

Confronting Population Denial within the United Nations

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**POPULATION
BALANCE**

Shrink Toward Abundance

Our Work

We inspire narrative, behavioral, and system change that shrinks our human impact and elevates the rights and wellbeing of people, animals, and the planet.



**POPULATION
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Shrink Toward Abundance

Media Publications ([Link](#))

**The
Guardian**

Reproductive rights are under threat

Nandita Bajaj

Newsweek

'Worrying' Population Declines Are Actually A Hopeful Sign | Opinion

By **Kirsten Stade**

The Washington Post

Opinion | Our goal should be a planet with fewer humans

Kirsten Stade

Ms.

MORE THAN A MAGAZINE, A MOVEMENT

Abortion Bans Are a Natural Outgrowth of Coercive Pronatalism

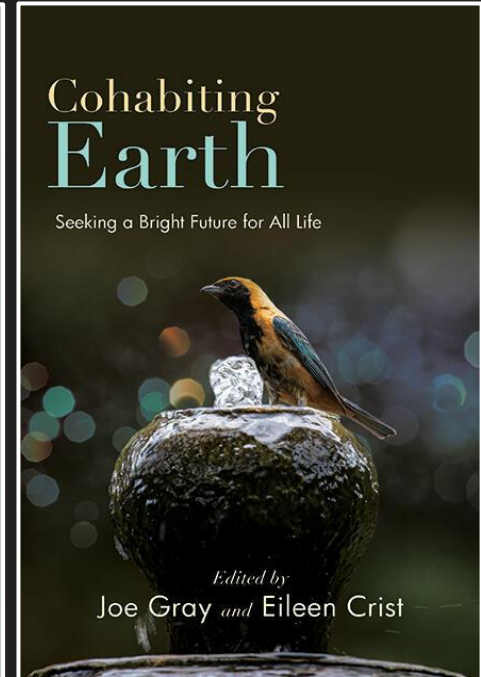
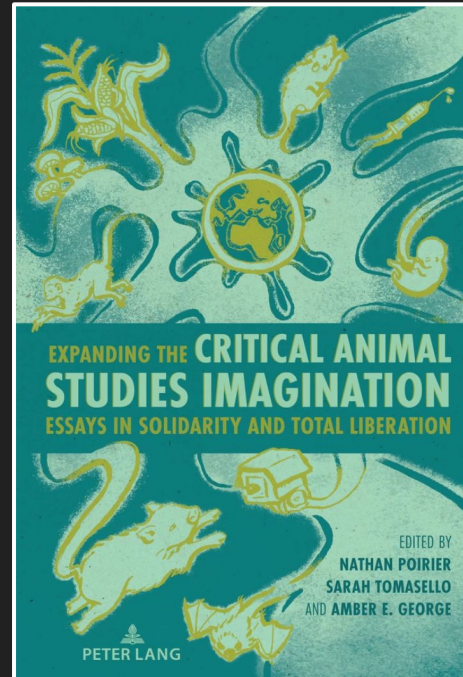
NANDITA BAJAJ

Academic Publications ([Link](#))

Challenging Pronatalism Is Key to Advancing Reproductive Rights and a Sustainable Population

World scientists' warning: The behavioural crisis driving ecological overshoot

Confronting the United Nations' Pro-growth Agenda: A Call to Reverse Ecological Overshoot



Conference and Classroom Presentations ([Link](#))



Open Online Discussion-Based Course ([Link](#))

Developed and taught by Nandita Bajaj, this is the only course in the world that draws the connections between pronatalism, human supremacy, social inequalities, and ecological overshoot, and offers life-affirming alternatives. It is open to anyone and is run as a discussion-based Zoom course over 14 weeks.

Graduate Course

Pronatalism, Overpopulation &
the Planet: The Personal,
Cultural, & Global Implications
of Having a Child

Online, Open, 3 credits
Jan-Apr/ May-Aug/ Sep-Dec
Learn more: bit.ly/3NKS1E5

ANTIOCH
UNIVERSITY



Podcasts ([Link](#))



SUPRABHA SESHAN

From Ego to Eco
Rewilding Nature
and Ourselves



AMRITA NANDY

**Patriarchy,
Motherhood,
and the Search
for Meaning**



ANDREW KYAMAGERO

**Engaging Boys
and Men to
Confront
Patriarchy in
Uganda**



ALAN WEISMAN

Countdown
Our Last, Best
Hope for a Future
on Earth?



Podcasts ([Link](#))

BEYOND PRONATALISM



finding fulfillment
with or without kids

MILLY & MIK

on healing and
celebrating family
through adoption



BEYOND PRONATALISM
finding fulfillment, with or without kids

HANS-PETER

on his most loving
gift - a vasectomy
at 25



BEYOND PRONATALISM
finding fulfillment, with or without kids

ASH

on rejecting
Mormonism and
motherhood



BEYOND PRONATALISM
finding fulfillment, with or without kids

OLIVIA

on reproductive
ambivalence



BEYOND PRONATALISM
finding fulfillment, with or without kids

Outline

- Part I: UN & Overshoot
- Part II: Population Denial within the UN
- Part III: Pathways Forward Toward Social and Ecological Justice

Confronting the United Nations' Pro-growth Agenda: A Call to Reverse Ecological Overshoot



