

POPULATION CONNECTION



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September 2021

**INVEST IN
KIDS FOR A
SUSTAINABLE
FUTURE**



President's Note

One of my first summer jobs as a teenager involved demolishing an outhouse in the fishing town of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The still-functional structure was a relic of a bygone era. Nostalgia has its purposes, but I doubt anyone missed those treks across the yard to do what's necessary.

When indoor plumbing was first installed in the White House during the tenure of our sixth president, some referred to the modern convenience as a “quincy” in his honor. In 1940, during FDR's time in office, 45 percent of American homes didn't have indoor plumbing. Today, nearly half the world still lacks access to modern sanitation. Despite that sad fact, we've seen improvement around the world. Combined with other public health advances, that has dramatically reduced infant and child mortality, which triggered the era of rapid population growth. A newer technology, modern contraception, could enable us to achieve zero population growth.

Indoor plumbing is but one example of how we can embrace change. We're an adaptable species—but only within biological limits. Columbia University's Professor Radley Horton reports that vast swaths of our planet, from Mexico to Southeast Asia, are racing toward levels of heat and humidity where “it's no longer possible to be able to sweat fast enough to prevent overheating.” Death ensues.

We're engaged in planetary anarchy by ignoring the rules of nature as we pack ever more people into Earth's closed system. What's truly maddening about overpopulation is that we know what to do: Remove all barriers that prevent women from choosing smaller families, and we could achieve zero population growth and then begin to lower our numbers.

Why are humans so willing to embrace some changes, from indoor plumbing to online shopping, yet so many actively oppose measures such as voluntary family planning that can reduce population pressures on our life-sustaining ecosystems?

When it comes to urgently needed changes, education is the key. The young are our last, best hope. When Covid hit, Population Connection's dedicated professional staff shifted immediately to remote activity. Forced to cancel our annual in-person Capitol Hill Days program that brings some 350 mostly young activists to DC to learn and to lobby, we dramatically expanded our reach with an online Twitter rally which reached over 9.2 million people. This past summer, we participated in a record 151 Advanced Placement trainings (many remote) for thousands of high school teachers. Like so many others, we were able to respond to a sudden shift.

As for dramatic change, just imagine if, instead of adding 80 million people to the planet annually, we added zero. Medical staff now assigned to maternity wards could provide relief to those working with elderly patients. Schools could transition to less-crowded classrooms. In the poorest places on earth, families could have more food to go around so their children wouldn't be stunted. And those children could become productive adults who choose to have smaller families.

From grassroots activists to the current occupant of the Oval Office, we deeply appreciate those dedicated to “changing the now.” We need more who see the wisdom in helping to tidy up the mess we've made on the one planet clearly blessed with abundant resources. Focusing on voluntary methods to uncrowd this jewel of the known universe seems like the challenge of a lifetime.

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Cover Image: Marissa James gets off the bus at Summit Elementary School in Summit, Mississippi, on August 5, the first day of the 2021-2022 school year for students in the McComb School District. (Matt Williamson, *The Enterprise-Journal*, via AP Images)

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Editor's Note

There's been a recent spate of hand-wringing articles in response to the release of the 2020 U.S. Census results and the publication shortly thereafter of the 2020 provisional births data from the CDC. Yes, the U.S. population grew at the slowest rate during the last decade since the 1930s, and yes, the U.S. fertility rate is at a historic low of 1.64 births per woman. But the U.S. population is still growing by 1–2 million a year (fewer in 2020 due to Covid deaths), and projections don't show that trend reversing for at least several more decades.

The 2020 Census counted 331,449,281 Americans, up from 308,745,538 in 2010—that's 22.7 million more people needing housing, heating and cooling, transportation, food, jobs, education, health care, and so on. Hardly a harbinger of “demographic decline,” as some have claimed.

Not that we'd mind if it were.

Population stabilization—which is nowhere near happening at the U.S. or global level—would be a boon to everyone's quality of life, to say nothing of the benefits to the natural world. Yes, there would be challenges to how economies are structured. But those challenges would be far easier to address than the permanent environmental tipping points that humanity is already beginning to breach and that we'll only exceed more frequently as world population continues to grow. After all, America's Social Security program was only introduced in 1935. Surely we can rejigger a system that has been in place for less than a century in order to preserve the only planet we have (Elon Musk's plans to colonize Mars aside).

Americans burn more fossil fuels each day than many poor countries burn in years. There are important and compelling reasons to facilitate slower population growth in low-income countries, of course. The bulk of our advocacy work focuses on slowing growth—through voluntary family planning education and services—in high-fertility countries least equipped to meet

the needs of rapidly growing populations. But there's hardly a country on earth that rivals the U.S. in terms of per capita consumption. Despite current and looming environmental crises, Americans aren't scrambling to give up their personal vehicles, airplane trips, single family homes, or room temperature indoor spaces (myself included). But we can reduce our ecological footprints by continuing to do what most of us want to do anyway: have small families.

We urge those with concerns about the U.S. economy to consider ways to improve per capita productivity in order to stop pinning our country's economic future on the population Ponzi scheme. The United States has more than enough people—what it lacks is adequate investment in its population of young people who will be tomorrow's workforce. Healthy economies don't need more people; they need people who are more productive.

We currently have nearly 12 million children growing up in poverty in this country—let's invest in their futures so they can become healthy, well-educated, productive adults. And let's educate the next generation to think of themselves as citizens above consumers (our Population Education program does a superb job of this, reaching 3 million K-12 students in North America each year with lesson plans that encourage kids to become planetary stewards). If we ensured that every baby born in the U.S. had access to high-quality health care, childcare, education, and nutrition, we'd be a much more productive society than we would be simply by adding more numbers to our ranks.

Fertility decline and slowing population growth present opportunities for the U.S. to reduce climate-changing emissions, lift people out of poverty, close the inequality gap, and protect our country's—and our planet's—natural resources for future generations. Rather than encourage couples to have more kids, let's embrace our low fertility reality and use it to our advantage.

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Letters to the Editor



I just finished reading the June 2021 issue of *Population Connection* and want to report on my bipolar experience reading it. First, I read the shattering report on life in the Sahel with overpopulation, climate change, abuse of women, lack of women's rights, and starvation and was just in a state of deep despair. While still reeling from that experience, I went on to the "news" of the UK cutting aid to UNFPA by 85 percent and the ongoing attack on women and reproductive rights in Arizona, Arkansas, Montana, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas.

But then I read the report of highlights from this year's World of 7 Billion Student Video Contest. Seeing all of these bright young people, of all ethnicities and genders, with their inquiring, intelligent, and concerned minds, together with their creativity in bringing such important ideas and information to so many people, was genuinely elating. As I said, a bipolar experience!

Michael A. Kalm, M.D.

Thank you for the electronic version of the latest issue of *Population Connection*—it is excellent and highly informative. Your articles in general fearlessly address the nexus between population pressure, political-societal instability, and misery among humans, while not neglecting climate and environmental issues. Kudos!

And, yes, as another writer of a letter to the editor wrote, we need to pay more attention to the responsibilities and reproductive health of men. Men can have many more children in their lifetime than women and can use their status and greater physical strength to pressure women into having children. While women's and children's health care remain a primary concern, perhaps the time has come to talk increasingly about social mores and attitudes among men that need to be addressed in our effort to stabilize and reduce the human overabundance.

And finally, thank you for taking an official stand in the press* regarding the antediluvian attitude that the human population needs to grow in order to grow the economy to serve a growing human population, etc. ad infinitum.

Dominique Homberger

Thank you for your response to an inaccurate and highly subjective *New York Times* article*. The front-page article inaccurately reported that world population was in decline. The authors' gloomy wording and tone expressed a blindly pessimistic attitude toward this imagined decline.

Equally biased was the authors' dismissive statement that "there is no guarantee that a smaller population means less stress on the environment." While no future projection is ever "guaranteed," it has become increasingly obvious to most of us that human overgrowth goes hand in hand with environmental degradation.

Marie Galletti Mitchell

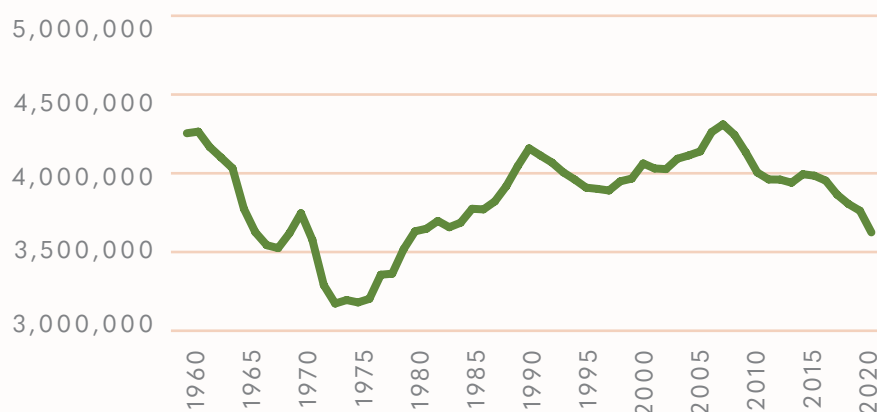
I just wanted to say bravo for your response to the NYT article* on sliding population growth. Your much broader and more ethical viewpoint on this subject, especially towards the poorest countries in the world, was very welcome to those of us who were thinking, "Really?" after reading the *Times* article.

Carol Sternkopf

* "Let's Celebrate a Lower Birthrate, Not Lament It," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2021, tinyurl.com/NYT-Starkey

United States Birth Rates Reach **New Record Lows**

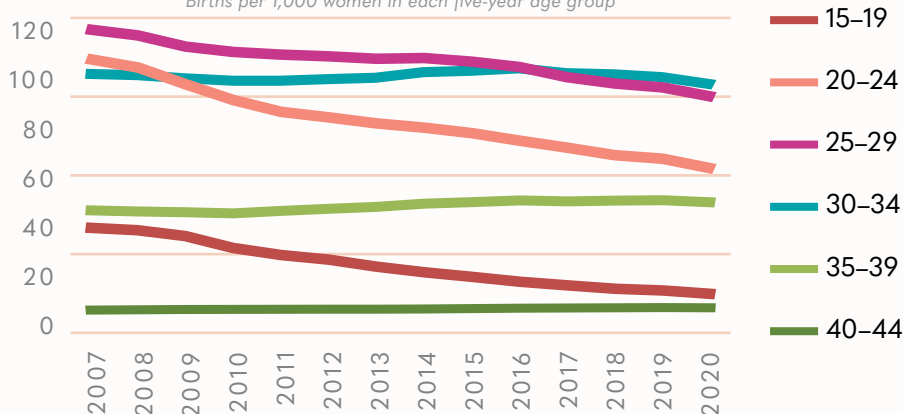
Total Number of Births



The provisional number of births for the United States in 2020 was 3,605,201, down 4% from the number in 2019 (3,747,540). This is the lowest number of births since 1979.

