. Indeed, it was for good reason that Thomas Carlyle characterized the supposed economics that buttressed such conclusions as "the dismal science."<sup>1</sup>

But how times have changed! Fast forward two hundred years to a January 2004 edition of the German weekly, *Der Spiegel*, whose cover depicts a muscular toddler doing a military press with a barbell weighted further with sixteen old Germans seated in comfortable positions from one weight plate to the other. The cover's headline reads, "The Last German—On the way

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<sup>1</sup> *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, "Thomas Robert Malthus," <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Malthus.html> (accessed September 20, 2014). See also Thomas Malthus, <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/malthus.html> (accessed September 20, 2014).

to an Old People’s Republic.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the once-mighty and frightening Reich was well selected because Germany has been losing population every year since 1972 and “now a united Germany is on schedule to become a retirement center, nursing home, and cemetery for the Germanic peoples,” Patrick Buchanan points out.<sup>3</sup> Nor is the once feared Fatherland alone. In fact, Germany is just one among several dozen developed countries that have gone through what demographic specialists refer to as the first demographic transition in global history—that is, a transformation from high fertility and high death rates to lower fertility and mortality rates.<sup>4</sup> Which means societies saturated with older folks shepherding a dwindling supply of toddlers, whose future, of course, involves supporting a multitude of geezers on a crumbling foundation of producing citizens. In short, we are seeing the global future and it looks like a menagerie of Floridas—specifically, *The Villages* (a retirement complex), run amok in a world filled with other countries whose populations are expanding exponentially, at least for now. Goodbye Europe, South Korea, and Japan; hello China, India, Africa, and South America. And that’s just for starters.

To explore these matters further requires a more thorough accounting of demographic trends around the world today, although most of our focus will be on the developed countries. Second, we shall explore reasons for what many scholars believe is a unique development in world history, where many nations simply are not reproducing themselves and are caught in a demographic death spiral. Third, we shall look at the consequences of such demographic trends; that is, what difference does it make whether or not a nation has a lot of babies. We shall

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<sup>2</sup> “The Last German,” *Der Spiegel*, Heft 2/2004, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/index-2004-2.html> (accessed September 23, 2014). See also Ben J. Wattenberg, *Fewer: How the New Demography of Depopulation Will Shape Our Future* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 103.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick J. Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2011), 171.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Yoshihara and Douglas A. Sylva, eds., *Population Decline and the Remaking of Great Power Politics* (Washington D.C.: Potomac, 2012), 8-10.

conclude that it makes a huge difference in world politics. Indeed, for many countries, it is literally a matter of life and death.

## TRENDS

Any discussion of population increases or declines must be set against the standard of what constitutes a fertility rate that replaces a population from one generation to the next. Demographers agree that this replacement rate is 2.1 children per woman over the length of her child-bearing years. That is, a fertility rate of less than 2.1 children per woman means that the population of a country is in decline, and anything over that figure means that the population is growing.<sup>5</sup> Without question, the most stunning development over the course of the past half century has been the birth dearth among developed countries especially, but even among those developing nations that have large populations, China, for instance. And in spite of Malthus, as well as Paul Erlich's 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, The Club of Rome's 1972 lugubrious report, *The Limits to Growth*, and Dan Brown's popular novel, *Inferno*, thoughtful scholars have rung alarm bells about the consequences of declining populations.<sup>6</sup>

For instance, Neil Lowe and Richard Jackson cite a number of recent works in the scholarly as well as popular literature that offer warnings about a world in which population is either declining, or, in the case of *Children of Men*, newcomers are nearly absent altogether. Often these expressions of anxiety are quite dramatic, as in the case of George Weigel, who asks: "Why is Europe committing demographic suicide, systematically depopulating itself?" in his *The*

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<sup>5</sup> Jack A. Goldstone, "A Theory of Political Demography," in *Political Demography*, eds. Jack A. Goldstone, Eric P. Kaufmann, and Monica Duffy Toft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jonathan V. Last, *What to Expect When No One Is Expecting* (New York: Encounter, 2013), 4.

<sup>6</sup> A pair of preposterous modern versions of Malthus were published within the last century: Paul R. Erlich and David Brower, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968); and Donella H. Meadows, et. al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe, 1972), otherwise known as *The Club of Rome Report*. A very recent and popular work of fiction inspired by Malthus and likely the above as well is Dan Brown, *Inferno* (New York: Anchor, 2013).

*Cube and the Cathedral*.<sup>7</sup> A sampling of similar titles conveys the degree of concern about the fate of the earth, demographically speaking, especially that part occupied by Europeans: *France is Falling*, *Can Germany Be Saved? The Last Days of Europe*, and dealing with the matter about who would replace the dwindling natives, Christopher Caldwell’s *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West*.<sup>8</sup>

Fertility Rates, Population 1950-2050 (in Thousands),  
And Onset of Population Decline<sup>9</sup>

|                | Fertility Rate | Population in 1950 | Population in 2010 | Population in 2050 (projected) | Onset of population decline |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| China          | 1.77           | 550,771            | 1,341,335          | 1,303,424                      | 2029                        |
| France         | 1.89           | 41,832             | 62,787             | 71,348                         | 2050                        |
| Germany        | 1.32           | 68,376             | 82,302             | 68,560                         | 2006                        |
| India          | 2.76           | 371,857            | 1,224,614          | 2,019,849                      |                             |
| Japan          | 1.27           | 82,824             | 126,536            | 99,689                         | 2008                        |
| Russia         | 1.37           | 102,702            | 142,958            | 114,125                        | 1992                        |
| United Kingdom | 1.84           | 50,616             | 62,036             | 70,425                         | 2050                        |
| United States  | 2.09           | 157,813            | 310,384            | 402,072                        |                             |