Nandita Bajaj, Eileen Crist, Kirsten Stade

the journal of population
and sustainability

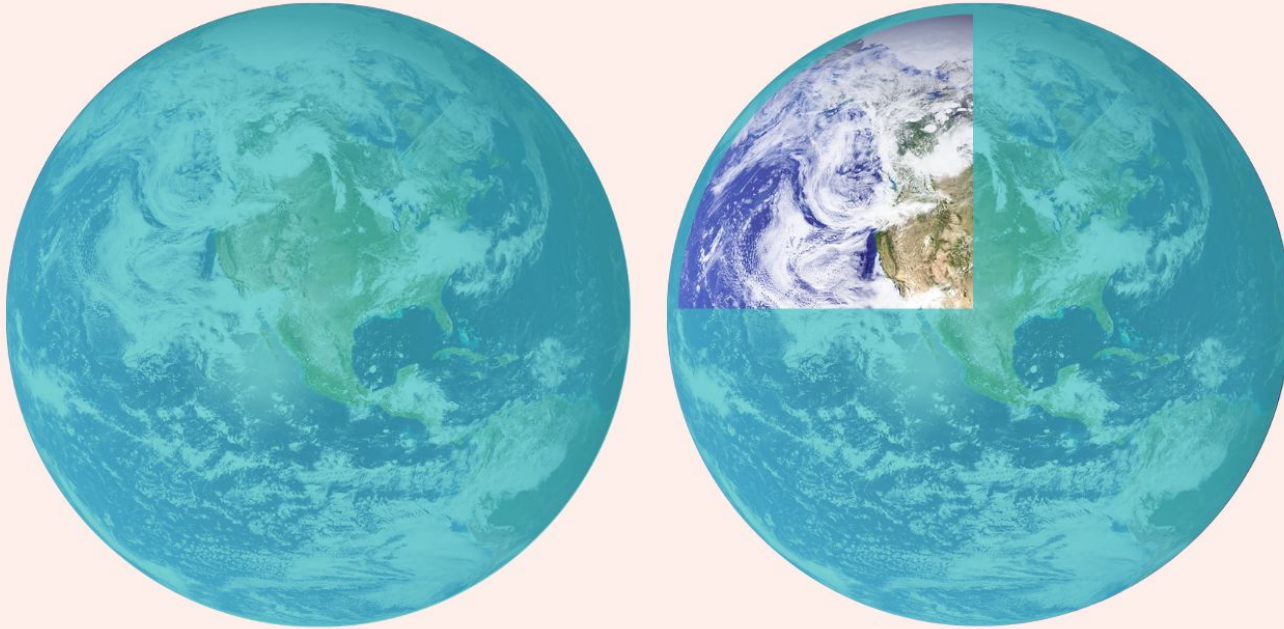
vol. 8, no. 2, August 2024

Part I: The UN and Overshoot

The founding of the United Nations

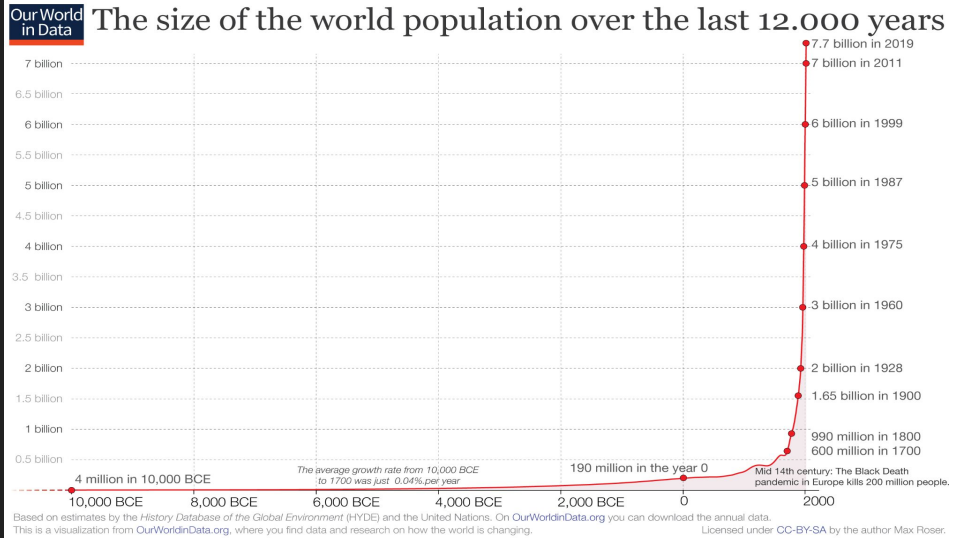
- Founded in 1945 to promote world peace and collaboration among nations;
- Prevailing ideas:
 - economic growth brings prosperity and wellbeing;
 - human ingenuity can overcome all constraints to growth;
 - nature and nonhumans exist as 'resources' to serve us
- The UN appears invested in this obsolete framing as ecological and social crises become more desperate