Age-Specific Birth Rates

Births per 1,000 women in each five-year age group



Provisional birth rates declined for women in all age groups 15–44 from 2019 to 2020 and were unchanged for adolescents aged 10–14 and women aged 45–49.

The provisional birth rate for teenagers in 2020 was 15.3 births per 1,000 females aged 15–19, down 8% from 2019, reaching another record low for this age group. The rate has declined by 75% since 1991, the most recent peak. The number of births to females aged 15–19 was 157,548 in 2020, down 8% from 2019.

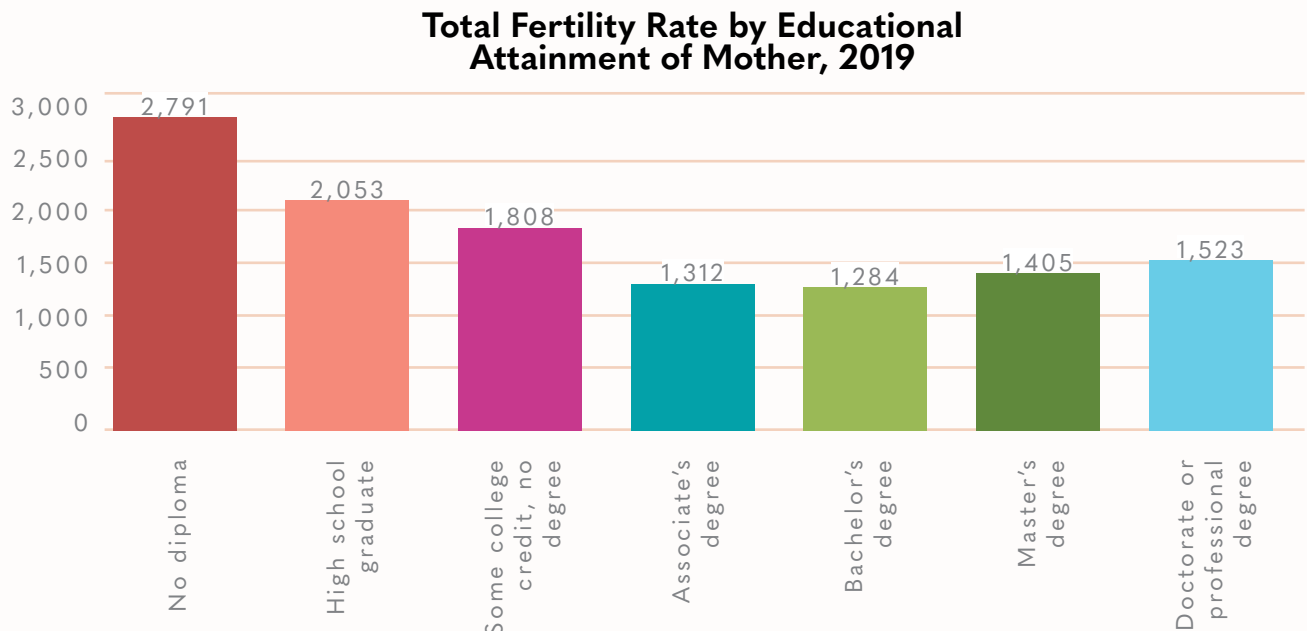
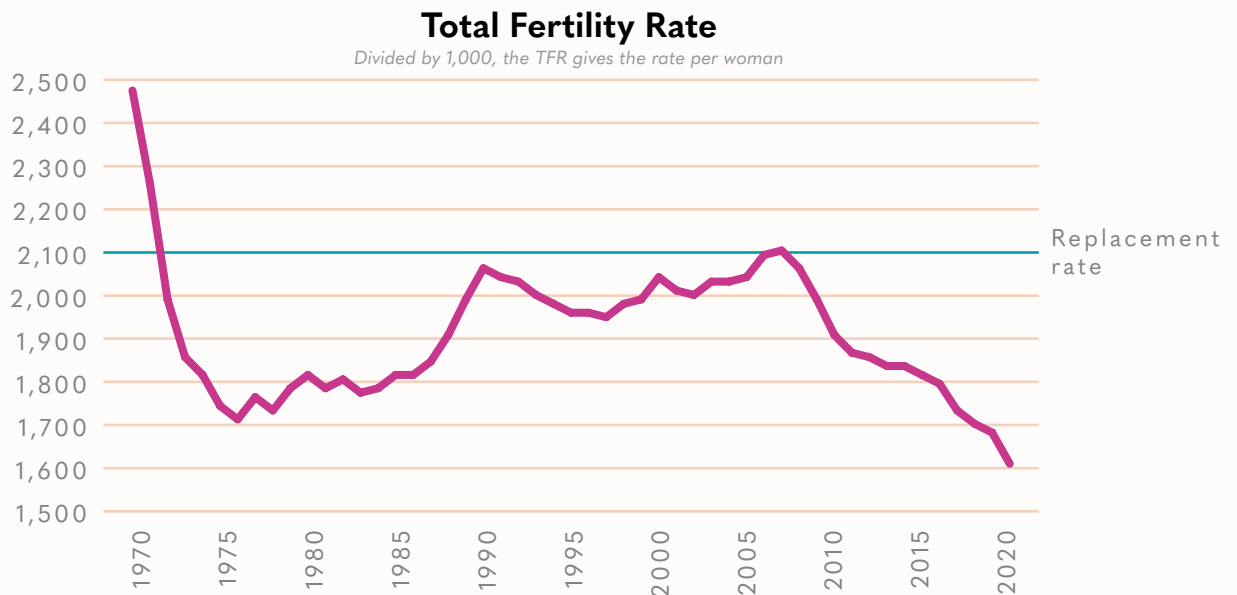
Sources:

- Hamilton BE, Martin JA, Osterman MJK. Births: Provisional data for 2020. Vital Statistics Rapid Release; no 12. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. May 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15620/cdc:104993>.
- Hamilton BE. Total fertility rates, by maternal educational attainment and race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2019. National Vital Statistics Reports; vol 70 no 5. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15620/cdc:105234>

The provisional total fertility rate (TFR) for the United States in 2020 was 1,637.5 births per 1,000 women, down 4% from the rate in 2019 (1,706.0), another record low for the nation.

The TFR estimates the number of births that a hypothetical group of 1,000 women would have over their lifetimes, based on the age-specific birth rate in a given year.

The TFR in 2020 was again below replacement—the level at which a given generation can exactly replace itself (2,100 births per 1,000 women). The rate has generally been below replacement since 1971 and has consistently been below replacement since 2007.





IN THE NEWS

By Stacie Murphy, Director of Congressional Relations

New Study Warns Global Warming Could Kill 83 Million People by Century's End

A new study from researchers at Columbia University's Earth Institute, published in the journal *Nature Communications*, calculates the so-called "mortality cost" of carbon emissions. It concludes that by the year 2100, carbon emissions could result in "excess mortality" of up to 83 million people—equivalent to the current population of Germany. Daniel Bressler, the study's lead author, said that the research should give businesses and governments another way to evaluate the costs of their decisions around climate by bringing the questions "to a more personal, understandable level."

UN Climate Report Warns Global Warming Has Become "Irreversible"

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has released a bombshell report declaring that global warming of at least 1.5 degrees Celsius is no longer avoidable, and that unless countries take immediate and dramatic action to limit carbon emissions, at least 2 degrees of warming should be expected by the end of the century. The report finds that climate change is accelerating, intensifying, and already impacting every region on earth.

Former Secretary of State John Kerry, who is currently the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, released

a statement in response to the report, during which he said, "What the world requires now is real action. All major economies must commit to aggressive climate action during this critical decade. We can get to the low carbon economy we urgently need, but time is not on our side."

World leaders are set to meet in November in Glasgow for COP26, the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference. The IPCC's report is certain to feature heavily in those discussions.

Extreme Climate Events Displaced Millions of People in 2020

A new report from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre indicates that, in 2020, at least 40.5 million people were forced to flee their homes—the highest number in a decade. Nearly 10 million displacements were due to local conflict or violence, while the rest were the result of disasters, most of them weather related. Researchers believe the final tally is a significant undercount and that the real number is far higher.

According to their findings, major climate-related disasters have almost doubled in the last 20 years, and the convergence of conflict and disasters means that some people suffer multiple displacements. The report notes that internal displacement results in significant economic costs for individuals, communities, and countries—some \$20.5 billion in 2020.

Egypt Will Integrate Population Education into School Curriculum

Egypt has signed an agreement with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to add population education into its school curriculum. Tarek Shawki, Egypt's Minister of Education and Technical Education, said that the goal of the Egyptian government is to focus on a strategic plan for the development of the Egyptian family. He said that the government seeks a comprehensive way of improving the quality of life for its citizens and achieving an educated and healthy workforce.

UNFPA Representative in Egypt Frederika Meijer, a Dutch national who has worked in Egypt since 2018, said of the agreement:

In our continuous efforts to engage young people in developmental issues, this partnership is particularly important. The Ministry of Education and Technical Education and UNFPA share the same goal: equipping young people with skills and knowledge, investing in their health and well-being so that Egypt can reap the benefits of the demographic dividend. Young people today constitute more than 60 percent of the population; hence empowered young people are key in the achievement of the SDGs of Egypt's 2030 agenda.

China to Allow Couples to Have Up to Three Children

In a dramatic shift in policy, China, which officially ended its draconian one-child policy only five years ago, in favor of a still-coercive two-child policy, will now allow some married couples to have up to three children in an effort to reverse the country's declining birth rate. The increasing cost of childrearing and women's greater participation in the workforce, however, have meant that even as restrictions on childbearing have loosened, couples have not chosen to have larger families. China's most recent census figures show that the country's total fertility rate has dropped to 1.3 children per woman, well below the 2.1 children demographers say are needed to maintain the current population.