*United Nations, World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision  
Constant Fertility Variant*

It is not just the European countries, however, that have been affected by demographic decline; Japan offers what Mark Steyn has referred to as “the demographic death spiral in its

<sup>7</sup> Neil Howe and Richard Jackson, “Demography and Geopolitics: Understanding Today’s Debate in Its Historical and Intellectual Context,” in *Political Demography*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Caldwell, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* (New York: Anchor, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Sarah Yoshihara and Douglas A. Sylva, “Introduction,” in *Population Decline*, 4. For the 2012 Revision, see [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012\\_HIGHLIGHTS.pdf](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2012_HIGHLIGHTS.pdf) (accessed September 23, 2014).

purest form.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the numbers couldn’t be grimmer or more instructive for the depression into which the country descended during the 1990s, and from which it has not yet completely recovered. Thus, a common explanation for that economic downturn dredged up the usual rogues’ gallery of excessive protectionism and political cronyism joining the standard litany of abuses by special interest groups, all conspiring to throw sludge into what had been regarded a scant decade earlier as a perfectly well-functioning economic machine. But these things are always present in any economic system, to varying degrees; what had changed was not the economics but the demographics. Steyn, again: “It’s not the economy, stupid. It’s the stupidity, economists—the stupidity of thinking you can ignore demography.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Japan is experiencing what Richard Jackson and Neil Howe characterize as a perfect storm of greatly declining fertility, significantly increasing life expectancy, and negligible net immigration.<sup>12</sup> The result is a birthrate that is described by the United Nations as “unprecedented in human history.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, in 2006, the country’s National Institute of Population and Social Security Research estimated that by mid-century Japan will have shed over thirty million citizens, bringing its population down to 95 million, of which a whopping 39.6 percent will be sixty-five or older.<sup>14</sup> The country is literally running out of human capital to keep its economy running and its society functioning at anything like a normal level, at least by standards that predated its precipitous fertility decline.

How are ordinary Japanese reacting to such projections of gloom? The answer is with a mixture of frustration and inventiveness. On the frustration front, a Japanese government official

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Steyn, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2006), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Steyn, *America Alone*, 4. See also Phillip Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity And What To Do About It* (New York: Basic, 2004), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Cited by Toshi Yoshihara, “Strategic Implications of Japan’s Demographic Transition,” in *Population Decline*, 139.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Yoshihara, “Strategic Implications,” 138.

<sup>14</sup> Yoshihara, “Strategic Implications,” 138.

once quipped, half seriously, that the country should deport its senior citizens to the Philippines, where they would supposedly receive better care from that country's large "youth bulge."<sup>15</sup>

Much of the time Japanese commentators inveigh against *parasaito shinguru*, or "parasite singles," who typically live with their parents, travel abroad extensively, dress well in designer clothes, vacation at the best hotels and resorts, enjoy socializing with their friends, but remain single and childless throughout their lives. Since only about nine percent of Japanese mothers report enjoying their children and status as mothers, who could blame such an enormous cohort of Japanese women who prefer to avoid the rigors of child-bearing and raising?<sup>16</sup>

Further, the Japanese are nothing if not inventive, and in the meantime many have conjured a variety of substitutes for children when they have finished partying away their lives, working at Mitsubishi, and are now enjoying their retirement years. The country's resourceful toymakers have discovered alternative markets for a population where there are few children but a lot of oldsters—the "Yumel," a doll equipped with over twelve hundred phrases to provide comfort and companionship to those myriads of elderly who never had children of their own. Indeed, not surprisingly, the Japanese lead the world in robotics technology. Still, however, hugging a robot doll cannot substitute for the real thing, and demographic trends indicate that the Japanese will pay frightfully for the children their young people today decided never to have.

In Japan's giant neighbor, China, the opposite would seem to be the problem, in that the middle kingdom is often described in terms of its "teeming masses" or "hordes of humanity." In fact, however, China has demographic problems of its own, largely stemming from the genocidal population program instituted in the 1970s, described by some Chinese scholars as "probably the

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<sup>15</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 51.

largest social experiment in human history.”<sup>17</sup> An experiment to do what? Prior to Deng Xiaoping’s one-child policy instituted in 1979, Chinese fertility rate was 5.9 children per female. The one-child program succeeded, all right; beyond anyone’s wildest imaginations, so that by 2011 the birthrate had plummeted to 1.54, well below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman during her lifetime.<sup>18</sup> And regardless of the images conjured by “throngsof-humankind” concept associated with China, birthrates in some of the country’s largest cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin are at, what demographers describe, as the “lowest low” of about 1.13.<sup>19</sup> Some Chinese have boasted that since 1979, the communist government has prevented the births of some 400 million new citizens, which is a measure of success, of sorts.

But this accomplishment has come with a huge price tag, resulting in what demographer Xiaochun Qiao has referred to as a “4-2-1” society, where, given China’s totally inadequate social security system, a single child is expected to support two parents and four grandparents.<sup>20</sup> It gets worse: Preventing the births of some 400 million children has also meant the tendency to abort female babies under the assumption that they are less valuable and less able to function in the 4-2-1 society than males. The result has been a surplus of males in Chinese society, sometimes to grotesque proportions, in that there are some 51.3 million men without the prospects of finding mates.<sup>21</sup> One might think that such a ratio would put young women at a premium, and in a macabre sort of fashion this is true. Prostitution has increased, along with attendant destructive diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and chlamydia, and renewed trafficking in women has seen gangs kidnapping females from nearby countries to put up for sale in China.