ECOLOGICAL OVERSHOOT



Humanity's
demand on
Earth is **75%**
greater than
is sustainable

Human Expansion



**POPULATION
X 8**

**CONSUMPTION
X 100**

THE GREAT ACCELERATION

SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

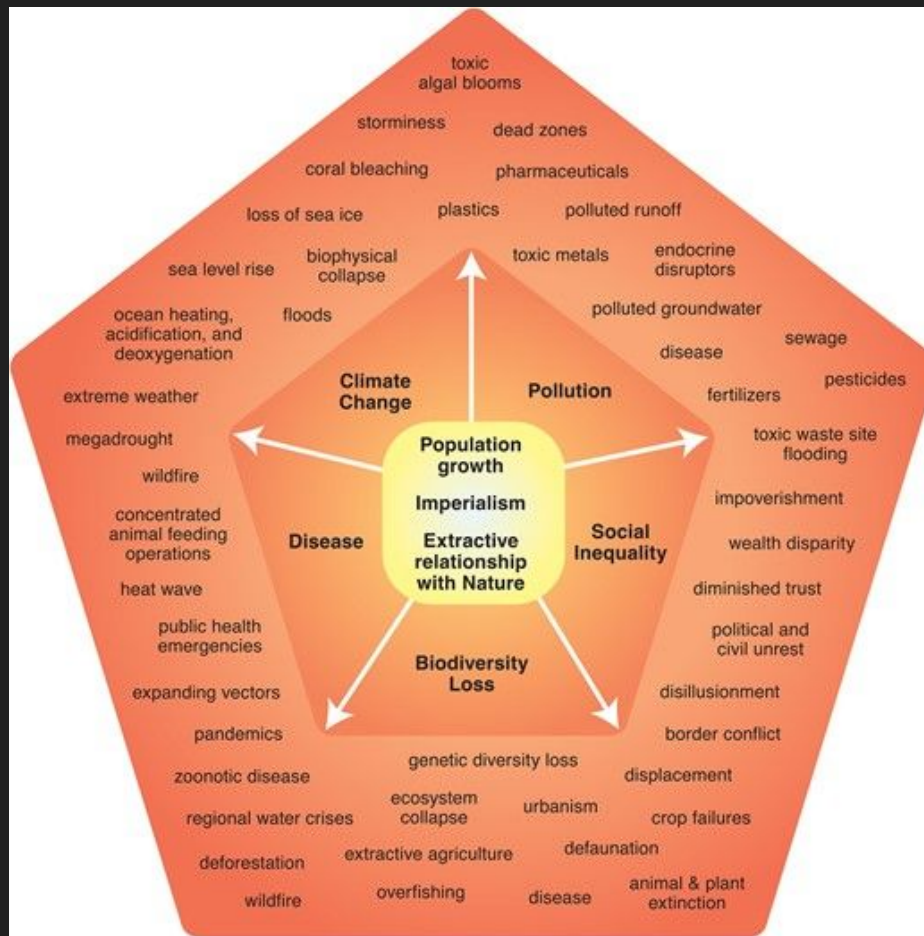


EARTH SYSTEM TRENDS



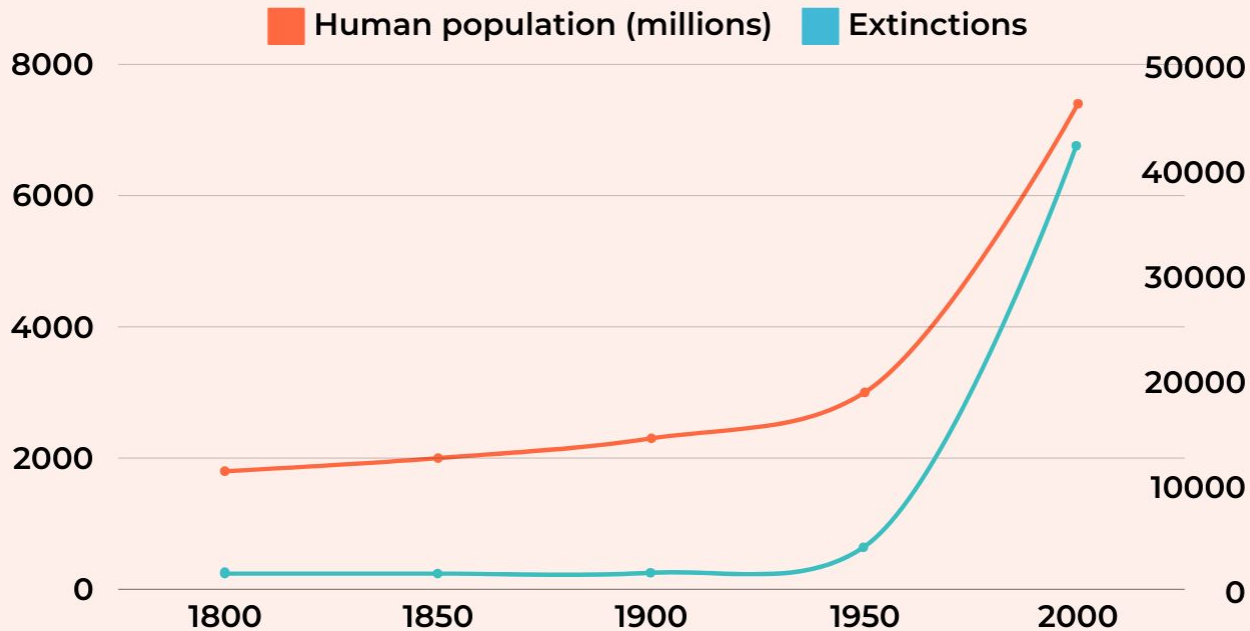
REFERENCE: Steffen, W., Broadgate, L., Deutsch, O., Gaffney and C. Ludwig (2015), The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: the Great Acceleration, Submitted to *The Anthropocene Review*.

MAP & DESIGN: Félix Pharand-Deschênes / Globala



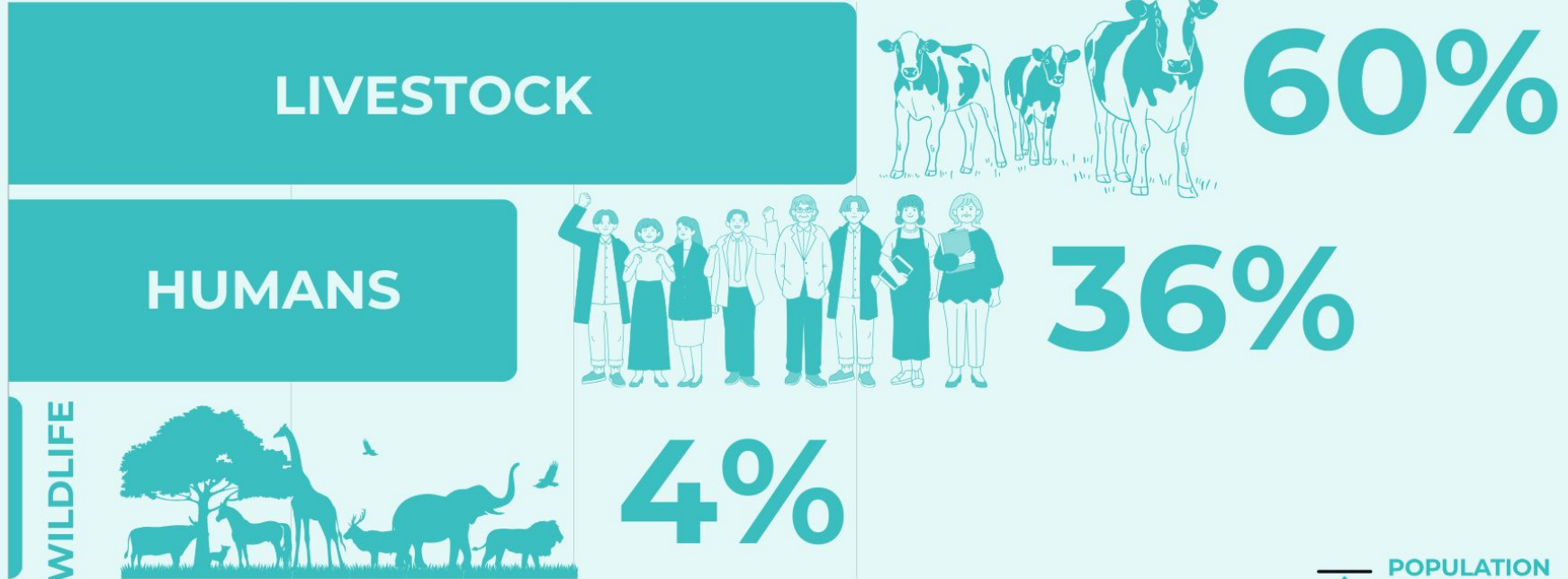
Source: Fletcher et al. Earth at risk: An urgent call to end the age of destruction and forge a just and sustainable future, *PNAS Nexus*, Volume 3, Issue 4, April 2024

HUMANS AND EXTINCTIONS



Scott, J. Michael, "SLIDES: Threats to Biological Diversity: Global, Continental, Local" (2008). Shifting Baselines and New Meridians: Water, Resources, Landscapes, and the Transformation of the American West (Summer Conference, June 4-6).
<https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/water-resources-and-transformation-of-American-West/15>