States Steered Federal Funding to Anti-Abortion Programs

According to a new report by the advocacy group Equity Forward, at least 10 U.S. states (Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas) have diverted federal dollars received under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program to so-called "Alternatives to Abortion" or "A2A" programming. These efforts, often run by anti-choice activists, frequently offer inaccurate and biased information intended to frighten or intimidate pregnant people into carrying their pregnancies to term.

The TANF program, which takes the form of block grants to states, is intended to offer direct assistance to needy families in meeting basic needs like shelter, food, and childcare. Due to lack of oversight, however, anti-choice state legislatures have been able to funnel millions of dollars of taxpayer money to A2A programs run by private, often religious, institutions.

West Faces Increasing Water Challenges

The American West, already suffering historic levels of drought, is set to face even greater long-term water challenges as a result of population growth and climate change.

Seven states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) rely on water from the Colorado River. All are part of the Colorado River Compact, which was enacted in 1922 and determines how the water supply is to be distributed. However, the calculations used in 1922 were based on data taken from a wetter than average period. In essence, the compact guaranteed states more water than the river could actually supply under typical conditions. And conditions over the past 20 years have been anything but typical. Cities across the West have grown even as the climate has warmed and the amount of rainfall has decreased.

Additionally, warmer weather increases evaporation, which means less water reaches the river in the first place.

Studies suggest that for every degree Celsius of additional warming, the Colorado River's flow will decrease by an additional 9 percent, further straining supply. Some states have begun to introduce more stringent conservation measures, but with such high demand and warming set to continue, the West will confront some difficult choices in the years to come.

Salvadoran Woman Freed from Jail After Serving 30 Years for Being Convicted of Having Had an Abortion

Sara Rogel, a Salvadoran woman who had been sentenced to 30 years in prison for having had an abortion, has been paroled after her sentence was commuted to 10 years. Rogel was eight months pregnant when she was found lying unconscious on the floor of her home in 2012 and brought to a hospital, where she delivered a stillborn daughter. She has always maintained that she did not attempt an abortion. Instead, she says, she slipped and fell while washing clothes.

El Salvador has one of the world's strictest bans on abortion, with no exceptions for rape, incest, or when the life of the pregnant person is at risk. According to a pro-choice advocacy group called Agrupación Ciudadana, there are at least 16 other women currently jailed in El Salvador in similar cases.

The digital version of this article includes hyperlinked sources: popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-september-2021/

MEMBERS TUNE IN TO COOL SUMMER EVENTS

Hundreds of Population Connection members and supporters joined in a very full slate of virtual events throughout the summer, taking advantage of numerous opportunities to learn, discuss population issues, and network with each other! Our Summer Series featured monthly speaking engagements with experts, our third “Page Turners” book club meeting, and an encore screening of the hard-hitting documentary *8 Billion Angels*, executive produced by Population Connection member Terry Spahr.

PAGE TURNERS BOOK CLUB

The third meeting of the Population Connection Page Turners book club took place in July. Several staff members led a lively and informative discussion of Alan Weisman’s *Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth*. The next book club meeting will take place in September—you can find more information, and sign up to join us, at popconnect.org/book-club.



EXPERT SUMMER SERIES SPEAKERS



Karen Gaia Pitts, Coordinator for Transition Earth and founder of the Maasai Harmonial Development and Sustainability project, and **Joshua Mirondo**, Transition Earth volunteer and Communications Team member at Reproductive Health Uganda, were co-presenters in June. Karen gave an overview of the work she's involved in to promote community-based solutions to enhance conservation practices, build resilient communities, and improve the health and well-being of local villagers, while Joshua discussed

his on-the-ground experiences as a reproductive health trainer and peer educator in Uganda.



Kristen Patterson of Project Drawdown talked to our members in July about her role as the Director of Project Drawdown's new program, Drawdown Lift, which aims to address climate change and alleviate extreme poverty in low- and middle-income countries through equity-focused health and education initiatives.

Nathalie Simoneau of World Wildlife Fund-US joined us in August to discuss her role in incorporating social policies into WWF's global programs, and also touched on various population, health, and environment-focused projects she's been involved with since joining WWF in 2010.



You can find recordings of each presentation, along with the supplemental resources each speaker shared, at popconnect.org/summer_series.

We encourage you to contact us at engage@popconnect.org with questions about how to join any of our events, as well as to offer your own ideas for future events. We love hearing from you!

The recent slowdown in the U.S. birth rate has resulted in much hand-wringing about our nation's future.

Instead of yielding to these dark prognostications, let's take advantage of this situation, which could be more optimistically viewed as an opportunity. There are some clear advantages to the decline in U.S. births—which is occurring in all age groups of women 15–44 but is most pronounced among teens. And the challenges that slower population growth may pose can be successfully addressed by disrupting the status quo when it comes to our investment in future generations of workers and taxpayers.

John Seager, President and CEO of Population Connection, has been interviewed by radio stations around the country this summer on the topic of lower fertility and slower population growth in the United States. The complete list of his interviews (as of our print deadline of August 18) is below.

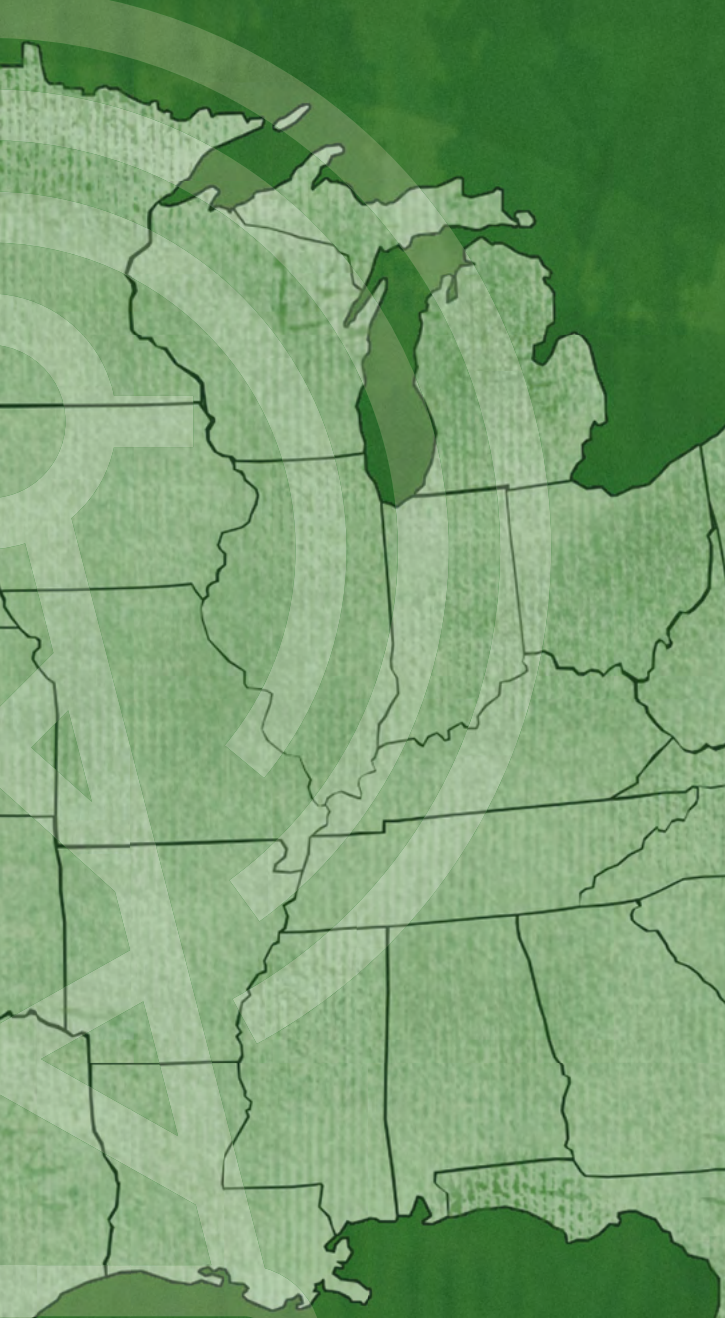


Head to our website to listen to the available audio clips and to see the list grow as John continues to do interviews into the fall:

popconnect.org/radio-interviews

8/20/21: Dr. Brian Southwell, "The Measure of Everyday Life," WNCU-FM (NPR), Raleigh/Durham, NC

8/12/21: Shelley Irwin, "The WGUV Morning Show," WGUV-FM (NPR), Grand Rapids, MI



In addition to John's radio interviews, we've been submitting op-eds and letters to the editor this summer in response to the many articles that have been published in newspapers across the country bemoaning lower fertility and slower population growth in the U.S.

Here's a list of the opinion pieces that have been published by Population Connection staff this summer:

John Seager, "How smaller families can benefit our country," *The Morning Call*, Allentown, PA, July 26, 2021, tinyurl.com/Morning-Call-Seager

Marian Starkey, "Let's fully fund international family planning on World Population Day," *The Hill*, Washington, DC, July 11, 2021, tinyurl.com/Hill-Starkey

Marian Starkey, "Let's Celebrate a Lower Birthrate, Not Lament It," *The New York Times*, June 5, 2021, tinyurl.com/NYT-Starkey

8/10/21: Greg Berg, "The Morning Show," WGTD-FM, Kenosha/Racine, WI

8/9/21: Mark Thompson, "The Mark Thompson Show," KGO-AM, San Francisco, CA

8/9/21: Don Rush, Delmarva Public Media, WSCL-FM, WSDL-FM, WESM-FM, Delmarva Peninsula

7/19/21: Laura Coates, "The Laura Coates Show," SiriusXM Radio, P.O.T.U.S. Channel 124

7/9/21: John Liddle, NewsRadio 1080 KRLD, Dallas/Fort Worth, TX

7/8/21: Tony Marino, News 96.5 WDBO, Orlando, FL

6/30/21: Roy Burnette, WRGC, Sylva, NC, and WBHN, Bryson City, NC

6/30/21: Bob Gourley, "Issues Today," nationally syndicated to 80+ radio stations

Fewer Births Can Lead to a Greater Society

By John Seager, President and CEO

Elon Musk took a moment away from his astronomical machinations to deliver a finger-wagging Twitter warning for humanity: “Population collapse is potentially the greatest risk to the future of civilization.” Just how the annual global population increase of some 80 million people on our planet translates into a collapse seems like murky Musk math. The father of seven also thought we should know that “Mars has a great need for people, seeing as population is currently zero.” Zero population on Mars will come as news to, well, no one. It’s been zero humans since the dawn of time.