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Gordon C. Chang, “The Geopolitical Consequences of China’s Demographic Turmoil,” in *Population Decline*, 160.

<sup>18</sup> Chang, “Geopolitical Consequences,” 160.

<sup>19</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Chang, “Geopolitical Consequences,” 160.

However one looks at this quandary, when it is combined with the projected increase in oldsters—given the country’s inadequate retirement program one hesitates to call them “retirees”—China is facing the problem of getting old before getting rich. At least its neighbors South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan are better situated because of their wealth to deal with a huge bulge of old people in their midst. But China, regardless of the hype associated with its stunning economic growth over the past quarter century, is literally aborting away its future.

Nor has it been alone in doing so. China’s even larger neighbor, geographically, at least, has been exterminating its citizens since the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. Indeed, Alexander Solzhenitsyn once estimated that the regime had killed some 66 million of its citizens between 1917 and 1959.<sup>22</sup> As if that were not enough, the average Russian woman had by the 1970s four abortions during her lifetime; by the end of the regime, 70% of pregnancies ended in abortion, and a Russian male who managed to avoid that fate and was born in 2000 can expect to live to 58.9 years.<sup>23</sup> It gets worse: “It is not surprising... to read that about 50 percent of sixteen-year-old males in Russia do not survive until age sixty,” which puts Russians roughly in the same category as citizens of Bangladesh.<sup>24</sup> And for the worst reasons: poor health. Murray Feshbach reports that Russian statistics on tuberculosis have reached epidemic proportions and it is the only country in Europe to rank among the two dozen or so worst places on earth for this horrible disease. Further, AIDS related deaths in the Russian Federation range from 35,000 to 65,000 per year, and rising.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, on the maternity front, even Russian statistics—never known as being the most reliable in the world—reveal that 80% of all pregnancies are afflicted with some kind of

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<sup>22</sup> The mortality figures associated with Stalin’s murderous regime are all over the map, and Solzhenitsyn’s number is, of course, on the high side. For a variety of estimates, see <http://necrometrics.com/20c5m.htm> (accessed September 26, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Steyn, *America Alone*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Feshbach, “Population and Health Constraints on the Russian Military,” in *Population Decline*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Feshbach, “Population and Health Constraints,” 81.



pathological condition on the way to childbirth, leaving only 30% of newborns who enter their gloomy world in relatively “healthy” condition.<sup>26</sup> In short, adding disease to a disastrously low fertility rate among Russian women produces a demographically declining country that is in possession of a huge cache of nuclear weapons—an incendiary combination, especially in light of Vladimir Putin’s unabashedly aggressive moves against countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union.

This is the last accusation in the world that one could make against Russia’s European neighbors—military aggression—for the excellent reason that France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and other countries in the European Union simply don’t have the numbers, much less the will, to contemplate military operations anywhere. As Phillip Longman points out, “Never in the past—not even after the plagues of the 1300s, or the slaughter of the last two world wars—has Europe’s ability to renew and sustain its population been more compromised by a dwindling supply of youth.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, having a fertility rate of 1.4 or below, which describes Italy’s situation, results in halving a population in about fifty years, or less. Or, consider the situation of Poland, whose fertility rate hovers around 1.32, which, if continued at this rate, will reduce its current population of 38 million to about 16.4 million by the end of the century.<sup>28</sup> Which means, further, that diminishing numbers of Europeans will grow up without any brothers or sisters, or aunts and uncles—only parents and perhaps grandparents as well. Without question, one of the reasons European countries, with the exception of Russia, which falls into a sort of hybrid category, are so pacific is that young men and women, but males especially, are at a premium. Why waste precious progeny in a military adventure in some god-forsaken hellhole in Asia or

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<sup>26</sup> Feshbach, “Population and Health Constraints,” 84.

<sup>27</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 62.

<sup>28</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 9; Douglas A. Sylva, “Europe’s Strategic Future and the Need for Large-Family Pronatalism,” in Yoshihara and Sylva, *Population Decline*; David Coleman, “The Changing Face of Europe,” in *Political Demography*.

Africa for the sake of supporting an abstraction, such as a kind of international or regional order? When the “average” or typical family consists of two parents and one child, such a prospect is sheer madness.

Except, perhaps for the United States, which, as Susan Yoshihara points out, may be demographically exceptional.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the total fertility rate (TFR) of the United States hummed along nicely reaching a peak of 3.8 in 1957, only to plunge below replacement levels in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and to recover by 2006 after a period of thirty-five years below 2.1.<sup>30</sup> Throughout all this the American population has increased from 179.3 million fifty years ago to 308.7 million, according to the 2010 U.S. census, and is expected to continue to rise throughout the century, until perhaps leveling out in congruence with global population stability by the end of the century.<sup>31</sup> Although such figures are robust compared to the relatively anemic European fertility rates, the data for America needs to be “unpacked” in ways to make it more understandable. Thus, as Jonathan Last points out, though a TFR of 1.93 in 2008 is pretty respectable—the numbers vary depending on the agency doing the calculating—African-American women had a TFR of 1.96, while white women’s rate was 1.79.<sup>32</sup> The national average is augmented by Hispanic women who have an average of 2.35 babies. Indeed, “to put it more starkly, between 2000 and 2010, the *total* population of the United States increased by 27.3 million yet more than half of *the entire increase* came just from Hispanics,” through higher fertility rates and immigration.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, white women college graduates have a TFR of 1.78, and those with graduate degrees can boast of a TFR of little higher than 1.61.<sup>34</sup> These

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Yoshihara, “American Demographic Exceptionalism and the Future of U.S. Military Power,” in *Population Decline*.