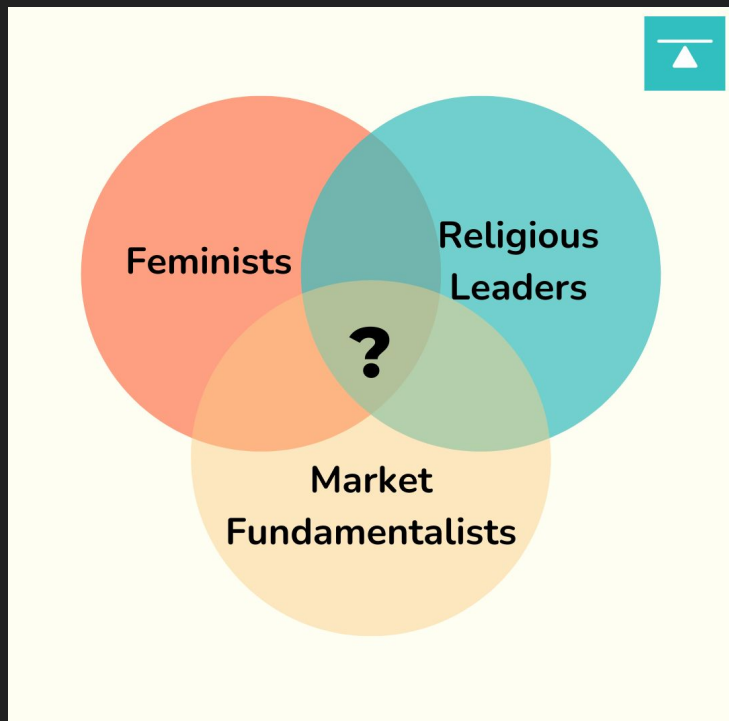
BIOMASS DISTRIBUTION OF LAND MAMMALS



Y.M. Bar-On, R. Phillips, R. Milo, The biomass distribution on Earth, Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A. 115 (25) 6506-6511, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1711842115> (2018).



Int'l Conf on Population and Development, 1994



The Toxification
of Population
Discourse

**Negligence of
unraveling
ecological and
social crises within
the UN**

**THE
OVERPOPULATION
PODCAST**



Confronting Overshoot
Changing the Story of Human
Exceptionalism



WILLIAM REES

Part I: Population Denial in the UNFPA

A glib title



Public survey

Commissioned by UNFPA

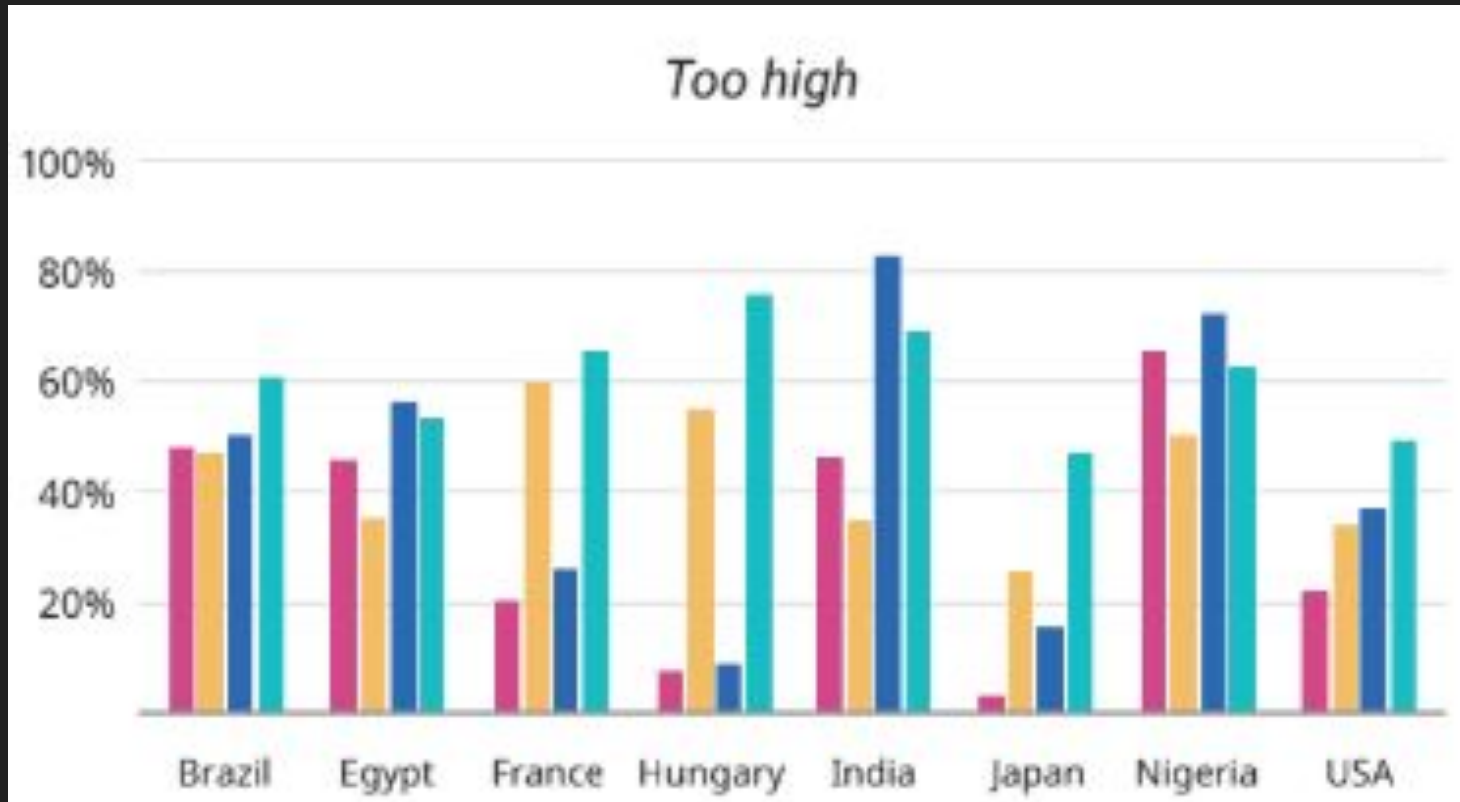
Conducted by YouGov

Representative sample of ~8000 for views on population

Eight countries:

- Brazil
- Egypt
- France
- Hungary
- India
- Japan
- Nigeria
- United States

Respondents' views on fertility rate and population size across eight countries surveyed




Country fertility rates

Global fertility rates

Country population

World population

Selective interpretation of results



The findings suggest that population anxieties have seeped into large portions of the general public. In every country surveyed, the most common view among respondents was that the global population was too large.

UNFPA SWOP, 2023



In all countries, those who reported being exposed to media or conversations about the world's population in the past 12 months were substantially more likely to view the global population as being too high.

UNFPA SWOP, 2023

Country ranks by population size

1. India
3. United States
6. Nigeria
7. Brazil
12. Japan
13. Egypt
23. France
96. Hungary

Seven of the eight countries surveyed are among the top 25 most populous countries in the world.