So far, 2021 has seen a riotous insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, extreme weather, water shortages, and the continued profound threat posed by Covid. Yet Musk

is but one of many voices sounding false alarms about a spurious people shortage around the world and in the United States.

The Week breathlessly proclaimed the “doom-loop of a falling fertility rate.” CNBC posted this alarming headline: “Researchers expect the U.S. to face underpopulation, blaming a falling birth rate and economic crises,” while strangely failing to cite any such research. And the *Wall Street Journal* ran a story entitled, “U.S. Population Growth, an Economic Driver, Grinds to a Halt.”

Coverage was triggered by a 4 percent reduction in the U.S. birth rate from one year ago. Given the hysteria, you’d think it was a 40 percent decline. And just how much did the U.S. population plummet

in 2020? Well, it didn’t. Rather, it rose by nearly one million, notwithstanding all the excess deaths related to Covid.

Leaving aside fuzzy arithmetic, what’s the fuss about? In a crisis-ridden world, do we need to push the panic button because women in the U.S. and many other places are choosing to have smaller families and to have them later in life?

In fact, these shifts can help solve some of our most intractable problems. They may avert some of the worst climate catastrophes. They can create opportunities for those who are often left out of our economy. And they might even help bring some measure of peace and quiet into a world that somehow feels like it’s spinning faster by the day.

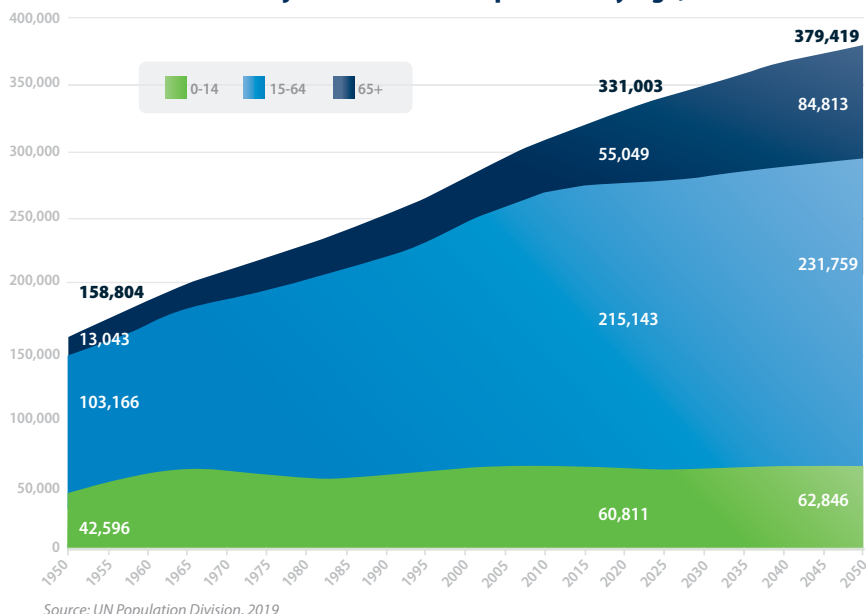
Smaller Families, Older Americans

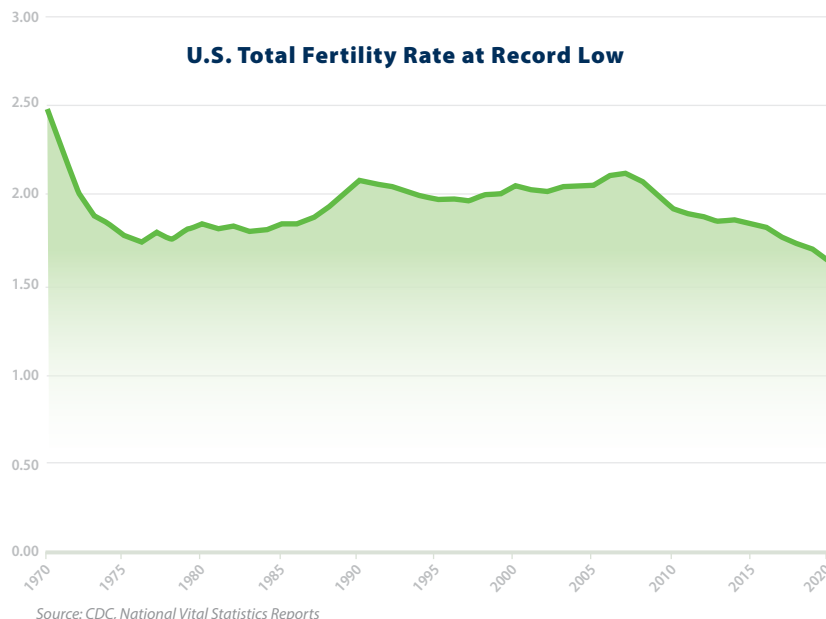
All across America, millions of women and couples are moving toward smaller families. Even Utah—home to many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (better known as Mormons), long associated with large families—is now below replacement rate in terms of childbearing.

Demographic changes now underway can represent an extraordinary opportunity for us to focus on creating a greater

The digital version of this article contains hyperlinks to sources: popconnect.org/article/fewer-births-can-lead-to-a-greater-society/

Estimates and Projections of U.S. Population by Age, 1950-2050





society—as opposed to a larger one. In the midst of an unprecedented climate crisis and continued socioeconomic inequities, the age profile of Americans is undergoing a significant, albeit gradual, shift as birth rates decline. Certainly, we’ll need more nursing homes, but we’ll also need fewer nursery schools. More senior transportation services, but fewer school buses. More gerontologists, but fewer obstetricians. Yes, the ratio of workers to retirees will shrink, but the ratio of workers to young dependents will rise.

It’s fair to assert that age 65 doesn’t mean the same thing in a digital world as it did in prior eras when most jobs involved manual labor, which can exact a physical toll over time. And researchers have found that “connecting with other people through social activities and community programs can keep your brain active and help you feel less isolated and more engaged with the world around you.” One way to accomplish this is by remaining in the workforce. The U.S. labor force participation rate stood at 59.7 percent in June 1960. As of June 2021, it was 61.6 percent. The

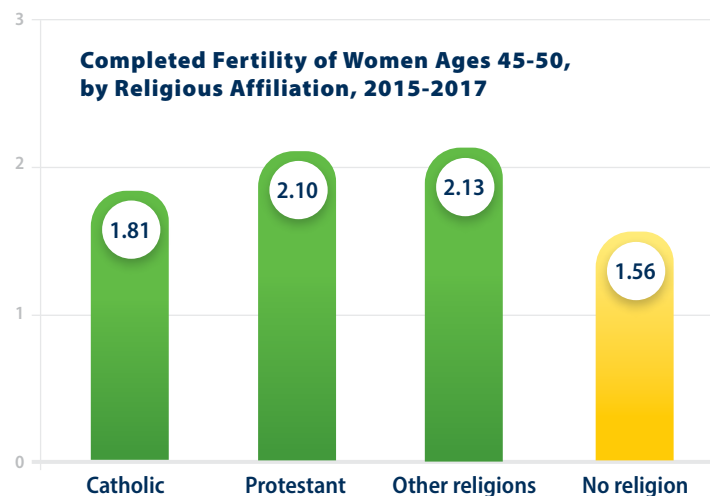
nonpartisan Congressional Budget office projects that it will be around 60.1 percent in 2050. In other words, no major changes. And no need for panic.

On a personal level, most Americans clearly understand that their own well-being and prosperity isn’t enhanced by having large families. Over the past several generations, the average American has stopped at two children or thereabouts. The total U.S. fertility rate in 2020 when Americans elected Joseph R. Biden, Jr., our second Roman Catholic

President, was 1.78 children per women, as compared with 3.58 children per woman when we elected our first Catholic President, John F. Kennedy, in 1960. It may come as a surprise to many that U.S. Catholics have considerably smaller families than their Protestant counterparts. Those who practice no religion have even fewer children.

The fate of our nation—and our world—need not be tied to population growth. In fact, the opposite is true. A peer-reviewed scientific study concluded that we could achieve between 37 percent and 41 percent of needed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by moving to a lower global population trajectory. The conspicuous silence of most environmental groups on this topic seems bewildering given the climate crisis.

While change can be disruptive, economic transformation is a fact of modern life. For example, none of today’s five largest U.S. companies even existed when the U.S. population hit 200 million in 1967. Remember when Amazon was just a river in South America? One need not view either the rise of the “new” Amazon or the destruction of rainforests in the original Amazon with equanimity



Source: Calculations by Anqi Chen and Nilufer Gok of the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, based on data from the 2015-2017 CDC National Survey of Family Growth

Colorado Can Lead the Way

Older workers can be highly dependable, productive employees. Colorado, which has the second fastest growing number of people over 65, is taking the lead in identifying and removing barriers that prevent older Coloradans from participating in the workforce. According to the Bell Policy Center, older workers comprise the fastest growing segment of those who are employed in the state.

Four major impediments for older workers have been identified:

- Age discrimination and negative perceptions of older workers
- Inflexible workplaces
- Inadequate training and skill development opportunities
- Lack of comprehensive, disaggregated information

Overcoming these barriers requires political leadership. By making the issue a high priority, governors such as Colorado's Jared Polis can open doors for older workers.

"Unlike states that focused more on long-term care and health care and other traditional aging topics, here we had a focus on workforce," says Janine Vanderburg, head of Changing the Narrative, a campaign to alter the way people think, talk, and act about aging and ageism. "I am optimistic that despite post-pandemic worries, Colorado will be in the forefront of older workers."