<sup>30</sup> Yoshihara, “American Demographic Exceptionalism,” 115.

<sup>31</sup> Yoshihara, “American Demographic Exceptionalism,” 116; Last, *What to Expect*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 16 (Italics in original).

<sup>34</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 6.

numbers are congruent with what women report as an ideal family size. For instance, in 2011 some 58 percent of women reported that they regarded an ideal family size as consisting of one or two children, or no children at all. In fact, 20.4 percent of women had no children; 16.9 percent gave birth to one child; and 34.4 percent had two children.<sup>35</sup> “All told, 71.7 percent of women wound up with small, or no, families.”<sup>36</sup> Clearly, this is a far cry from the image of households bustling with aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, grandparents, and most of all, children, that often accompany popular depictions of what constitutes a “healthy” family get-together during a holiday season. Think here less, *The Brady Bunch*, and more, the bizarre shenanigans of *Friends*. In between these two is something like *Happy Days*, with its comfortable four-member family, which, with or without the Fonz, seems to hover around what a majority of Americans regard as a “normal”-sized family unit. The question is why so many in the developed world remain stuck at that level or less.

## CAUSES

Answers to this question depend on what part of the world one is talking about. Ben J. Wattenberg did a quick tour of the globe and concluded that Japanese women are more committed to feminism than to having children, and that in any event, men don’t want to spend time shopping with their girlfriends—whatever that means; Italian men prefer to live at home well into their thirties, as “mama’s boys”; Germans would just as soon avoid being around their own *kinderfichlekeit*, and anyway unemployment is too high throughout Europe, birthing the conclusion that there are simply too many people; Eastern Europe is still traumatized by its long Soviet occupation, which keeps its TFR to only about half of replacement rate; Russia suffers

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<sup>35</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 17.

from a health and sinking morale crisis—no sense bearing children under such circumstances; and, Canada, especially French Canadians, now have fewer children because they have forgotten their once ambitious demographic plan to take over the entire dominion via high birthrates.<sup>37</sup> And that’s just a sampling.

Other explanations point to cultural influences. For instance, Phillip Longman reports that there is a relationship between the numbers of hours Brazilian women watch *telenovelas* (soap operas) and the number of children they will bear. Apparently the cultural message is strong: “The men are dashing, lustful, power hungry, and unattached. The women are lithesome, manipulative, independent, and in control of their own bodies. The few who have young children delegate their care to nannies.”<sup>38</sup> In short, who wants to live with a household filled with children when your role models lead telegenic lives that are impossible to conceive with a bunch of kids dominating their environment?

But in spite of a cultural statement like this from Brazil—which, after all, seems a long ways away from first world countries—many European governments believe they have a better explanation for low birthrates, based on something called the “gap policy.”<sup>39</sup> It goes like this: There is a gap between the number of children that European women report they would like to have and the number they actually have. The role of government is to “fill the gap” by instituting policies that reduce potential child-bearers their “fear of the future,” and give birth to the actual number of children they believe constitutes an ideal family size—about 2.3 children per family,

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<sup>37</sup> Wattenberg, *Fewer*, 28-29.

<sup>38</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 32. It is hard to estimate, or perhaps overestimate the influence of cultural products, especially television, on what constitutes a “normal” family situation, or any family situation at all. I am informed by several mothers of young children that too many programs where children play the central role also depict parents as idiots. It’s hard to get enthusiastic about having children in a cultural setting where oldsters are shown as fools who defer to their children for sources of wisdom and guides to behavior.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas A. Sylva, “Europe’s Strategic Future and the Need for Large-Family Pronatalism,” in *Population Decline*, 102.

somewhat above replacement rate.<sup>40</sup> The European Commission explains all this in the following fashion: “The low fertility rate is the result of obstacles to private choices: late access to employment, job instability, expensive housing and lack of incentives (family benefits, parental leave, child care, equal pay).”<sup>41</sup> Of course, this is a very convenient explanation, because it simply means that governments across Europe should continue to do all the things that they want to do or are inclined to do anyway, which includes providing cash grants for having additional children, allowing for maternity as well as paternity leave, create accommodating work schedules, and so forth. In short, expand the social safety net and expect that women will come gushing forth with new Europeans to take the place of their parents.

Except it hasn't happened that way, which gives rise to the inevitable question, why not? Again, culture enters the arena of choice, in that it seems after a generation of low fertility outcomes, population expectations have been altered in such a fashion that it seems normal to have a family that consists of only two parents and one or two children. This puts the generally pronatalist government officials throughout Europe in a quandary, in that they may sensibly ask the question, what more could they possibly do to change the situation? The answer to that question is discouraging: not much, since what they're doing is based on the assumption that women want to be in the workplace as much as men, and that having children constitutes an impediment to that goal. In fact, however, as Tony Fahey and Zsolt Spéder point out, the only statistically significant relationship involving high fertility rates among European women is the actual desire for having larger families, and that government policies geared toward career women really don't matter that much.<sup>42</sup> Which means further that all women—perhaps most—

