

POPULATION CONNECTION

A full-page photograph of a white and black gibbon hanging from a tree branch. The gibbon has long, white fur with black markings on its face, chest, and limbs. It is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred forest scene with green foliage and brown tree trunks.

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**NO, HUMANS ARE NOT
THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION,
BUT 1 MILLION OTHER SPECIES ARE**

President's Note

John Seager
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“Human Fertility Levels Need to Be Higher to Avoid Extinction.” That recent *U.S. News & World Report* headline implies we may soon join the dodo bird, woolly mammoth, and *Tyrannosaurus rex* on the vanished species list.

It's absurd, of course. There are more of us today than ever before. In fact, global population has more than tripled just since 1950.


That doesn't prevent birth dearthers from hyperventilating over relatively recent reductions in average family size — while glossing over the fact that world population will increase by more than 70 million people this year.

Pronatalists constantly claim that small families will bankrupt the United States due to increased costs relating to an aging population. Goldman Sachs recently reported that this is much ado about not much since additional care costs are more than offset by revenue generated due to Americans extending their working years. Their report concludes: “Transitions are often difficult to manage, but this is one transition that we are currently managing well.” Certainly, there are funding challenges facing Social Security and Medicare, but they can be met as in the past.

Meanwhile, let's not overreact to recent reports of sharp reductions in US family size. A 2023 study published in *Population Research and Policy Review* reported that “the lifetime fertility is (or can be projected to be) at or near replacement levels for the oldest cohorts of US women.” Regarding those now in their teens and early 20s, the researchers

concluded, “Similar clues for these cohorts can be obtained by monitoring their future fertility intentions and desires, which to date continue to follow a two-child norm and thus closely resemble those in older cohorts.”

While we simply don't know what we can't yet know, it can be hard for some to avoid “jumping to confusions” when we are constantly bombarded with narratives that elide inconvenient facts such as continued rapid population growth. Every day, we deplete nonrenewable resources and destroy the fabric of nature. And now we must deal with the Trump administration's wholesale assault on reproductive health here at home and its callous cancellation of US investments in international family planning — a program that has been in place since Lyndon Johnson was president. Those are the extinction events we should be worrying about this very minute.

We face an uphill battle fulfilling the right to all forms of reproductive health care as well as ensuring that children everywhere are planned, wanted, and have a great future. If, in the meantime, we see reductions in population numbers in the US and around the world due to people choosing smaller families, that could alleviate all sorts of social and environmental pressures. Just imagine if we could proclaim the extinction of climate change, hunger, water shortages, extreme poverty, and biodiversity loss. What a world that would be. 

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Feature

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There Are Many Threats to Humanity. A Low Birth Rate Isn't One of Them.

By Samuel Miller McDonald



Cover image: A black crested gibbon at the Wuliang Mountain National Nature Reserve in China's Yunnan Province. Black crested gibbons are critically endangered, numbering 1,500 in the wild, according to the IUCN Red List. The population is decreasing, primarily due to hunting and habitat loss. This photo is from 2013, as more recent photos could not be found, underscoring how elusive these lesser apes have become. Black crested gibbons are the world's rarest primate species. *Tang Yun/Xinhua/Alamy Live News*

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Editor's Note

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Another magazine issue marking the end of another season of absurd headlines about low birth rates and impending population collapse.

A recent prompt for such stories has been the publication of a book by two University of Texas at Austin economists, Dean Spears and Michael Geruso. *After the Spike: Population, Progress, and the Case for People* is sitting in my Kindle unread as yet. While I procrastinate on getting into the original source material, I'm reading and listening to plenty of interviews with the authors.

Spears is the Director of the Population Wellbeing Initiative at UT–Austin, and Geruso is “affiliated” as a researcher but appears not to have an official title. In all of these articles and interviews, and in the two op-eds Spears has published in *The New York Times* recently (one with Geruso), no mention has been made of the fact that the founding of the Population Wellbeing Initiative was made possible by a certain billionaire patron writing a check for \$10 million ...

Who else but Elon Musk.

One news outlet that hasn't shied away from reporting on this unsavory association is Bloomberg. A 2023 article of theirs is how we came to know of the Musk–Spears relationship. It was followed by a more in-depth investigation into their alliance last year. (Links to both are provided in the digital version of this column.)