“Too many” people.

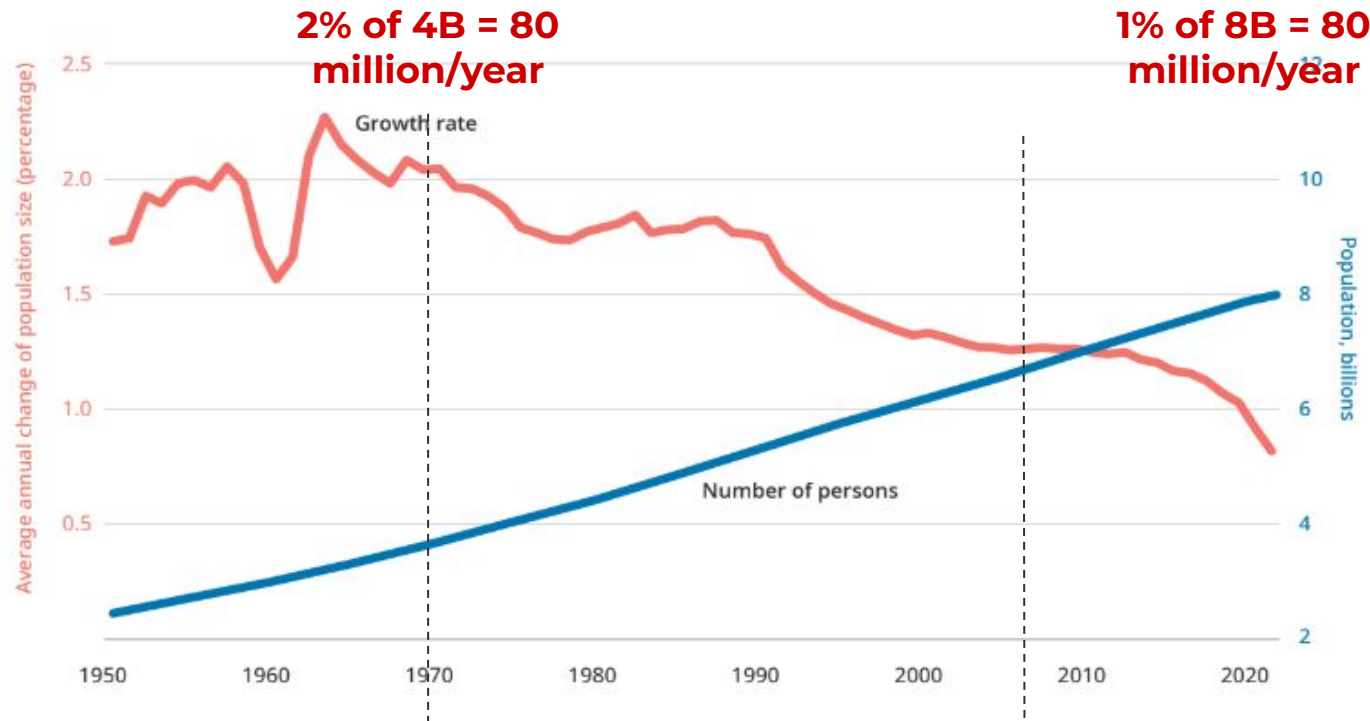
This phrase is uttered every day. It can be heard among drivers sitting in traffic. It may be spoken by shoppers in long queues for groceries and by consumers of news about the plunder of natural resources and rising global temperatures. From their perspectives, a world of 8 billion human beings is one bursting at the seams.

UNFPA SWOP, 2023

If the rights of people are so central to the UNFPA's values, why are their views and experiences constantly being dismissed and belittled?

The tired trope of “the problem is solving itself”

World population growth rate, 1950–2021



Source: UN DESA, 2022.

Population growth rate is declining, yet population is still increasing by the same absolute amount each year as in 1970.



The idea that fewer people would automatically relieve pressures on the planet and allow ecological restoration is persistent. Proponents of such thinking often link human population size to food insecurity, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, the increased chances of pandemics, overcrowding, joblessness, deteriorating infrastructure, bad governance and conflict.

UNFPA SWOP, 2023

UNFPA denying scientific evidence

Evidence from other UN agencies

Many countries will face challenges in meeting the needs of their growing urban populations, including for housing, transportation, energy systems and other infrastructure, as well as for employment and basic services such as education and health care. - UNDESA, 2018

Since 1970, trends in agricultural production, fish harvest, bioenergy production and harvest of materials have increased, in response to population growth, rising demand and technological development, this has come at a steep price for [] biodiversity and soil health. - IPBES, 2019

A combination of rapid population growth and limited social protection measures have led to a steep increase in the global numbers of extremely poor children, especially in Africa and South Asia where nearly 90% of the world's children caught in extreme poverty reside. - World Bank and UNICEF, 2023





A misplaced focus on population growth as a key driver of past, present and future climate change conflates a rise in emissions with an increase in people, rather than the real source of those emissions: an increase in cars, power plants, airplanes, industries, buildings, and other parts of our fossil fuel dependent economy and lifestyles. - **The Union of Concerned Scientists**

UNFPA SWOP, 2023



”

Globally, GDP per capita and population growth remained the strongest drivers of CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the last decade.

IPCC, 2022

Consumption distribution (per capita)

How many Earths would we need
if everyone lived like U.S.A. residents?