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<sup>40</sup> Sylva, “Europe’s Strategic Future,” 101.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Sylva, “Europe’s Strategic Future,” 101.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Fahey and Zsolt Spéder, “Fertility and Family Issues in an Enlarged Europe,” *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, 1, cited in Sylva, “Europe’s Strategic Future,” 111.

are not like men and also that not all women are alike in their desires and goals in life. On this matter, Douglas Sylva concludes: “To shift the gap policy to target family-oriented women might entail that European governments recognize men and women are different, that some women do not want to pursue the same career paths as men, that some women want to be homemakers and mothers as their principal vocation, that single-income families must be able to afford three or more children, [and] that marriage may be more conducive to large-family outcomes than cohabitation...”<sup>43</sup> In other words, European governments would have to jettison their cherished views about feminism and multiculturalism, along with some basic tenets of the welfare state, which none of them seems inclined to do. From all this we may expect European birthrates to remain in the below-replacement level doldrums until the continent’s project of depopulating itself to impotence is completed by the end of the century.

All of which amounts further to the conclusion that the effects of government policies contribute to lower fertility rates as much as the culture throughout the country. That is, although it is the ostensible goal of the welfare state to remove impediments to heightened fertility, practically everything a government does to provide its citizens with cradle-to-grave security produces disincentives to have children, because whether or not a woman wants to have children, she certainly doesn’t need them. If nearly every conceivable requirement for an individual to lead a life, productive or otherwise, is aggrandized by some government program, why should anyone want to have children?

Consider Social Security, for instance. It used to be the case, for humankind’s entire history, that children were necessary to provide for their parents’ needs during old age, in physical, often social, and certainly financial terms. But since the institution of Social Security during the 1930s and Medicare during the 1960s, this basic fact of human life over the millennia

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<sup>43</sup> Sylva, “Europe’s Strategic Future,” 112.

changed dramatically, in that children are no longer needed to fulfill their former social and family responsibilities; the government now does it for them, especially in a financial sense. Furthermore, Social Security and Medicare have become so extraordinarily expensive, that men and women who pay for these programs during their productive years have less left over to raise and support their own families. In fact, Jonathan Last points out that studies “trying to isolate their effects suggest that Social Security and Medicare actually suppress the fertility rate by a staggering 0.5 children per woman. Put simply, these programs are sowing the seeds of their own destruction.”<sup>44</sup> This sobering conclusion has been common knowledge among economists for decades, usually associated with the word “unsustainable.” *The 2013 Index of Dependence on Government* produced by the Heritage Foundation provides a stark summary with regard to the effects of just one program, Social Security: “To break even, Social Security needs at least 2.9 workers to pay taxes for each retiree who receives benefits. The current ratio is 3.3 workers per retiree and dropping because the baby boomers produced fewer children than their parents did and have begun to reach retirement. The ratio will reach 2.9 workers per retiree around 2015 and drop to two workers per retiree in the 2030s.”<sup>45</sup> In short, the family burden on this dwindling number of workers has been increasing at precisely the time when raising children has become more expensive than ever.

How expensive? Children under such circumstances have become a burden, or an expensive luxury. A *very* expensive luxury. Indeed, Phillip Longman posits a situation where a DINK couple—Double Income No Kids—decide to have a baby when they’re a couple of years

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<sup>44</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> David B. Muhlhausen and Patrick Tyrrell, *The 2013 Index of Dependence on Government*, Heritage Foundation Web site, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/11/the-2013-index-of-dependence-on-government> (accessed October 7, 2014).

into their marriage.<sup>46</sup> How much will it cost to raise this child from infancy through the college years? Longman and Jonathan Last crunch the numbers in such a case, by adding up figures that include housing, food, transportation, clothing, health care, education, plus a host of miscellaneous expenses, and the opportunity cost of wages not earned if the DINKs decide on a one-earner family, and come up with a figure approaching 1.1 million dollars.<sup>47</sup> Reminder: That's just for one child, though without question, economies of scale kick into operation for the second or third child. At all events, these figures obviously refer only to the financial part of the child-raising experience; the glories, pleasures, heartbreaks, and exasperations along the way aren't reflected by this number, as anyone who has raised children knows. But the bottom financial line is that anyone who contemplates a family is squeezed between the costs of supporting the previous generation through higher taxes, on the one hand, and the egregious amount of resources required by raising a child or two, on the other. The result? A lower birthrate and fewer children.

Of course, all this begs the question about having any choice in the matter to begin with, which is where modern science in the form of the birth control pill becomes relevant, along with a sea change in the culture; the first prevents pregnancy and the second permits ending it if a woman is expecting "by mistake." How many births has the birth control pill prevented? Impossible to know, other than offering incidental data on how many women actually have used it, and this figure climbs to 82% among females who are sexually active.<sup>48</sup> About the number of abortions that have taken place since the Supreme Court's monumental 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, a bit more precision is permitted: Somewhere in the neighborhood of 56 or 57 million

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<sup>46</sup> Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 72, 81-85.

<sup>47</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 55.



babies have been aborted during this period of time.<sup>49</sup> Both developments—The Pill and abortions—reflect a very great change in the culture, of course. Gone are the days of the “shotgun wedding,” where unplanned premarital pregnancies are rushed into early marriages. We have been living in the Brave New World of Planned Parenthood with or without marriage and the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), or Pro-Choice America.<sup>50</sup> However you spell it, the result has been the same: fewer babies, lowered fertility rates.