The name of the UT–Austin initiative and the title of the new book are misleadingly positive — the ideas behind them are less rosy, and some

of them are downright bizarre. A philosophy called Effective Altruism is at the root of some of the weirdness. Spears wrote in his 2023 *New York Times* op-ed, “Sustained below-replacement fertility will mean tens of billions of lives not lived over the next few centuries — many lives that could have been wonderful for the people who would have lived them ...” In his view, we should usher as many new people onto the planet as possible because otherwise some good lives will go unlived (without acknowledging that many of these hypothetical lives could also be miserable).

A couple years ago, Spears calculated population projections to 2400. According to his modeling, if the entire world converged on the same total fertility rate that we have in the US — 1.66 at the time of the study — in 300 years, there would be about 2 billion people on Earth. It's only been a hundred years since the world population was last measuring about 2 billion. Would it really be so bad if it gradually contracted back to that level over the course of three centuries?

The author of the feature article in this issue, Samuel Miller McDonald, confronts similarly questionable arguments made by people with large media platforms. He calls out the absurdity of worrying about a mass extinction of humans (which doesn't, grammatically or otherwise, make sense) and reminds us that it's an estimated 1 million other species around the world that are actually at risk of disappearing. The true mass extinction event is the one we're currently witnessing and largely responsible for causing. 🌍

Letters to the Editor

It saddens me deeply to see the killing of USAID and weakening of WHO, the Peace Corps, and many other vital agencies, as well as the damaging of careers of dedicated humanitarians.

I had the pleasure of helping to start rural potable water and sanitation programs in Thailand (1959–66). Working for USAID, we helped to initiate Thailand's first rural family planning program, as well as Pakistan's (1966–69). Rural people were delighted to learn how to space their pregnancies and to obtain quality primary care services in those two nations and in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and elsewhere. Meanwhile, others were preventing starvation, strengthening educational systems, protecting rights of women and children, and much more.

Readers, please do what you can to help restore those efforts.

Barry Karlin, Dr. of Public Health

I am hopeful that all regions of the world besides sub-Saharan Africa will reach zero population growth by 2050. And all sub-Saharan Africa needs to get there as well is the empowerment of women and cost-free availability of contraceptive supplies.

Cheers, and keep up hope!

Gary Koop

In his letter to the editor in the June issue, Konrad Kummli wondered if any other supporters shared his view that effective population mitigation must include speaking to the religious beliefs that underpin the attitudes of many regarding population stabilization. He implies that by avoiding this issue, the ability of the organization to meet its mission is weakened.

While I share his atheism, I also applaud the efforts of Population Connection to present truthful data and rational analysis about Earth's population.

It took some serious internal debate for me to finally give up the indoctrination of my youth and early adulthood and declare my atheism. At least a decade before that realization, I had already decided only to replace myself in the world. My wife had a daughter by her previous marriage, and my vasectomy after our son was born assured that we would only replace ourselves. These decisions did not require a total abandonment of our church-based community. We continued to attend church services, sing in the choir, and recite the Creed, but we rejected any doctrinaire prohibition of family planning by any means. We did not need to throw the baby out with the bath water, as the saying goes.

Eventually, I came to realize that I could not reconcile the beliefs I recited from the Apostles' Creed, and embraced atheism. It is clear to me now that I was a humanist long before I admitted to being an atheist.

I agree with Mr. Kummli that a discussion of the issue of religion in natalism would be a worthwhile pursuit for your readership as there likely are many who are struggling with the competing realities of religious beliefs/directives and the information available in our modern world.

Russell M. Hostetler, MD

Letters to the Editor, continued

Thank you for the work you do to try to bring the issue of overpopulation to the attention of the overall population.

I have been an advocate of birth control since my early 20s, when I wrote a thesis for my third-year sociology class at Arizona State University in Tempe. I brought one son into this chaotic system we call capitalism, who has made a living in California with his music school.

I wish you and your staff well.

Merritt Jannsen

I could cheer! Mr. Kummli has it exactly right: All the world's conflicts stem from different religious beliefs. I'm glad to know I'm not alone in thinking this.

How I would love for some powerful world leaders to come out and say to audiences of millions that it is man who creates gods — and powerful men reduced that to one god. And all in the name (originally) of ignorance, then with it the newfound realization that using it gave them power!