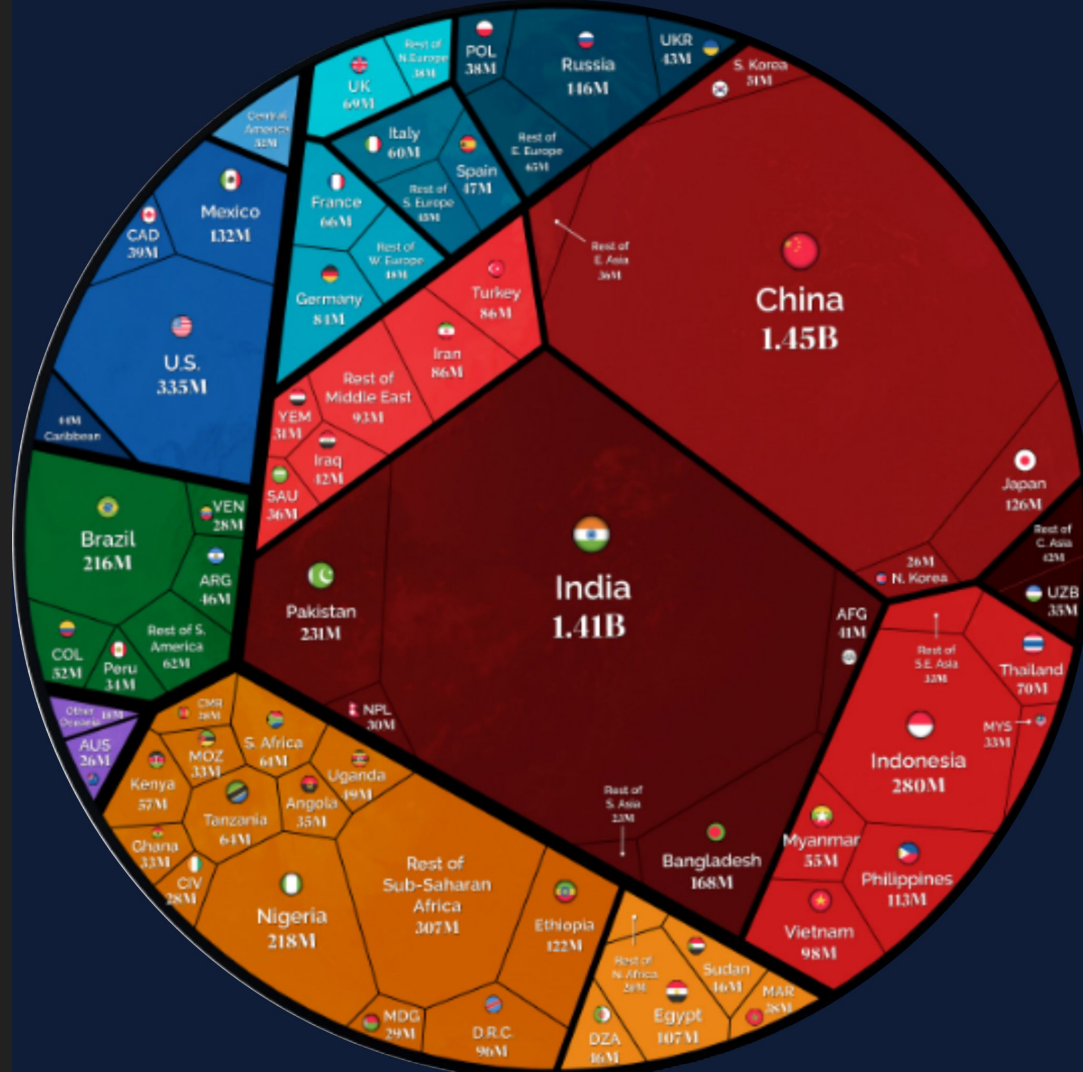


Source: Global Footprint Network

Population distribution

Global South:
>6B (>75%)

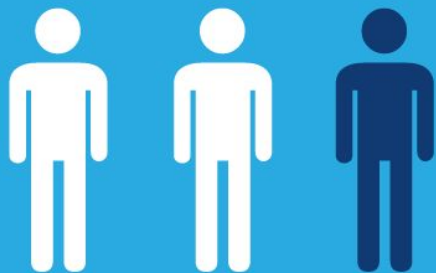
Global North:
<2B (<25%)



The Global Middle Class

88 percent of the next billion entrants into the middle class will be in Asia

By 2030, Asia could represent 2/3 of the global middle class population.



BROOKINGS



Source: Kharas, H. 2017. The unprecedented expansion of the global middle class, *Brookings Institution*

The Global Middle Class

The global middle class market is growing slowly in advanced countries and rapidly among emerging market economies

The middle class market in the U.S., the Eurozone, and Japan is projected to grow at only 0.5% per year, compared with annual growth of 6% or more in China and India.



0.5%

A bar chart with three bars of equal height, each composed of three horizontal segments. To the right of the bars is the text '0.5%'.

U.S., EUROZONE & JAPAN



6%

A bar chart with four bars of increasing height from left to right. The tallest bar is composed of six horizontal segments. To the right of the bars is a large '6%' with a circular icon containing an upward-pointing arrow.

CHINA & INDIA

BROOKINGS

Source: Kharas, H. 2017. The unprecedented expansion of the global middle class, *Brookings Institution*



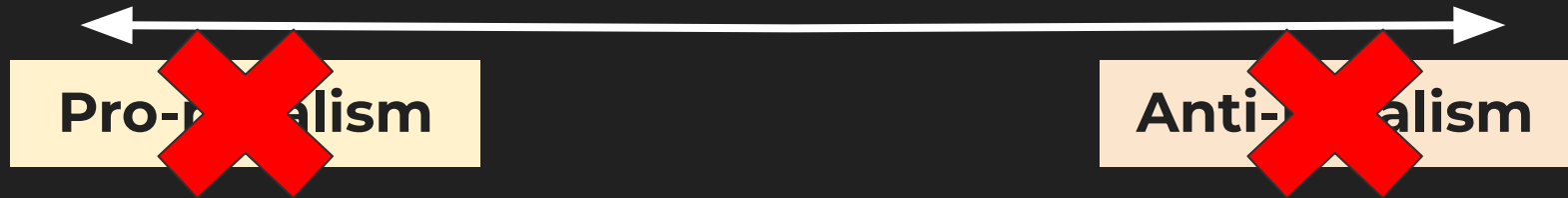
Many real challenges are waved away with a simple, nihilistic verdict: if global catastrophes are the result of too many people, the logical assumption that follows is that the number of people must be reduced, that some unknown number of people should survive and reproduce while others should not.

UNFPA SWOP, 2023

Is advocating for a sustainable population for the benefit of all nihilistic?

Is the logical assumption to population reduction selective reproduction and selective culling?

Pronatalism versus antinatalism



**Reproductive Autonomy
& Responsibility**

Selective examples in history

**Too many, too few: the long history
of population debates**

UNFPA SWOP 2023, pg. 30

Patriarchy, pronatalism, and population



ANGELA SAINI

The Patriarchs

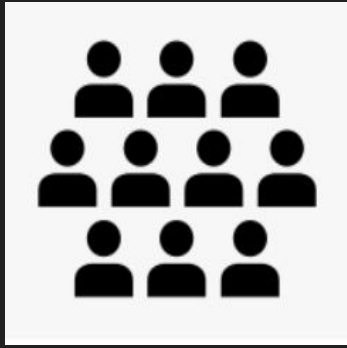


”
Elites in early societies needed population growth to strengthen their states. Young women were expected to produce as many children as possible, and men were expected to fight in wars. Family arrangements and gender roles were codified in service of the state.