This trend becomes especially more pronounced when taking into consideration a number of other factors that contribute to the decrease in births over the past half-century. One of these, noted earlier, is the level of education that women have, in that the more highly educated tend to have fewer children than those with less education.<sup>51</sup> Another is degree of religiosity in the population, in that the more religiously observant tend to have more babies than their secular counterparts.<sup>52</sup> What this means, of course, is that the increasing secularization of the culture results in lower birth rates. Indeed, Biblical parallels here are hard to resist: Rodney Stark in his review of the rise of Christianity makes the point that one of the reasons that Christianity succeeded in the late Roman Empire is that Christians simply outbred their pagan competitors, and furthermore, did not kill their newborns.<sup>53</sup> And certainly they believed in marriage, which is one of the institutions that attempts to regulate sexual behavior and encourage the propagation of sons and daughters to carry on the family line. Today, by contrast, one may enjoy the pleasures of sexual encounters simply by “shacking up” without any intention to marry, and if the encounter produces an unwanted pregnancy, the woman may always get an abortion.

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<sup>49</sup> Life News Web Site, <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/01/18/55772015-abortion-in-america-since-roe-vs-wade-in-1973/> (accessed October 7, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Pro Choice Web site, <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/about-us/> (accessed October 7, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 47; Longman, *Empty Cradle*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Eric P. Kaufmann and Vegard Skirbekk, “‘Go Forth and Multiply’: The Politics of Religious Demography,” in *Political Demography*, 194-210.

<sup>53</sup> Cited by Kaufmann and Skirbekk, “Go Forth and Multiply,” 202.

Such is the case with what demographers have referred to as the Second Demographic Transition, augmenting the first one, which entailed lower mortality and lower fertility rates and a situation where parents did their best to maximize life's prospects for the smaller number of children they had. So at least children mattered in this scheme, especially given the concept of duty among religiously observant parents to continue their family lines; further, children constituted the center of their parents' lives, hopes, and dreams. But this is not the case with the Second Transition, in that the self-actualization and individual development of adults is taken as primary and having children simply constitutes another way that two people have to express themselves. In short, the kids have no particular meaning or moral weight independent of their parents' desire to propagate for their own self-regarding purposes.<sup>54</sup> And after all, who wants to return to the days when marriage was described by Betty Friedan as a "comfortable concentration camp," where mothers did the housework, cooking, and raised the three or four children, while the husbands worked and dominated family decision-making?<sup>55</sup>

In short, a plethora of causes stemming from the effects of government policies along with significant cultural changes in the developed as well as some countries in the developing world conspire to produce situations where populations are seriously declining, or on the verge of declining, to the point where fertility rates become an existential question. This prognosis, of course, renders superfluous, indeed, dangerous, the classic alarmism of Malthus as well as the more recent apocalyptic screeds about "overpopulation" of the past fifty years or so. The question remains what difference all this makes to the countries most affected by the demographic transitions that have overtaken much of the world during the past century.

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<sup>54</sup> Last, *What to Expect*, 93; David Coleman, "The Changing Face of Europe," in *Political Demography*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> For a sampling of quotable Friedan comments, see <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/809732-the-feminine-mystique> (accessed October 8, 2014). Her first chapter in *The Feminine Mystique* offers a scathing review of American family life in the 1950s and early 1960s.

## CONSEQUENCES

In his essay on “America’s Golden Years?” Mark L. Haas cites an interesting anecdote about how the governor of the Ulyanovsk region in Russia in 2007 tried to encourage population growth by awarding a sport utility vehicle, along with other prizes, to those couples who had produced a child nine months after taking advantage of a “family contact day.” Which illustrates a point made earlier, that some governments will do almost anything to encourage their populations to reproduce, not only because low fertility rates threaten ultimate extinction, but also because the populations in the developed countries are aging rapidly.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, as Haas pointed out, “Never before has humanity witnessed such dramatic, widespread aging in the world’s most powerful states.”<sup>57</sup> Just a sprinkling of data drawn from the United Nations Population Division offers some devastating news to the former and current great powers of the world. Consider Japan’s gloomy situation again, for instance. By the year 2050, 35.6% of the Japanese population will be over the age of 65, and the median age of the entire country will be a stunning 52.3 years—in short, a few years above what is traditionally understood as “middle aged.” Figures for other great powers are equally disturbing. Thus, the percentage of those over age 65 for Germany by mid-century will be 30.9; for China and France, about a quarter of the population will be 65 years of age or older.

The figures get worse when one continues with reviewing median age data of other countries. Thus, the median age of China and Germany by mid-century will be close to 49 years; for France, Russia, and the United Kingdom, the figure hovers around 43 years of age, and for the rather more fortunately situated United States, around 40 years of age.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, as we have seen, discussing demographic data on fertility rates and aging always generates descriptive

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<sup>56</sup> Mark L. Haas, “America’s Golden Years? U.S. Security in an Aging World,” in *Political Demography*, 49-62.

<sup>57</sup> Haas, “America’s Golden Years?” 51.

<sup>58</sup> These data are drawn from Haas, “America’s Golden Years.”

terminology such as “unprecedented,” “unsustainable,” “jaw-dropping,” “catastrophic,” and words to the effect of “never before has humanity witnessed such extraordinary population developments.” There’s a sense in which the population doomsayers were right, but in completely the opposite direction, of course. The question is what difference does this make.