Konrad, you aren't alone. If I were one who prayed, I'd pray that Pope Leo is the one who finally breaks the stranglehold of the Catholic Church.

Reproductive education is essential to curbing human population. Keep up your good work, Population Connection staff!

Sincerely (and happily childless),
Jan Feeler

I just finished reading your June 2025 newsletter. It was informative and inspiring, as always.

I appreciate so much all the work that you do here in the US and around the world. I have been an ardent supporter ever since I first discovered ZPG, and I will be a supporter for life.

Stephanie Erickson

If you'd prefer to read the quarterly *Population Connection* magazine online, please visit our website at popconnect.org/magazine to see archives going back to 2020. The digital version of each issue contains links to sources, staff authors' email addresses, and suggestions for further reading.



EDITORIAL EXCERPTS

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

As Missouri and many other states continue their fractious political battles over the issue of reproductive rights, a Trump administration project is threatening to undermine those rights nationally: The Food and Drug Administration is unilaterally launching a “safety review” of mifepristone, the widely used abortion-inducing medication, based on nothing but junk science conjured up by anti-choice activists.

The FDA review was confirmed at a Senate hearing last week by (it should come as no surprise) Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the administration’s Health and Human Services Secretary and chief purveyor of anti-science nonsense. Kennedy justified the review by citing scientifically suspect, ideologically driven “research” that presumes to contradict decades of mainstream medical data.

The strategy here isn’t difficult to see: With voters in recent years protecting reproductive rights even in red states like Missouri, and with passage of a federal abortion ban remaining politically unlikely, the administration will attempt to use the medical safety issue to impede abortion access nationally — without a single vote by members of Congress or anyone else. If they’re successful, abortion services will become far more difficult to access even in states with laws fully protecting that right.

...

Outlawing the drugs is a stated goal of Project 2025, the far-right governmental blueprint from the Heritage Foundation that President Donald Trump tried to disavow before embarking on a second term that has been defined by his attempts to implement it virtually point by point. ...

– May 21, 2025

The Guardian

...

A study published in *The Lancet* predicted that Donald Trump’s aid cuts could claim more than 14 million lives by 2030, a third of them among children. For many poor countries, the scale of the shock would be similar to that of a major war, the authors found. More than four-fifths of the US agency’s programs have been cut, with surviving projects folded into the State Department.

The US was by far the world’s largest donor to global development — though its contributions were a fraction of the G7 target of 0.7% of GDP. Yet the damage does not end there. Its move encouraged others to follow suit. The UK, Germany, and France are slashing their aid budgets to spend more on defense. Oxfam says that the collective retrenchment by G7 nations is the biggest aid cut since 1960, with spending 26% lower in 2026 than it was last year. Don’t expect China or the Gulf states to fill this gaping hole.

It is not just grim news for aid recipients. It bodes ill for all. It would be naive to imagine that aid is a high-mindedly altruistic endeavor. Just as conflict breeds hunger and poverty, so injustice and deprivation breed instability and a more dangerous world. Slashing health budgets also increases the risks of another global pandemic.

...

For all their flaws, USAID-funded programs alone saved almost 92 million lives over 20 years. We know that remarkable leaps in human wellbeing are possible. ...

– July 1, 2025

"I WANT A BABY BOOM!"

Pronatalism in the Trump administration

This White House has made increasing the US birth rate a policy priority. Here are some of the strange, suspicious, and unsettling statements Trump and members of his administration have made so far:

On the campaign trail, Trump declared,

"We will support baby booms, and we will support baby bonuses for a new baby boom. How does that sound? That sounds pretty good. I want a baby boom! You men are so lucky out there. You're so lucky."

In his first speech as Vice President, at the so-called March for Life in Washington, DC, JD Vance stated,

"I want more babies in the United States of America!"

(The implication being that taking away any remaining abortion rights would lead to more births.)

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy circulated an order instructing his department to

"prioritize projects and goals that [...] give preference to communities with marriage and birth rates higher than the national average"

when awarding grants, loans, and contracts.

Trump issued an Executive Order about expanding access to in vitro fertilization (IVF), saying,

“Because we want more babies, to put it very nicely. And for this same reason, we will also allow new parents to deduct major newborn expenses from their taxes, so that parents that have a beautiful baby will be able, so we’re pro family. But the IVF treatments are expensive. It’s very hard for many people to do it and to get it, but I’ve been in favor of IVF, right from the beginning.”