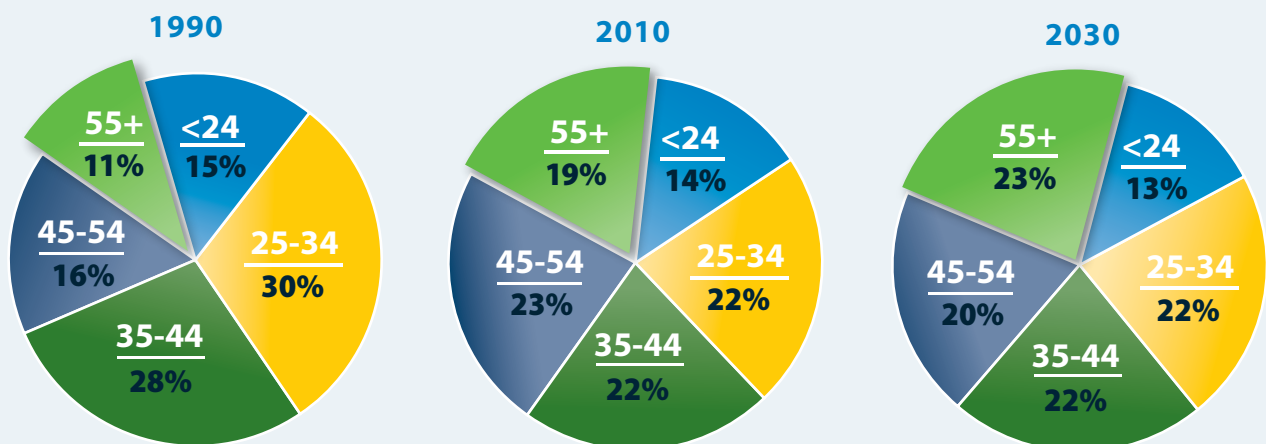
Under the leadership of then-Governor, now U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper, Colorado became one of the first three

"We know the current and future generations of older Coloradans will provide economic, social, and civic value to our communities for decades to come. We have an opportunity to harness this value."

—Governor Jared Polis

states to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. Colorado's Boomer Bond program supports programs that enable aging residents to remain in their own homes. Employment options are just one key part of the social infrastructure needed to address a changing age profile.

Colorado Labor Force Participation Rates by Age



Source: Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office

to realize we must develop new strategies as our world changes. Finding ways to live well with a stable or declining population could ease the crushing pressures we're now placing on our living planet.

Escaping the Poverty Trap

A stable U.S. population with fewer people entering the workforce could provide job opportunities for those members of the next generation who are currently trapped in poverty. When they grow up, they deserve the chance to find great jobs, which will benefit all of us.

While some have raised reasonable concerns that the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief legislation signed by President Biden, which includes a dramatic increase in child tax credits, may possibly result in some larger families, there are considerable benefits to ensuring that children grow up in stable environments. When it comes to population growth, stressed-out people simply don't make great decisions about anything—including matters of reproduction. This landmark venture can help meet population challenges while improving children's lives at the same time. Lifting the next generation out of poverty is key to population stabilization.

There are vital factors that can lead people everywhere to choose smaller families. We can act to make those outcomes more likely. There is strong evidence that Americans with higher incomes tend to use family planning more effectively. The Guttmacher Institute reports: "The rate of unintended pregnancy among women with incomes less than 100 percent of the [federal poverty level] was 112 per 1,000 in 2011, more than five times the rate among women with incomes of at least 200 percent of [the federal poverty level] (20 per 1,000 women)."

With 3.6 million U.S. births in 2020, and given that more than a third of U.S. births are unintended (37 percent, according to a 2012 CDC survey of new mothers), we can estimate that there were over 1.3 million unintended births in 2020. This outweighs our net immigration of 595,000 (in 2019—2020 data is not yet available) by more than a two-to-one ratio. If you're looking for the leading source of U.S. population growth, it's important to look first at unintended births.

Expansion of child tax credits could prove a great benefit for society by dramatically reducing the poverty rate. It could also help reduce population pressures. When you live in a state of constant worry about eviction, when your cupboards are bare, when you can't pay the bills, and when you barely make enough money to get by even with two jobs, it's hard to make positive decisions about anything—including family size.

Consider the nearly 12 million U.S. children who are trapped in poverty. Often, they suffer from poor health due to lack of adequate nutrition and medical care. Even before they begin school, they lag behind other students. Their parents are often so stressed out from working long hours that they can't give their children needed care and attention. This is a prescription for social inequity at every level.

Even leaving aside the deep personal toll here, this represents an extraordinary waste of potential for a society that needs sophisticated, productive workers to compete in the Information Age. Children trapped in poverty tend to drop out of school and thus not advance their career opportunities.

More education strongly correlates with later childbearing—a Pew Research

Center analysis of 2012 census data found that the average age at first birth for mothers ages 40–50 without a high school diploma was 24, while it was 30 for those with a Master's degree. And later childbearing reduces a country's total fertility rate. Consider "Emily," who gives birth when she is 17, and "Jessica," who doesn't do so until she is 34. Jessica has essentially skipped an entire generation, which has a major impact in terms of reducing population growth.

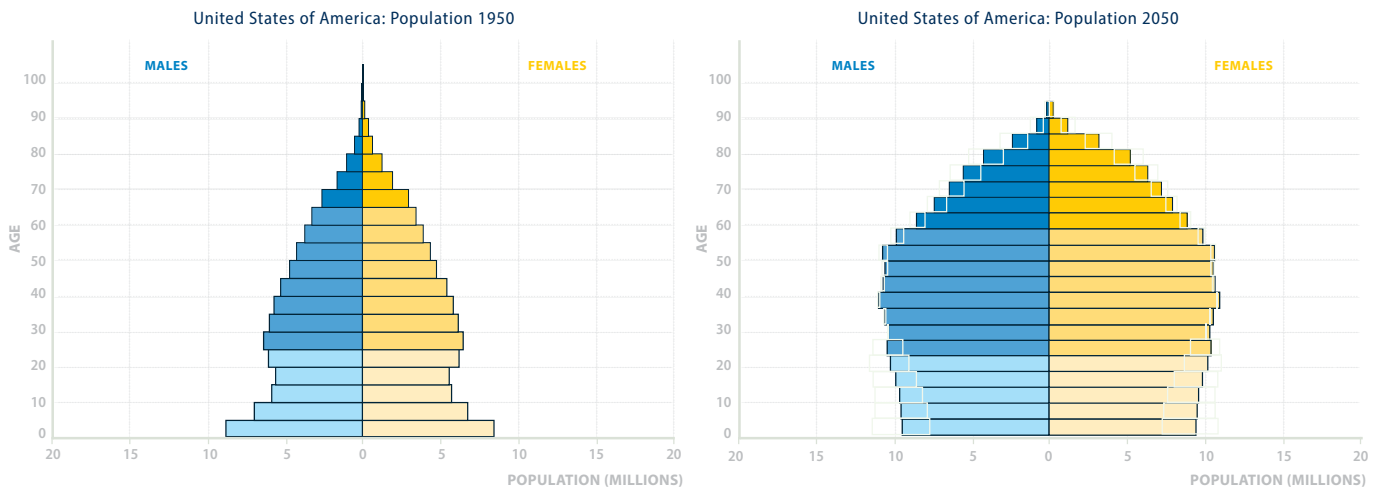
The legislation signed by President Biden slashed the poverty rate for children in the United States by nearly 50 percent—at least temporarily, since the current measure expires at the end of the year. This reduction in poverty will mean healthier children. It will mean they'll advance further in school. And down the road, it means they will, on average, postpone starting families.

The phrase "population stabilization" doesn't appear in this landmark law, but no matter. Results are what count. We can shift from a vicious cycle of poverty and rapid population growth to a virtuous cycle of healthy, well-educated citizens who can make thoughtful decisions. Population stabilization won't solve every problem, but it's essential to achieving a sustainable future for all.

The Change We Need

As for worries about Social Security running out of money, if the cap on earnings subject to the Social Security tax were eliminated, the Congressional Research Service reports that Social Security would be in good shape through 2085. Lifting this cap would only affect about 5.9 percent of current American workers. Adjustments to Social Security have been made in the past and will no doubt be needed from time to time in the future. A system that taxes every worker

U.S. Population Changing Shape: 1950 vs. 2050



Source: UN Population Division, 2019

How to Shrink Smart

Paradoxically, some places, especially in the middle of our country, are emptying out despite U.S. population growth. Most cities in Iowa have lost population. It can be devastating when a community loses vital services like schools and stores and its only hospital. If we're going to find new pathways that don't depend on population growth, we need to help some of these places find ways to thrive so we can demonstrate that population decline can be fully compatible with a high quality of life.

That's the mission of researchers at Iowa State University (ISU) who are seeking to understand why some communities that are losing population are faring well while others are not. As part of the Shrink-Smart initiative, David Peters, Associate Professor of Sociology at ISU, notes, "Instead of seeing population loss as a problem, we need to start looking at it as a process that needs to be managed." Peters also commented that "people tend to think of rural America as declining. They equate decreases in population with overall decline in quality of life. We wanted to ask if that's really true, and we found that it doesn't have to be."

According to a Shrink-Smart analysis:

- Residents of smart shrinking towns are more civically engaged and have stronger social networks.
- These residents tend to say their towns are more trusting, supportive, and tolerant.
- Smart shrinking towns have more private and public investment.
- Residents say their leaders work on behalf of everyone and newcomers are welcomed as leaders, showing strong "bridging social capital," a term that refers to how people connect across society.

One positive example is the small city of Bancroft, Iowa. While Bancroft has lost about one-third of its population since 1980, it has strong citizen engagement, a healthy town center, and a public-owned local utility that provides revenue to the community. A key local employer, Aluma, provides nearly 200 local jobs as it builds and ships some 300 aluminum trailers each week. According to Zillow, a typical home in Bancroft costs about \$100,000. Small town life in rural Iowa isn't for everyone, but it might prove attractive for some who feel priced out and left behind in overcrowded coastal communities.

at the same current rate would put the system on solid footing.

As family size shrinks, higher employment among working-aged women, who are still the primary caregivers, can help offset the shrinking ratio of workers to retirees. Also, smaller families make it easier to invest more per child in terms of health and education, which is a boon to our future economic productivity. Tomorrow's jobs will mostly demand a highly skilled workforce. If less-skilled labor is needed, a healthy society can afford to pay living wages for that sort of hard work. The work will get done if the price is right.

Some fear that we're entering an age of diminished innovation partly as a result of slower population growth. Economist Lyman Stone argues that "slower population growth reduces innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic dynamism, making everyone worse off." U.S. population growth slowed over the past decade—those, like Stone, who view this as lessening the flow of new ideas, might want to check out the newest iPhone, which performs 11 trillion operations per second. It seems a bit illogical to write an obituary for innovation.

Past the Boiling Point

In reality, slower population growth should be seen as a breath of fresh air. And speaking of fresh air, while our air and water are cleaner than they were 50 years ago, most Americans are still understandably worried about air and water pollution. And we are among the primary drivers of global climate change.