For one thing, a decrease in fertility accompanied by an increase in aging generates a thinner “middle part” of the population distribution that comprises a nation’s workforce, those aged between 15 and 64. China, Germany, Russia, and Japan are all expected to experience a dramatic decline in their workforce by 2050, contributing to a lowered Gross Domestic Product, unless productivity somehow makes up for the difference between fewer workers and higher expectations and requirements for economic output. But the basic point remains. As Adam Smith stated in his *Wealth of Nations*, “The most decisive mark of prosperity of any country is the increase of the number of its inhabitants.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, the problem is worse than that because the elderly tend to be more conservative in their investments, more risk-averse, more likely to extract resources from the economy rather than contributing to it, and less innovative in their social output. In short, in the developed world, they’re living off their savings. And in countries such as China, where oldsters in urban areas have no more than a single year’s savings for their “retirement,” the pressure on the Chinese government is very heavy, especially considering its 4-2-1 predicament, cited earlier.<sup>60</sup>

Second, if one thought that raising children is expensive, which it is as we have seen, then preserving the elderly in the lifestyles they desire is even more costly. Consider the

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Last, *What to Expect*, 36.

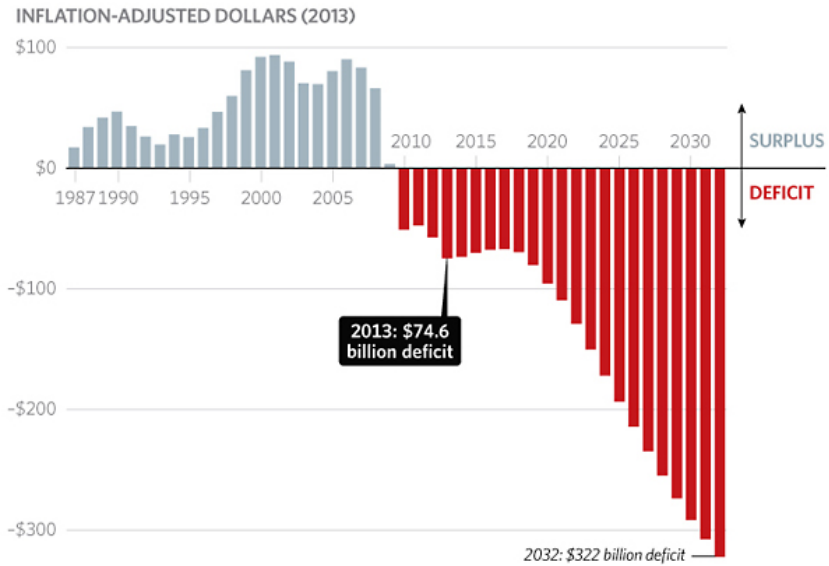
<sup>60</sup> Haas, “America’s Golden Years?” 54.

American Social Security System, a very popular but expensive program devoted mostly to the elderly, and the extent to which the system itself is in deficit:<sup>61</sup>

CHART 1

**Social Security Deficits Are Permanent and Set to Quadruple in Fewer than 20 Years**

*Social Security began running deficits in 2010, paying out nearly \$50 billion more in benefits than the program received in payroll taxes. Without reforms, Social Security's deficits will rise rapidly and will quadruple in fewer than 20 years.*



**Sources:** Social Security Administration, "Financial Data for a Selected Time Period," 1987-2012, <http://www.ssa.gov/oact/ProgData/allOps.html> (accessed April 3, 2014); and Social Security Administration, "The 2013 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds," Table VI.F7.—Operations of the Combined OASI and DI Trust Funds, May 31, 2013, <http://www.ssa.gov/oact/tr/2013/tr2013.pdf> (accessed April 3, 2014).

BG 2906 heritage.org

Further, Social Security is not the only government program relying on our familiar pantheon of shock-based adjectives that center on the “unsustainability” of it all. Medicare, another popular program devoted exclusively to the elderly, combines with Social Security as one of the principal drivers of America’s notorious deficits, both of which have exploded in recent years, as indicated

<sup>61</sup> Romina Boccia, “How Social Security Works in 2014,” Backgrounder #2906 on Retirement Security, Heritage Foundation Web site, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/how-social-security-works-in-2014> (accessed October 21, 2014).

by the following table:<sup>62</sup>

## Medicare shortfall is driving federal deficit spending

The Medicare shortfall is the difference between the money the program brings in and the money it spends on health care benefits. Even assuming that unrealistic cost-containment policies in current law are sustained, by 2040, Medicare's shortfall will account for 81 percent of the federal deficit. Addressing runaway federal deficits requires targeting Medicare.

Sources: Medicare Trustees 2012 report, Congressional Budget Office, extended baseline.