When asked by Fox News what keeps him up at night, Elon Musk said,

“The birth rate is very low in almost every country, and unless that changes, civilization will disappear [...] nothing seems to be turning that around. Humanity is dying.”

Trump made bizarre comments at a Women’s History Month event at the White House:

“We’re gonna have tremendous, tremendous goodies in the bag for women too. The women, between the fertilization and all of the other things that we’re talking about, it’s gonna be, it’s gonna be great. [...] Fertilization. I’m still very proud of it, I don’t care. I’ll be known as the fertilization president, and that’s okay. That’s not bad. That’s not bad. I’ve, I’ve been called, I’ve been called much worse. Actually, I like it, right? I like it. Thank you.”

The administration is reportedly considering several policy proposals aimed at increasing the birth rate, including a \$5,000 “baby bonus,” a “motherhood medal” for women with six or more children, a commitment to reserve 30% of Fulbright scholarships for applicants who are married or have children, and government-funded menstrual education to teach women and girls when they are best able to get pregnant.



IN THE NEWS

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager

New Population Connection survey: Americans are poorly informed about population sizes and trends

Declining birth rates are all over the news. In June, we worked with polling firm YouGov on an online survey of 2,000 US adults to find out to what extent this is shaping public knowledge and perception of demographic trends.

Survey respondents were asked to guess the sizes of the US and world populations. Only 16% were within 5% of the actual US population of 342 million (in other words, between 325 and 359 million), and 20% were within 5% of the global population of 8.2 billion (between 7.8 and 8.6 billion). For both population sizes, the majority of respondents made guesses that were more than 50% higher or lower than the actual population.

When asked whether the US population is growing, shrinking, or staying the same,

only 61% knew it is growing. Knowledge was slightly better regarding the global population, with 72% saying it's growing.

Respondents were also asked if they had seen any headlines about declining birth rates or global population growth in the past month. Close to a third (31%) said they had seen declining birth rate headlines, while just 11% said they had seen headlines about global population growth.

Then they were asked how concerned they are about declining birth rates and global population growth. Only a third said they were very to somewhat concerned about global population growth, while 42% said they are not at all concerned. Concern over declining birth rates was even lower, with just a quarter saying they are very to somewhat concerned, while more than half (53%) said they are not at all concerned. For those who expressed concern about global population growth, the top reasons were “more people living in poverty” (24%) and

“depletion of natural resources” (22%). For those concerned about low birth rates, by far the biggest reported reason was “erosion of traditional family values / fewer people getting married and having children,” with 29% of respondents ranking this as their number one concern.

See the full survey results at popconnect.org/yougov.

UN report inspires misleading headlines about the “real fertility crisis”

The 2025 edition of UNFPA's annual publication, *State of World Population* (SWP), received a lot of media attention when it was released in June, with multiple articles claiming that low fertility rates present a crisis and that people around the world are having fewer children than they desire.

While this was not a comprehensive representation of the report, SWP 2025 does argue that people having fewer than their ideal number of kids is a “crisis.” This was the aspect

that media stories highlighted, while sadly neglecting the more serious problems of persistent reproductive rights violations and rapid population growth. The publication notes that around half of pregnancies worldwide are unintended, while an estimated 44% of women and girls do not have decision-making power or bodily autonomy regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use, or reproductive health care.

Wealthiest 10% are driving the climate crisis

A new paper by researchers at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), published in *Nature Climate Change*, links emissions inequality to climate warming and extreme heat.

They found that nearly two-thirds of global warming between 1990 and 2020 is attributable to the wealthiest 10% of the global population, while a fifth of warming was caused by the richest 1%, and 8% was caused by the richest 0.1%.

In 2019, the richest 10% included everyone earning more than €42,980 (roughly \$48,000) — below the US national average of nearly \$52,000 that year. The study showed that if the entire world population had emitted at the same level as this top 10%, the Earth would have warmed by 2.9°C — an increase considered

catastrophic by climate experts. If everyone lived like the top 1%, the temperature increase would have been an unthinkable 6.7°C, while everyone emitting like the richest 0.1% would have led to a planet-killing 12.2°C of warming.