While we typically think of climate change affecting faraway places, there are serious challenges facing us here at home as well. Out West, the Colorado River is in peril. California—which

The Good Crisis

Here in the U.S., we can enhance productivity without relying on population growth. In *The Good Crisis: How Population Stabilization Can Foster a Healthy U.S. Economy*, published by Population Connection, David Bloom, Harvard Professor of Economics and Demography, and Jay Lorsch, Harvard Professor of Human Relations, emphasized:

It is clear that the fortunes of the U.S. are tied closely to the education, training, and health of its future workforce. Investing in school and health can offset the projected decline in the share of the working-age in the population. Such investments have the potential to magnify the size of the effective labor force insofar as more and better education and better health results in more productive adults. Investments can also be disproportionately directed toward minority populations to promote their employment, productivity, and earnings and stem the tide of further increases in income inequality.

Download a free electronic copy of *The Good Crisis: How Population Stabilization Can Foster a Healthy U.S. Economy* on our website (popconnect.org/the-good-crisis/) or order a hard copy from your favorite bookstore!

produces most of our fruits, vegetables, and nuts—relies on that river for crop irrigation. Lake Mead and Lake Powell, which are key parts of a water system relied on by 40 million people, are at historic lows. Hydroelectric production at Hoover Dam has plummeted by 25 percent. Slower population growth would reduce demands on the shrinking supply of fresh water in the American West. Back East, coastal communities such as Miami already face "sunny day" flooding due to climate-related sea level rise. Overbuilding, triggered by rapid population growth, in increasingly flood-prone areas is a prescription for disaster.

Fewer Can Be Better

Economies are man-made. While we can modify them to reflect changing needs, societies cannot hope to thrive when natural capital is depleted. Preserving our planet is the real bottom line. Population stabilization and eventual decline can play a key role.

Manageable shifts can unfold over decades and generations—though sooner would be much better. Demographers still project that U.S. population may rise by more than 100 million by 2100, although there are now some welcome estimates that our population growth may slow. The Congressional Budget Office recently revised its figure for U.S. population in 2050 downward by 11 million people. That's roughly equal to the number of people now living in our 11 least populous states.

Going forward, we'll have more older people and fewer younger people. We'll have more women entering and staying in the paid labor force. And we'll have more jobs carried out through automation. We can also have more green spaces and wildlife habitats, more investment in each American, and more hope for a planet that can comfortably support future generations. In terms of a sustainable future, less can be more.



The Declining American Birth Rate Could Actually Be Good for the Economy

By Hillary Hoffower | Originally published by *Business Insider* on May 23, 2021

Earlier this month [in May], the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) dropped a new report that revealed the U.S. birth rate fell by 4 percent, the sharpest single-year decline in nearly 50 years and the lowest number of births since 1979.

The news seemingly sent America—and American media—into shock. One

demographer deemed the trend a “crisis” in an interview with CBS, while *The New York Times* explored how the pandemic may be fast-forwarding American decline, and another demographer told CNN the baby bust could have the opposite effect of the 1950s baby boom.

I wrote about the baby bust a few weeks prior to the latest data, tracing the

pandemic’s influence on the decision to have kids and how it could either slow down the economy in the long term or result in a delayed baby boom.

But here’s the thing: A declining birth rate isn’t necessarily bad news. It’s both the continuation of a decades-long trend and a symbol of progress in gender equity. And while it signals some



economic distress, it may also represent the start of a solution to America's affordability problem.

The big question is whether women will end up having babies at a later date or will have fewer babies overall. It's too soon to tell.

Fewer babies doesn't have to mean devastation for the U.S. economy, depending on Biden's success in boosting worker productivity with his infrastructure plans and how the economy continues to reopen. But it does mean change, and maybe the cries of despair over the declining birth rate are more about resistance to the unknown than looking forward to a reshaped America with differently shaped families. The declining birth rate is a step into the great unknown, and that could be exciting.

A Sign of Progress

American birth rates have been declining for six years as millennial women have been waiting to have babies until a later age. Birth rates among teens, which have fallen nearly every year for the past three decades, were down by 8 percent last year. This is normal, if you look at worldwide trends.

Christine Percheski, Associate Professor of Sociology at Northwestern University, told me last month that there's been a broader shift among high-income countries and some middle-income countries for women to postpone having kids until

later ages. The U.S., she said, was a little slower to see that increase.

Look no further than the declining fertility rate, or the number of live births a woman is expected to have over her lifetime. It tracks closely with birth rates, and, since 1950, the worldwide fertility rate has dropped from an average of 4.7 children to 2.4 children.

It all signals economic progress. "It's about women having access to education and employment opportunities," Percheski said. "It's about the rise in individualism. It's about the rise in women's autonomy and a change in values."

Women, she continued, are choosing to stay in school longer and waiting until later to marry. The Pew Research Center found that the more educated a woman, the more likely she was to postpone having a child until her 30s. This stat can be partly explained by the fact that women today find themselves with more life options than women 50 years ago (it could also indicate that educated women are financially burdened, but we'll get to that soon).

Clare Mehta, an Associate Professor of Psychology at Emmanuel College who studies established adults, previously told *Insider* that millennials are finding fulfillment in building a professional life for themselves because of new opportunities previous generations didn't have. "Women want to have careers now before they settle down, people want to feel as though they're financially secure," Mehta said. "That wasn't happening in the past."

It's part of how millennials are redefining adulthood. While many people have described the generation as "behind" due

to their myriad economic woes, they're really just creating a new normal.

A Turning Point for the Economy

Now, while the rise in women's autonomy has helped birth rates climb for women in their later 30s and in their 40s in recent years (amid the overall declining birth rate), they declined for this cohort during 2020. This might spark some concern over just how severe the effects of the pandemic are.

Declining birth rates during an economic downturn also aren't abnormal. Recessions typically have the strongest economic influence on birth and fertility rates. "People tend to wait during periods of political and social unrest," Percheski said.

The Great Recession saw a 9 percent decline in births, per Brookings, about 400,000 babies fewer than there would have been otherwise. And while the Spanish Flu only resulted in an economic contraction instead of a recession, that public health crisis also led to a drop in births. That the pandemic combines both health and economic crisis could have a greater impact on birth rates.

But recession or no recession, underlying macroeconomic factors are influencing the birth rate. Millennials have long been facing an affordability crisis, plagued by the lingering effects of the Great Recession and soaring living costs for things like housing, health care, and, of course, childcare.

Looking back at the stat that more educated women are more likely to have kids at a later age in this context points to a new perspective: Education often comes with student debt. Women may be waiting to have kids not out of choice, but

Opposite: A mother and father kiss their one-year-old daughter at Kosciuszko pool in Brooklyn, New York, on June 26, 2021. (Anthony Behar, Sipa USA, via AP Images)

out of a desire to get their financial footing and pay off student debt first.

A declining birth rate therefore also reflects how expensive the U.S. economy has become. It's not the drop in births that's distressing, but the affordability problem that it signifies. If we look closely at these issues, the birth rate could serve as a turning point for a better economy.

Not an Economic Decline, But an Economic Change

Experts are worried today's baby bust will result in an economy plagued by an aging population that isn't replaced by enough young workers. That might result in higher government costs and a smaller workforce that would have to front the care costs for aging populations, creating a shortage of pension and social security-type funds.

But what if it doesn't?

Percheski said the country will likely need to make structural adjustments like creating new policies that accommodate changes in population in size.

Percheski has company in the form of President Joe Biden. His American Families Plan proposes investments of \$1.7 trillion in the care economy, with a focus on support for families including an expanded child tax credit and universal pre-K. It's an ambitious proposal that, combined with a large infrastructure investment via the \$1.7 trillion American Jobs Plan, seeks to boost the productivity of American workers in a 21st-century context.

Less births and less workers may not spell economic disaster if these plans—or others like them—can boost American workers' productivity. I've already written

about evidence that productivity has increased during the pandemic, while reopening has brought a wage boost for most workers. Inflation comes with these trends, but a more productive worker could essentially pay for that inflation, as well as paying for a prosperous society with less babies in it.

By examining some of the factors contributing to the decline in births, we can start with preventative adjustments now. Work structure in America—like expensive childcare and lack of paid parental leave—is a big deterrent to having kids.

That's only the beginning of a few issues that could be addressed: expensive health care (or lack thereof), climate change, and debt are other hindrances to having kids. For many millennials, the latter comes in the form of student loans. While Biden's Education Department has canceled billions in student debt, trillions remain outstanding. Borrowers and politicians alike have been arguing for more student debt relief.

The exact impact this would have on births is unknown, but society needs these improvements anyway. If we do get to the point of having to make population-based changes 20 or 30 years from now, it doesn't have to mean the economy is going downhill, but rather in a new direction.

Maybe the declining birth rate is not a problem, but a way of telling America it's time to start a new chapter.



Above: Brianne Walker plays with her three-year-old daughter, Jeannette, at A Place To Grow daycare in Brentwood, New Hampshire, on July 26, 2021. Walker and her family have qualified for the expanded child tax credit, part of President Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. "The additional money does help alleviate the pressure," said Walker, 29, who took custody of her two siblings last year after her mother overdosed. The \$800 credit will help make up for losses she incurred after quitting a kitchen design job to care for her three children, as well as her two younger brothers. (Elise Amendola, AP Images)

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Women Are Having Fewer Babies Because They Have More Choices

By Jill Filipovic | Originally published by *The New York Times* on June 27, 2021

American women are having fewer children and having them later than ever before—a demographic shift being met with significant consternation from the left and right alike.

For conservatives, the fact that more women are putting off parenthood or forgoing it entirely is evidence of a dangerous decline in traditional family values. In this framing, women have been manipulated into putting their educational and professional aspirations ahead of motherhood, contributing to a broader cultural breakdown.

Liberals make the (better) case that birth declines are clearly tied to policy, with potential mothers deterred by the lack of affordable childcare and the absence of universal health care, adequate paid parental leave, and other basic support systems. Couple that with skyrocketing housing prices, high rates of student loan debt, and stagnant wages and it's no surprise that so many women say: "Children? In *this* economy?"

Either way, the baby bust, if that's what it is, is cast negatively. Both liberals and conservatives point to shifting demographic trends as a kind of failure: of the

family, of women, and of a culture compromised by feminist ambition; or of the state, of capitalism, and of our family-unfriendly workplaces that fuel a culture of overwork.

But what if lower birth rates are a good thing? For a great many individual women, reconsidering motherhood doesn't reflect hardship or unmet desire, but rather a new landscape of opportunity. As a country, we would be better off if we saw significant demographic changes as data points that can give us important clues about what people want, what they need, and how we might improve their lives.