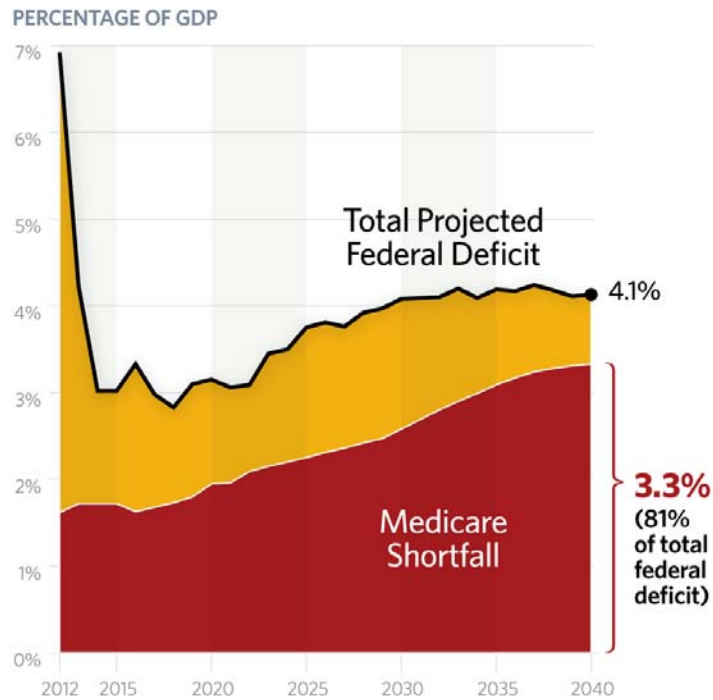


Chart 2 • Medicare at Risk heritage.org

Thus, by 2040, the combination of pension and medical spending in the United States for the elderly will amount to about 20% of the Gross Domestic Product, and with Medicaid, will practically consume all federal outlays, leaving little or nothing remaining for other federal programs, such as defense.<sup>63</sup> Naturally, the federal government over the course of this period of time will have to make painful adjustments to avoid this catastrophic fiscal quagmire, and it will not be alone in doing so. Other great, or formerly great powers, are in the same situation, in that spending for the elderly is consuming ever-higher percentages of their GDPs. Thus, for instance, Japan, our purest case study of slow demographic suicide, will have to devote 27% of its GDP by

<sup>62</sup> “Medicare Shortfall is Driving Federal Deficit Spending,” Heritage Foundation Web site, <http://www.heritage.org/multimedia/infographic/2012/05/medicare-at-risk/medicare-shortfall-is-driving-federal-deficit-spending> (accessed October 21, 2014).

<sup>63</sup> Haas, “America’s Golden Years,” 54. See also Nicholas Eberstadt, *A Nation of Takers: America’s Entitlement Epidemic* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton, 2012).

2040 exclusively to old age pensions and health care; the figure for Germany is 26% and for France, 29%. These last two examples are particularly instructive in that they show the extent to which First and Second Demographic Transition societies are subject to what we may fashion the Law of Squeezing Militaries: As Haas points out, “Germany will have to increase its annual spending on elder care more than 7 times what it currently spends on defense. France will have to spend more than 5 times as much, and Japan more than 15 times as much.”<sup>64</sup> In short, in a contest between guns and canes, the canes will always win.

What about the United States? As Nicholas Eberstadt explains, over the ten years from the 9/11/2001 attacks on America by Muslim extremists, the United States increased its spending on entitlements (He includes all social welfare transfer programs.) by a factor of two and a half times over the increment spent on defense.<sup>65</sup> In fact, future restraints on military spending are driven not by evaluations of threat levels, but rather by budgetary considerations driven by the welfare state. And, as we have seen, most of these considerations involve expenditures for America’s older citizens in the form of Social Security and Medicare. However you cut it in this scenario, oldsters win, workers pay, and babies lose.

More than that, a third consequence of low fertility rates that pertains especially to Europe centers upon what David Coleman calls the Third Demographic Revolution.<sup>66</sup> This refers to the extent to which the low fertility countries of old Europe find their native populations gradually being supplanted by immigrants, which in Europe means predominantly Muslim minorities. Some of the projections about a Muslim takeover of Western civilization may seem farfetched, but there is no doubt that Muslims constitute significant and growing segments in several major European countries, and that their fertility rates are significantly higher than

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<sup>64</sup> Haas, “America’s Golden Years,” 54.

<sup>65</sup> Eberstadt, *A Nation of Takers*, 69.

<sup>66</sup> David Coleman, “Changing Face of Europe,” 191.

European TFRs. For instance, Muslims number some 6.5 million in France, which comprises over ten percent of the total population; in Germany the figure is around 4.1 million; and in the United Kingdom, roughly 3 million inhabitants have their origins in Muslim countries. None of which should matter in its own terms if newcomers and their children were easily assimilated into the prevailing norms and values of western civilization, but the real concern is that they are not. Indeed, there is a large and growing literature dealing with Islamic separatism in their host countries along with radicalization of young Muslim men to wage jihad at home or abroad in the Middle East, fighting for al Qaeda or its hideous offspring, ISIS (or ISIL).<sup>67</sup> In fact, increasingly, domestic terrorism is perpetrated by radicalized Muslims who are citizens of the countries they attack, such as the case of the Fort Hood massacre in the United States in 2009, and the bombing of the Canadian Parliament in 2014, and many others as well. And these are cases involving countries with generous immigration policies and generally good records on assimilation. Europe, by contrast, is in a much more difficult situation.

Which can only be alleviated by Europeans, and citizens of the other countries we have considered here, having more children as well as assimilating those who have taken advantage of compliant immigration policies into their respective cultures. The West in general, along with China, Russia, and Japan, can only secure their futures by recognizing that the overpopulation thesis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an insidious and destructive intellectual fad, and that their countries' survivals mean doing everything possible to encourage larger families. We also know, however, that the long bad habits of governments and populations are hard to break and that devising

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<sup>67</sup> See for instance, Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within* (New York: Random House, 2006); Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan* (New York: Encounter, 2006); and Bat Ye'or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010); Mark Steyn, *America Alone*; Taweh Beysolow, "Secular Suicide: How European-born Terrorists Signal the West's Demise," <http://townhall.com/columnists/tawehbeysolow/2014/10/06/secular-suicide-how-europeanborn-terrorists-signal-the-vests-demise-n1900514> (accessed October 23, 2014) and many books by Robert B. Spencer for a sampling.



national programs to generate more babies is extremely problematic. But problematic or not, the continued existence of the world's richest civilizations is in the balance. It is hard to conceive of stakes higher than that.