The paper provided a sobering demonstration that at our current population size, there really is no “space” for billionaires and that we need to drastically reduce consumption across the Global North, even among those not considered “wealthy” by US standards.


Escalating drought is pushing millions to the brink of starvation

Some of the most damaging droughts in recorded history have taken place over the last two years, according to a new report by the US National Drought Mitigation Center and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

The drought events, “fueled by climate change and relentless pressure on land and water resources,” have led to more than 90 million people across Eastern and Southern Africa facing acute hunger. In Somalia, where an estimated 43,000 people died in 2022 due to drought-linked hunger, 4.4 million people faced crisis-level food insecurity in early 2025.

While the crisis is worst in Africa, other parts of the

world are not spared. In the Mediterranean, water shortages negatively impacted domestic supplies, agriculture, and tourism, while the Amazon Basin saw record-low river levels in 2023 and 2024 that led to mass die-offs of fish and endangered dolphins, and disrupted drinking water and transport for hundreds of thousands of people.

The authors explain that the 2023–2024 El Niño event created “a perfect storm,” which amplified already dire climate change impacts in areas affected by extreme warming, population pressure, and fragile infrastructure. As with all crises, the most vulnerable people, in particular women and children, faced the worst impacts, such as acute malnutrition and more forced child marriages due to families seeking dowries to survive. 

Visit our blog to read more about some of these news items: popconnect.org/blog

The digital version of this article includes hyperlinked sources: popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-september-2025

NO SUMMER SLIDE FOR THESE UNC STUDENTS!

Did you know that we teach a full-credit summer course at the University of North Carolina?

Each summer for the past three years, Hannah Evans, Senior Analyst, has led a discussion-based seminar-style class — renamed **Global Populations, Planetary Health, and Justice** this year. It runs two hours a day, four days a week, for five weeks, allowing students to dive deeply into topics that are new for many of them.

Through a combination of lectures, discussions, student presentations, and guest speakers, population trends and dynamics and their connections to environmental challenges, progress toward gender equality, public health, and sustainable development become familiar and even obvious to these inspiring students and aspiring professionals.

The class was offered to graduate students for the first time this summer, having been an undergrad-only course in 2023 and 2024. Prof. Plaxedes T. Chitiyo joined Hannah to teach this year's class and was a wonderful addition. We're already looking forward to brainstorming guest speakers and refreshing the curriculum and syllabus for next summer!



"I leave this course with a heightened sense of urgency, possibility, and responsibility. I believe that a just and sustainable future is still attainable, but only if we are willing to act in ways that prioritize both human and nonhuman life, as well as the planetary systems that sustain us all."



"I enjoyed this course immensely and would recommend it to absolutely anyone."



"I just wanted to send a quick thank you again for such a fabulous class. Truly, it could have been twice as long and I would have been thrilled. Thanks so much again, this was such a treat of a class."



2025 UNC SUMMER STUDENT TESTIMONIALS



“Overall exposure to population issues related to climate was fantastic and provided me a strong foundation as I start the [Master of Science in Sustainability and Environment] program. Discussion of women’s issues was also great exposure and really provided a tangible human element to the class through use of guest speakers, which were all relatable and put a ‘face’ to the issues. I really enjoyed the delivery of content, the class discussions, and interactions with the other students – there was a lot of experience and generational diversity, which made things interesting.”



“I loved the speakers from around the world bringing a voice to women and girls who need and deserve a good quality of life. Professor Evans was fantastic – very kind and knowledgeable and a great facilitator.”



“I want you to know that I talk to my own kids about EVERYTHING I learn in my classes. You have made another advocate in me, and as a teacher myself, I will continue to share these lessons far and wide!”



“I feel like I’ve been exposed to and learned so much in a short period of time. I’ve personally felt the impacts of population growth and consumption in the many places I’ve lived but understanding demography and population theory puts my personal experience into deeper context.”



INVITE HANNAH TO YOUR CLASS

If you’d like to invite Hannah to speak to your college or university class, please get in touch with her!

hannah@popconnect.org

PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE MEMBER PROFILE

Keith Burridge

By Kimberly Dexter, Philanthropy Officer

Keith Burridge remembers when the wilderness began to disappear. As a boy growing up along the southern coast of England, wild spaces weren't some far-off dream. They were right there, just a short walk from his front door. "I'd collect bugs, watch birds, track frogs and snakes," he recalls. "It was my playground." But over time, he watched that land shrink. New homes and roads replaced the hedgerows and meadows. And even as a child, he felt it. The quiet heartbreak of losing the natural world, bit by bit.