Birth rates are declining among women in their 20s, ticking up slightly among women in their 30s and 40s, and, as a *New York Times* analysis found, decreasing the most significantly in counties where employment is growing. In other words, the women who are driving this downturn are those who have the most advantage and the greatest range of choices, and whose prospects look brightest.

Further, while birth rates are dropping, the total percentage of women who are mothers has risen, in part thanks to older women, college-educated women, and unmarried women being *more* likely to have a baby than they had been. Childbearing remains overwhelmingly the norm: 86 percent of American women ages 40 to 44 are mothers. Motherhood

isn't on the decline so much as motherhood is delayed, and families with one or two children are ascendant.

Thanks to feminist cultural shifts, and better access to contraceptives, more women now approach childbearing the same way we approach other major life decisions: as a choice weighed against other desires, assessed in context. Without compulsory childbearing, this assessment continues throughout women's childbearing years. The 24-year-old who says she wants children someday but is focusing on her career can easily turn into the 30-year-old who says she wants children but with the right partner. Later, she can easily become the 45-year-old who has a meaningful career, a community of people she feels connected to, and a life rich in pleasure and novelty that she doesn't want to surrender. Likewise, a mother sold in theory on three children might discover her family is complete with two, or one. Is that a woman who had fewer children than she intended? Or is she someone whose intentions were largely abstract in the first place, and they shifted as she did?

Many women are surely not having as many children as they want, and policymakers should pay attention to that: Many of those women might make different decisions if they had better support. But the hard binary of child-free vs. definitely wanting children doesn't adequately capture the push-pull

Left: Krystal Glass stretches while joined by her baby, Jaron, at Vancouver Wellness Studio in Vancouver, Washington (Amanda Cowan, *The Columbian*, via AP Images)



Above: A woman seeking employment attends the 25th annual Central Florida Employment Council Job Fair at the Central Florida Fairgrounds. (Paul Hennessy, SOPA Images, Sipa USA, via AP Images)

decision-making process that characterizes the lives of many American women.

It is still revolutionary to consider childbearing in the context of desire. Throughout human history, parenting was simply an assumed part of adult life.

But intentionality matters. Women who plan their pregnancies wind up happier, better educated, and with less relationship conflict than women whose pregnancies are unintended, according to studies compiled by the Guttmacher Institute. The Institute for Family Studies found that women who have more children than their ideal are less likely to report feeling happy than women who had their ideal number and than women

who had fewer children than they said they wanted.

Women the world over are having fewer children and having them later. And countries where women have the most opportunity to pursue higher education, live independently, and work for pay also tend to have a higher average age of first birth and lower birth rates overall. Despite the broad lack of social support systems in the United States, the average American woman has her first child at 26.4, a younger age than the average woman in any other developed nation.

At the heart of declining birth rates in the world's most prosperous countries might be the matter of meaning.

Historically, men dominated the realms of paid work, politics, economics, and world affairs, while motherhood was the clearest and most acceptable path to adulthood, community respect, and purpose for women. As more women either find jobs that bring in a paycheck and the attendant power of independence, or maybe even a sense of satisfaction and purpose, fewer women use motherhood as a conduit to respect and adulthood. This makes parenthood better, too: Women lucky enough to have a choice see parenthood as its own distinct path, and intentionally walking down it brings unique life experience, deep meaning, expanded potential, and a relationship unlike any other—and also trades some opportunities for others.

Of course these choices are not all free, or always “choices” at all. The United States remains a wildly unequal place, and that affects women’s reproductive choices. Women who want to balance career, life, and their own future may be less likely to have a baby (or a second or a third) with a man who doesn’t pull his own weight. And many American women are still unable to find easy access to family planning tools, including contraception and abortion.

But there are also fewer constraints on American women today than at any point in U.S. history, and many more options. The United States is also now a place where huge numbers of women of childbearing age live in dynamic communities where those their age are staying single and delaying motherhood longer than ever. Growing numbers of young women have opportunities to travel, live independently, pursue a career, and simply spend many more years of their adult lives asking themselves who they are and what they want, instead of being slotted, early, into a narrow set of gendered expectations.

To be sure, for some women choosing to wait to have children, choosing to have fewer, or not have them at all, is linked to a failure of the state. But for many others, it’s a sign of a more flexible and open society, populated by women who feel surer of themselves to pursue the unconventional.

Concerns about the economic impacts of lower birth rates are valid, but also shortsighted—especially given that an ever-expanding global population of wealthier people living longer is simply unsustainable. One short-term solution to an aging population is immigration. Longer-term answers come down to finding more creative ways to fund social

welfare programs than dependence on unlimited population growth and placing the burden on women to create a generation of workers.

Maybe the truth is that, given a wider range of options for finding love, respect, and a full life, women will choose many different paths of which motherhood or mothering a large brood are but two. Maybe the choices made by some of the luckiest and best-resourced women in the world shouldn’t scare us, but should inform us that when women have more options and opportunities, women’s desires become far more varied.

We should spend less time worrying about birth rates, and more time developing policies to support families of all kinds—because it’s simply the right thing to do. We should couple that with an intentional shift in culture that doesn’t require women to cede so much of themselves (and give up so much of their potential and so many of their other wants) when they have children. That might not result in a baby boom, but it would serve a more worthy goal: healthier families and happier citizens, each a little freer to decide for themselves what makes a good life.



Concerns about the economic impacts of lower birth rates are valid, but also shortsighted—especially given that an ever-expanding global population of wealthier people living longer is simply unsustainable. One short-term solution to an aging population is immigration. Longer-term answers come down to finding more creative ways to fund social welfare programs than dependence on unlimited population growth and placing the burden on women to create a generation of workers.



Appropriations Process Pauses as Congress Goes into Recess

By Stacie Murphy, Director of Congressional Relations

It's summer in Washington, DC, which means the appropriations process is underway, though, as always, there will be a lull in the proceedings as Congress leaves town for its August recess. Given the progress in the House of Representatives so far, however, the future looks bright for international family planning supporters.

House Tackles a Pair of Great Appropriations Bills

First up was foreign aid. On July 1, the House Appropriations Committee considered the Fiscal Year 2022 State Department and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) appropriations bill, which:

- Increased funding for bilateral family planning to \$760 million (\$185 million above the prior year);
- Provided a U.S. contribution for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) of \$70 million (\$37.5 million above the prior year);
- Included the Global HER Act language to permanently repeal the Global Gag Rule; and,
- Removed the Helms Amendment from the bill (though it remains part of permanent statute).

A trio of Republican amendments attempted to undermine these advances,

with Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Kay Granger (R-TX) offering an amendment to reinsert the Helms Amendment, which forbids the use of U.S. foreign assistance funds for abortion “as a method of family planning.” The Granger amendment was rejected on a vote of 27-31 with all Democrats, except Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-TX), opposed. All Republicans voted in favor.

The second amendment, offered by freshman Rep. Ashley Hinson (R-IA), was a broad amendment with multiple parts. It would have reinserted the Helms Amendment, deleted a requirement to provide complete and accurate medical information on modern contraceptives and condoms, eliminated the permanent legislative repeal of the Global Gag Rule, and reversed a slight modification to the Kemp-Kasten Amendment, which has been used in the past by Republican presidents to deny funding to UNFPA. The Hinson amendment was rejected 27-31, identical to the tally on the Granger amendment, with Rep. Cuellar again voting with the Republicans.

The final amendment was offered by Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD). Rep. Harris's amendment was quite radical, combining a flat-out prohibition on any funding for

UNFPA with a total elimination of the \$760 million set aside for bilateral family planning programs. The Harris amendment was rejected on a straight party-line vote of 26-32, with Rep. Cuellar joining the rest of his Democratic colleagues in voting it down.

After disposing of all amendments, the Appropriations Committee voted 32-25 to send the bill to the House floor, where it came up for a vote on July 28. The House Rules Committee limited amendments, causing Republicans to decide to offer what's known as *en bloc* amendments—a list of amendments grouped together for one up or down vote. That vote failed, and the final bill passed the House by a vote of 217-212.

In a statement after the bill's passage, SFOPs Subcommittee Chairwoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) said:

This bill makes critical investments in global health and humanitarian needs, provides strong funding to address the climate crisis, and advances gender equity. ... I'd like to thank Chair DeLauro for her leadership and my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee for their dedication to getting this bill across the finish line.

While the SFOPs bill was making its way to the floor, the Appropriations Committee turned its attention to the Labor/Health and Human Services (HHS) bill. That bill:

- Increased funding for the Title X domestic family planning program (the only federally-funded family planning program for low-income Americans) to \$400 million (\$113.5 million above the prior year);
- Included \$130 million for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention program (\$29 million above the prior year);
- Provided zero funding for ineffective and medically inaccurate abstinence-only programs; and
- Excluded the Hyde Amendment, which forbids the use of federal funding for abortion except under very limited circumstances. (Unlike the Helms Amendment, Hyde is “only” an appropriations rider and is not part of permanent statute.)

On July 15, the Appropriations Committee met to consider the bill. Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) offered an amendment to reinsert the Hyde Amendment language into the bill. His amendment failed, 27-32, with Rep. Cuellar again joining with all committee Republicans

to vote in favor. Ultimately, the committee voted to approve the HHS bill on a party-line vote, 33-25. It came to the House floor as part of a package of spending bills on July 29, where it passed 219-208.

What’s Next?

In an ideal world, we’d immediately see the Senate pass the same set of bills and watch President Biden sign them.

However, since we’re not in an ideal world, things are likely to play out somewhat differently. Practically speaking, the Senate versions of the bills are guaranteed to differ from those passed by the House. We haven’t yet seen the Senate language, and we don’t have a firm schedule for when it will be considered. At our print deadline, Congress was on recess, so we can be certain there won’t be further progress until members reconvene in September.

That won’t leave a lot of time for the Senate to work before the end of the fiscal year on September 30, which means that one of several things is likely to happen. Both sides may agree to speed up the process by skipping floor votes on individual bills or passing them as part of an omnibus package. Even if they do that, however, there will still need to be

“This bill makes critical investments in global health and humanitarian needs, provides strong funding to address the climate crisis, and advances gender equity.”

—Rep. Barbara Lee

some way of reconciling the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bills. Usually, that’s accomplished by a Conference Committee—a handful of members appointed to negotiate a compromise.

No matter how it plays out, a Continuing Resolution, or CR, which will fund the government at current levels for a few days or weeks, while the details of the final package are hammered out, is likely.