- Angela Saini



The pervasiveness of pronatalism



Cultural
Pressures



More
Followers



More
Consumers



More
Taxpayers,
Military,
Ethnocentrism



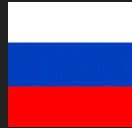
Draft Iraqi law allowing 9-year-olds to marry would 'legalise child rape', say activists



Have 'at least 3 kids', Erdogan tells Turkish women



Have four or more babies in Hungary and you'll pay no income tax for life, prime minister says



Putin revives Stalin-era 'Mother Heroine' award for women with 10 children



As Trump returns, state lawmakers pursue bills that would treat abortion as homicide



Japanese officials push dating apps in effort to boost birth rates



Iran is urging people to have babies — and making life hard for those who don't want to

CHILD MARRIAGE



almost **650 million**
women and girls alive today
were married before their 18th
birthday

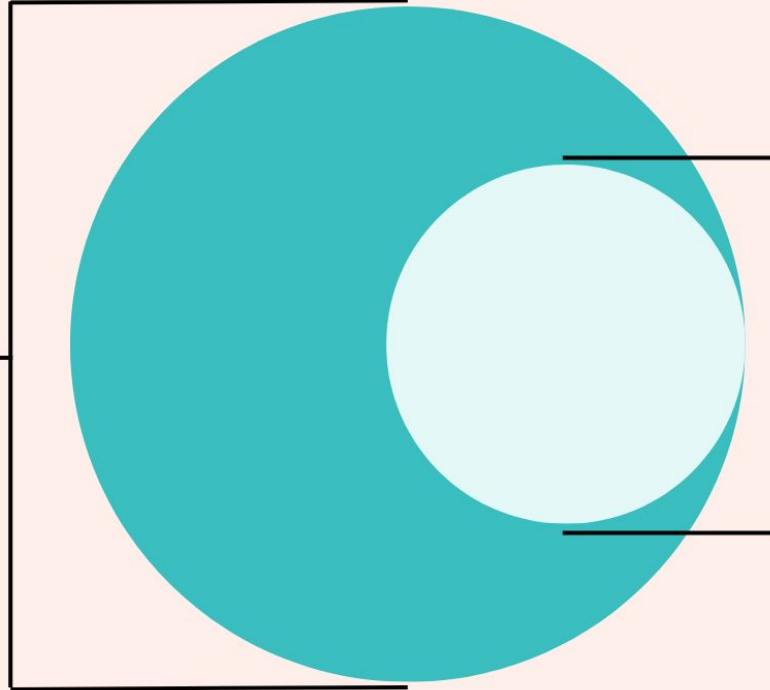
UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES

Globally, nearly
half of all
pregnancies are
unintended.



UNMET NEED FOR CONTRACEPTION

923 million women
of reproductive age
want to avoid
a pregnancy



218 million of them
have an unmet need
for modern
contraception



ELON MUSK
CEO, TESLA MOTORS

”

Population collapse due to low birth rates is a much bigger risk to civilization than global warming. The urge to have sex and procreate has been “subverted” by birth control and abortion, leading to population decline.



POPE FRANCIS
HEAD OF THE CATHOLIC
CHURCH

”

Today ... we see a form of selfishness. We see that some people do not want to have a child. Sometimes they have one, and that's it, but they have dogs and cats that take the place of children.



”

If you say there is a population problem in a country, but you're killing millions of your own people through legalized abortion every year, if that were to be reduced, some of that problem is solved



”

We will defend Christian culture and will not surrender the country to aliens. Instead of just numbers, we want Hungarian children. Migration for us is surrender.



”

**Patriarchal
pronatalism is the
oldest form of
population and
reproductive control.**

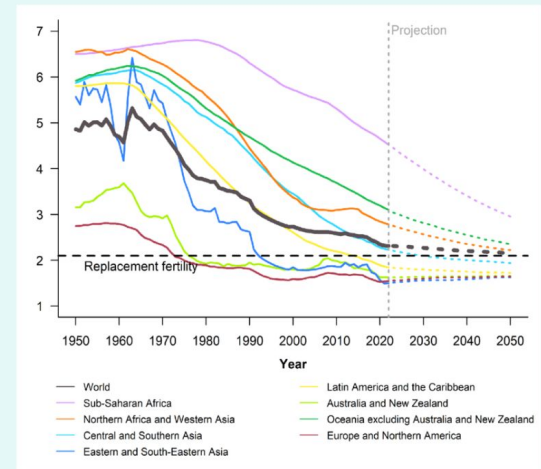
- Nandita Bajaj



Across the world, in country after country, once women achieve the education, empowerment and means to plan their families, fertility declines. This trend is so strikingly uniform across religious, cultural and political contexts that it has revealed women's 'latent desire' for lower fertility – a general preference that surfaces forthrightly once conditions for women's authentic choices align

BAJAJ, CRIST, & STADE, 2024

TOTAL FERTILITY RATE: ESTIMATES



Diniz, José Miguel & Vasconcelos, Henrique & Souza, Júlio & Rb-Silva, Rita & Ameijeiras-Rodriguez, Carolina & Freitas, Alberto. (2023). Comparing Decentralized Learning Methods for Health Data Models to Non-Decentralized Alternatives: A Systematic Review Protocol (Preprint). JMIR Research Protocols. 12. 10.2196/45823.

Selective focus on rights

All individuals and couples
should have the basic right
to decide freely and
responsibly the number and
spacing of their children and
to have the information,
education and means to do
so. - ICPD, 1994.

UNFPA SWOP, 2023

No focus on responsibility

The assumption that women should be spared accurate information about population impacts – lest they plan their families based on a comprehensive picture of the consequences not only for themselves but for present and future societies, for children and for the planet – is condescending.

BAJAJ, CRIST, & STADE, 2024

The rights of children ignored

Due, in large part, to population growth (esp in South Asia and Africa where 90% of extremely poor children reside):