That loss stayed with him. It followed him through the gates of Cambridge University, where he originally set out to study veterinary medicine, and later shifted to molecular biology. "I was fascinated by life, not just the animals I loved as a kid, but how life works at the smallest levels." That curiosity brought him across the Atlantic to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory on Long Island, NY, a hub of scientific innovation. And it was there that Keith met his wife, Pat Saling, through colleagues in the lab.

"She was also a scientist, eventually at Duke University in the Ob/Gyn and Cell Biology Departments. Sharp, driven, deeply committed to her work," he says with quiet pride. "We've always shared a passion for understanding how the world works, and how to make it better." Their shared values of inquiry, integrity, and environmental stewardship became the foundation of their family. They had one child, a daughter named Claire, who lives in Norway and is a senior researcher of early medieval health and medicine at the University of Oslo.

Keith eventually accepted a faculty position at the University of North Carolina in 1981. "The

timing felt right, even though leaving England wasn't easy," he says. "But the opportunity, the intellectual community, it was a place where we could both grow, professionally and personally."

Over the next few decades, Keith built a rewarding career as a researcher and mentor. He trained students, published studies, and helped advance our understanding of the building blocks of life. But even while focused on cell structures and scientific discovery, the bigger picture was never far from his mind.

"I'd read *The Population Bomb* as a student, and the message stuck with me. Population growth, environmental collapse, reproductive justice ... they're all connected. And it never made sense to separate them."

That belief is what eventually brought him to Population Connection. "I'd known about ZPG since the '60s, but I didn't have the means to support back then. Once I retired and had more freedom, I started giving, and the more I learned, the more I wanted to get involved."

For Keith, reproductive rights aren't just a side issue; they're central. "When women and girls

“I’d read *The Population Bomb* as a student, and the message stuck with me. Population growth, environmental collapse, reproductive justice ... they’re all connected. And it never made sense to separate them.”



Keith and Pat visiting Cambridge University, his alma mater, in 2015


have access to contraception and education, they gain agency. That leads to healthier families, stronger communities, and a better shot at protecting the environment. It’s a moral issue, and it’s a practical one.”

He knows he might not be the typical face of the reproductive rights movement. “An older man talking about women’s rights might seem unusual,” he says with a smile. “But I genuinely believe women are smarter than men, and we’ve had our chance. Maybe it’s time to let women run the show.”

Now retired, Keith spends his time writing plays. Most of them historical, some laced with science. “It’s harder than I expected,” he laughs. “But it’s also a new way to engage with the world, to process history, and maybe offer something meaningful.”

He’s proud to support Population Connection, and he’s hopeful others will join. “Most people don’t realize how reproductive rights tie into climate, poverty, migration — everything. But the more we educate, the more momentum we build.”

When asked what keeps him going, Keith points to partnership. “Pat and I have always believed in doing our part. Whether through science, storytelling, or supporting organizations like Population Connection, we try to live our values.”

And that curious kid from coastal England? He’s still in there. Still wondering how to save the frogs. Still believing that every act of care for people, for the planet, matters. 

We’re grateful for Keith’s thoughtful generosity and commitment to reproductive freedom and environmental preservation. His journey reminds us that science and compassion are not mutually exclusive and that change, like nature, begins at the root. If you would like to learn more about our giving societies, please contact our Development team at giving@popconnect.org.



SUMMER PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

By Stephanie Wolfe, Membership Relations Coordinator

We are excited to announce the winners of our fourth annual Summer Photo Contest! Supporters from around the world submitted images capturing beautiful natural landscapes, fascinating creatures, and cultural curiosities that inspire their environmental stewardship. Thank you to all participants for sharing your stunning photographs that showcase the incredible beauty and diversity of our shared planet. Congratulations to our winners!