It’s all very cumbersome, and sometimes it feels like something of a miracle that government functions at all. But despite the tediousness of the process, there’s a lot to look forward to this year. We’re on the cusp of ending the Global Gag Rule forever. For the first time, the House has passed a repeal of both Helms and Hyde. Long-needed funding increases for both domestic and international family planning programs are on the horizon.

It’s going to be an exciting fall.



Another Successful Summer of HER

By Isabel Rewick, Stanback Activist Engagement Fellow

Our volunteers and activists have been working hard to #Fight4HER all summer. The fight to ensure reproductive health and rights for everyone, everywhere, is as crucial as ever, especially now that we have a supportive White House and majority in Congress. The Biden-Harris administration marks a distinct shift in the political landscape for reproductive health and rights. With Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, our hopes are high that Congress will pass the Global HER Act and permanently repeal the Global Gag Rule this year.

The Fourth Annual Summer of HER

This year's Summer of HER fellows—25 amazing activists from across the country—demanded during this year's Summer of HER program that Congress pass the Global HER Act. They also developed their skills as activists and galvanized grassroots networks of volunteers. While the Summer of HER was facilitated virtually due to the pandemic, the fellows showed up engaged and eager to use this opportunity to end the Global Gag Rule.

Throughout the eight-week program, the fellows attended weekly sessions, workshops, and trainings with leaders

from the reproductive health and rights community. During the coalition-wide Week of Action to End the Global Gag Rule (June 21-25), fellows circulated petitions; called, emailed, and tweeted at their members of Congress; and attended our June National Volunteer Call. The call featured Dickson Okong'o, the founder and Executive Director of Stretchers Youth Organization in Mombasa, Kenya, and Caitlin Horrigan, the Director of Global Advocacy at Planned Parenthood. Our audience learned about the extremely harmful impacts of the Global Gag Rule on the ground as well as the political pathway to passing the Global HER Act.

In July, the fellows practiced intentional recruitment and relational organizing by hosting their own “kitchen table conversations.” These conversations took place across the country as fellows mobilized their networks and encouraged friends, family, and community members to join the #Fight4HER.

The [Virtual] HER Summit

We wrapped up this year's Summer of HER program with our fourth annual [digital] HER Summit on July 29. The Summit included speakers Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, the founder and CEO of Conservation Through Public

Health, and Dr. Michelle Dubón, the Medical Director of WINGS Guatemala. Both speakers led excellent sessions that engaged our 77 viewers and concluded with audience questions. Dr. Kalema-Zikusoka spoke about the importance of the population, health, and environment approach to solving complex issues related to population pressures, reproductive health and rights, and environmental protection. Our audience also had the opportunity to learn about Dr. Dubón's work in Guatemala to increase access to reproductive health care for rural and Indigenous women through improved medical access and youth leadership campaigns.

The Summit concluded with a special video from Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA-7). The congressman, also a physician, is a longtime champion of reproductive health and rights and has been a vocal advocate of the Global HER Act. Our activists and fellows enjoyed hearing his words of support as he encouraged our audience to continue to #Fight4HER.

While the HER Summit marked the end of our Summer of HER program this year, our volunteers, activists, and fellows will continue in their efforts this fall to put a permanent end to the Global Gag Rule.



Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA-7) addressing HER Summit attendees via a special video



Above: Summer of HER fellows connect online at the first session of the program



HER Summit attendees hear from Dr. Michelle Dubón about her work at WINGS Guatemala to improve access to reproductive health care





Rising to the Challenge: PopEd Trainers Excel in Virtual Classrooms

By Lindsey Bailey, Education Network Director, and Sandy Joseph, Population Education Fellow

PopEd's volunteer trainers are the backbone of our program. They are K-12 teachers, pre-service professors, non-formal educators, and education administrators who are passionate about population issues and share PopEd resources with educators in their communities. When our workshops transitioned online in March 2020 due to the pandemic, we weren't sure how involved our trainers would want to be in the new, and very different, online workshop model. We've been thrilled by their willingness to learn, get creative, and offer their talents in this virtual format.

Nearly 50 trainers attended our "Learn to Present PopEd Virtually" webinar last fall. Others observed or co-presented alongside PopEd staff to get up to speed on virtual presenting methods, and still others used their own remote teaching experiences to take the lead on digital workshops from the get-go. Over the past 18 months, 88 trainers have been involved in presenting 148 online PopEd workshops, many sharing their own tips and tools to enhance PopEd's online delivery methods.

Two trainers have stood out in their commitment to reaching educators this past year, despite the limitations of online learning:



Kathryn (Kate) Silvis, Professor and Chair of Education at La Roche University in Pittsburgh, has been a key figure in facilitating PopEd's Act 48 programming in Pennsylvania. Act 48 is a Pennsylvania law requiring teachers to get professional development credits to renew their teaching certificates.



Lynda Deschambault is the Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Climate Leaders in California. She is a veteran trainer (in the Trainers' Network for 20 years!) who worked with our staff to transition her skills to the virtual format.

Kate and Lynda were named our Most Valuable Trainers (MVTs) for the 2020-2021 school year. We recently had a chance to speak with them to learn more about their passion for PopEd.

What made you want to be a PopEd trainer?

Kate: I had seen other people do these interactive activities and it looked like fun—I wanted to do it myself. I also wanted to provide Act 48 workshops to local teachers, since I can earn my credits by presenting these workshops. My ultimate plan is to pair an undergraduate student with a current teacher to attend Act 48 workshops and have them use PopEd lesson plans to support each other.

Lynda: At the core of environmental issues is education. I've always slightly regretted that I wasn't a teacher, but my career took me down a path as an environmental scientist. Being a PopEd trainer was interesting to me and I felt it was a great way to do both: follow my calling and do what is necessary. My core passion is protecting the environment, but always with education in mind.

What is your favorite PopEd lesson plan?

Kate: “Panther Hunt”—it’s fun to watch teachers go get their “food” and go back to their “den.” I love the virtual version of “Panther Hunt” too—PopEd did a fabulous job taking those face-to-face lessons and converting them to virtual lessons. It’s been incredible having these virtual lessons to use the past year.

Lynda: I love “Earth: The Apple of My Eye.” It’s so simple and visual that anybody can “get it.” Also, “Mining for Chocolate”—that one really hits home for me. I worked for the EPA for 20 years managing mountain top removal mining sites. We can’t mine resources this way without it crumbling, and in the lesson, you can’t take resources out without the cookie crumbling.



Are there any specific challenges you had to overcome in the virtual environment? Or benefits to virtual presenting?

Kate: I attended the PopEd webinars and I learned a lot about how to teach virtually. Having Google folders for breakout rooms is a nice way to involve small groups and be interactive.

And on the virtual tools, everything is there for you—there are prompts, directions, and a wealth of resources. It was really nice to co-present with Raf [PopEd staff member] for a virtual session, since I wasn’t as familiar with the tools PopEd had created. We could go back and forth between the two of us.

Lynda: I felt really challenged when we went virtual. The technology was overwhelming, and I have a lot of respect for teachers that came up to speed so quickly and changed to that format. One of the benefits is I was able to teach a workshop that would have been a four-hour drive for me. Presenting virtually is a lower environmental impact with no carbon footprint.

Do you have a memorable experience as a PopEd trainer you’d like to share?

Kate: For my first PopEd workshop, I was presenting in Memphis and using the lesson “Something for Everyone.” In the lesson, the facilitator plays music and people around the table grab chips to model sharing renewable resources. I spent a long time choosing an Elvis song to play, but all the chips were gone not even two minutes into the song. If people take everything, there is nothing to share.

Any specific tips on presenting PopEd workshops?

Lynda: Have fun and use the flexibility of the curriculum. Weave in your own experiences—it helps people to remember the lessons. “In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught.” (Baba Dioum, 1968) This summarizes why, as an environmental scientist, I teach PopEd workshops.

Interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

Children's Books for the New Era



K. A. Polzin

CartoonStock.com

Los Angeles Times

For the nearly five decades since the U.S. Supreme Court decided that a woman has a constitutional right to an abortion, that right has been under attack by state legislators. But the High Court has stood by its landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade* over and over again in the rulings that followed.

Now the justices have taken a case that could result in that bedrock precedent—a pillar of a woman’s ability to control her body and her life—being overturned. On [May 17], the High Court agreed to weigh in on a Mississippi state law that bans abortions at 15 weeks of pregnancy. A federal district court and the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals both found the law unconstitutional because *Roe* guarantees a right to an abortion up to the point when a fetus would be viable outside the woman’s body, which is around 24 weeks of gestation.

...

After months of scheduling and then rescheduling the discussion on whether to hear the state of Mississippi’s appeal of the 5th Circuit’s decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the Court finally decided to accept it. The Court said it would consider only one of the three questions Mississippi broached, but it’s enormously important: Does the Constitution bar all prohibitions on elective abortions prior to viability?

...

When deciding this case, the Supreme Court could send a clear message to state legislatures, once and for all, that a woman has a constitutional right to an abortion before the fetus is viable. Any state law that shortens that time frame abridges that right and will always be unconstitutional. That is the opportunity presented by *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, and the Court should seize it.

– May 17, 2021

The Seattle Times

Federal protection for women’s access to abortions is in more peril than in decades. Women across America should not lose the right to safe, legal abortions because of an ideological tilt by the U.S. Supreme Court.

On May 17, justices voted to hear an abortion case that may give the Court’s newly established six-member conservative majority an opening to overturn the guarantee of abortion access in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. ...

The case concerns a Mississippi law enacted in violation of the Court’s prohibition on abortion bans, or laws that have effects approaching that. The law in question bars abortion after the 15th week of pregnancy. The Court has repeatedly held that abortions must remain available before a fetus is viable outside the womb—about the 24th week or later. A new Texas law signed [May 19] pushes the line further, prohibiting abortions after the sixth week, which is earlier than many women even know they are pregnant.

If the Court overturns or diminishes the *Roe v. Wade* decision, expect similar prohibitions to creep across the country. Because the then-Republican-held Senate enabled former President Donald Trump to push three conservative justices onto the U.S. Supreme Court, the 5-4 margins that protected abortion access in a 2016 Texas ruling and a 2020 Louisiana one cannot be read as predictive of the next decision on abortion access.

This is a perfect illustration of why elections matter—in this case, those for the president who nominates justices and the Senate seats that confirm them.

...

If the newest case succeeds in stripping away the protections *Roe v. Wade* extended to women across the nation, voters should hold Washington’s Republican members of Congress accountable for their aid of the long march to that precipice.

– May 23, 2021

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