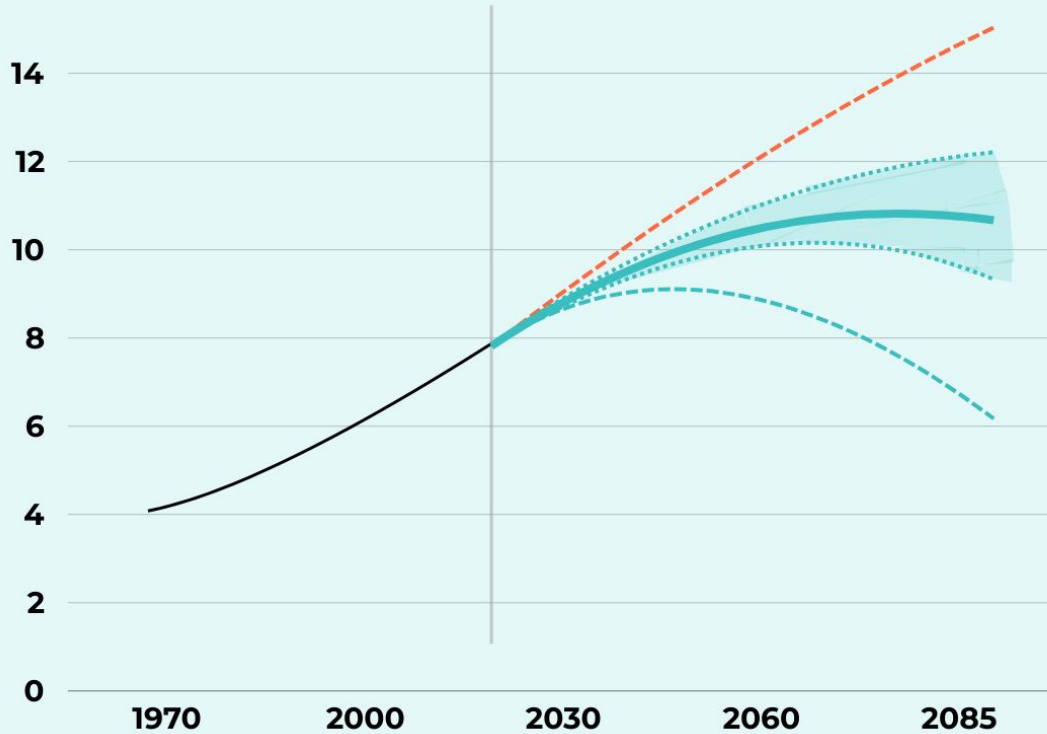
- the number of extremely poor children has increased
- the rates of child marriage has increased and is expected to double by 2050;
- the highest prevalence and largest number of children in labour, a trend that is expected to rise
- Half of the 2.2 billion children at risk of experiencing 'extremely dire' conditions from the climate crisis and pollution





Source: [Bajaj, Crist, & Stade, 2024](#)

Part III: Advancing Social and Ecological Justice

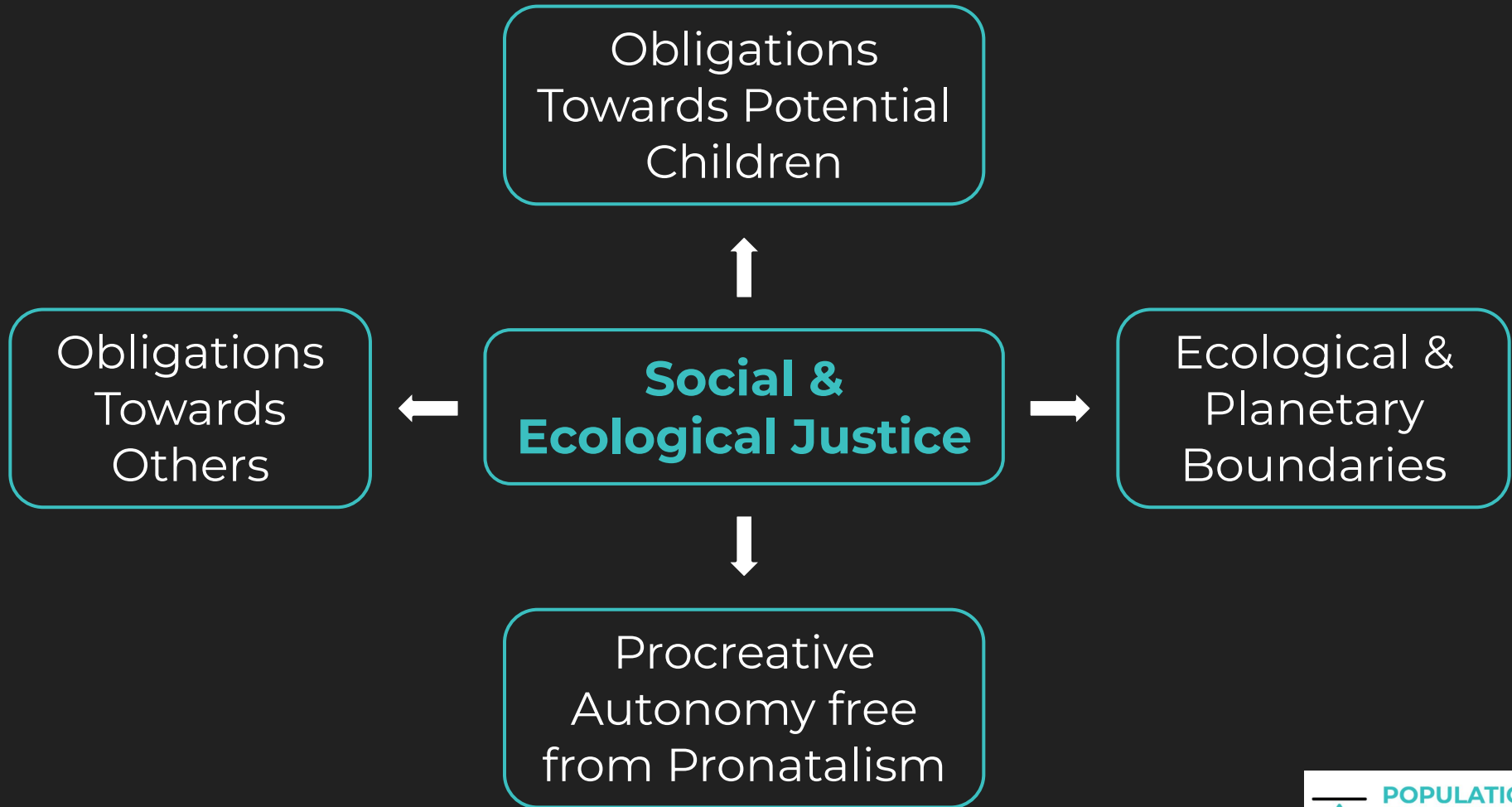
UN POPULATION PROJECTIONS

WORLD POPULATION (BILLIONS)



-  median projection
-  high fertility scenario
-  low fertility scenario
-  95% confidence

UN, 2024



Alternative Ecologically-Grounded Narratives

- Embrace and help accelerate a declining fertility rate and modify policies that celebrate liberated family choices;
- Embrace an aging population and modify policies that treat our elderly with dignity, and not burdens;
- Restructure our economic model so our economy is here to serve us, and not vice versa;
- Abandon our pretense of human supremacy and embrace an ecocentric worldview that upholds Earth's ecological integrity.

Thank you!

SHRINK TOWARD ABUNDANCE

We envision a future where our human footprint is in balance with life on Earth, enabling all species to thrive.