1

First Place



David Newswanger, Sunnyvale, CA

Population Connection member since 1999

Two chinstrap penguins at Palaver Point in Antarctica

Why population issues are important to David

I wrote a letter to the editor as a high school student after reading *The Population Bomb* in 1970. My letter focused on environmental concerns and conflict among people due to scarcity of resources, which are the same things that motivate me today. These two penguins are sharing a moment in time, but surely don't realize that the ice they depend on is melting and that the survival of their species is threatened. Similarly, we in California live our lives without much thought about our limited resources, such as water, which is already causing conflict among us. Now is the time to do something about it.

2

Second Place



Doranne Jacobson, Springfield, IL

Population Connection member since 2015

Fishing is essential to the people in Ganvie, Benin, a village built on stilts over water.

Why population issues are important to Doranne

The people of Ganvie have depended upon fishing for centuries. Here, as in many places throughout the world, fish stocks are now threatened by overfishing and pollution caused by burgeoning human populations. Responsibly caring for fish — and for our planet — should be a top priority for everyone.

3

Third Place



Alex Crystal, Somerville, MA

Population Connection member since 2025

A flamingo taking flight from the lagoon at San Pedro de Atacama in Chile

Why population issues are important to Alex

As I watched a flamingo take off from mirrored salt flats — surrounded by vast, untouched wilderness — I caught a glimpse of a world largely unaltered by human hands. Places like that are vanishing. As global population grows, so does our footprint, draining resources,

fragmenting habitats, and pushing wildlife into ever-smaller refuges. The Atacama stands as a powerful reminder of what still exists and what we risk losing. I hope that capturing the world's natural beauty through photography will inspire us to preserve its remaining wild places for future generations and the planet itself.

Find all of the incredible photo entries our members and supporters submitted on our website at popconnect.org/photo-contest-2025.

THERE ARE MANY THREATS TO HUMANITY. A LOW BIRTH RATE ISN'T ONE OF THEM.

Commentators across the political spectrum claim that humanity faces imminent collapse due to a “fertility crisis.” Is this mass delusion or cynical propaganda?

By Samuel Miller McDonald

Originally published in *Current Affairs* on April 18, 2025

Far-right authoritarian pundits and political actors, from Matt Walsh to Elon Musk, all seem to have gotten the same memo instructing them to fixate on “low” fertility and birth rates. Musk has claimed that “population collapse due to low birth rates is a much bigger risk to civilization than global warming” and that it will lead to “mass extinction.” Some liberals are flirting with this narrative, too. In a February *New Yorker* essay¹, Gideon Lewis-Kraus deploys dystopian imagery to describe the “low” birth rate in South Korea, twice comparing the country to the collapsing, childless society in the 2006 film *Children of Men*.² Visiting a school that’s populated by a student body smaller than its intended capacity, Lewis-Kraus describes the scene looking “as if everyone had evaporated overnight.” He laments that in South Korea, “In 2023, the number of births was just 230,000.” It’s not just liberals and authoritarians engaging in this birth rate crisis panic. Self-described leftist

¹ “The End of Children,” February 24, 2025, [newyorker.com/magazine/2025/03/03/the-population-implosion](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/03/03/the-population-implosion)

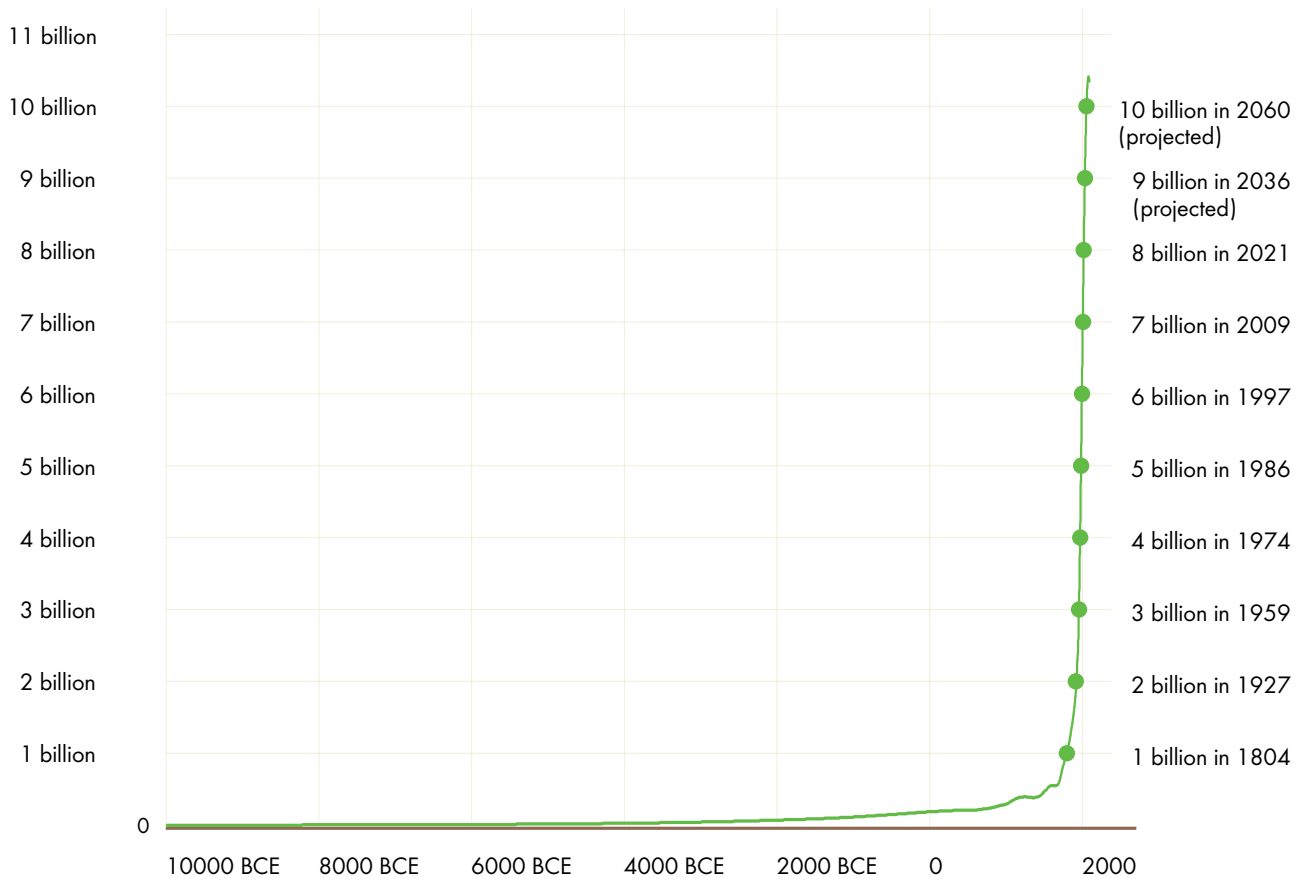
² And to the novel of the same title once. The reporter of the piece is a satisfied father of two. He seems to have gotten the impression that the simple absence of children is what is dystopian about the film, rather than the deteriorating social fabric, fascist rule, and civil war.



A still image from *Children of Men*, in which characters Theo and Marichka smuggle Kee to safety with her baby, the first to be born anywhere on Earth in 18 years. *United Archives GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo*



World Population Milestones Over 12,000 Years of Human History



Elizabeth Bruenig recently equated falling fertility with humanity’s inability “to persist on this Earth.” Running through her pronatalist *Atlantic* opinion piece¹ is an entirely uninterrogated presumption that fertility rates collected today are able to predict the total disappearance of the species *Homo sapiens* at some future time.

But is this panic about low fertility driving human population collapse supported by any evidence?

Precisely how the falling birth rate of a single species (humans) would lead to “mass extinction,”

¹ “The Pro-Baby Coalition of the Far Right,” April 11, 2025, theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/04/natal-conference-austin/682398/

in Musk’s words, is unclear. “Mass” in this term refers to a multitude of species, not many individuals in one species, which is already implied by the word “extinction.” Whatever Musk may mean by this, experts say he is wrong. More vital than his misuse of language is how he manages to flip reality: There already is a mass extinction event occurring today — driven in no small part by human-induced climate change and other human pressures — in which many species are facing catastrophic declines, and it would be far less likely to be happening with a lower human population.

The human population is still growing quite a bit. About 132 million people are born every year.

Figure above: Estimates and projections from the History Database of the Global Environment (HYDE) and the United Nations Population Division 2024 World Population Prospects; Design based on a visualization created by OurWorldinData.org

That's more than a third of the total United States population. It also amounts to around 361,000 births every day. A number of people equal to about half of 132 million will die every year. That means that overall, about 180,000 people — or the equivalent of Fort Lauderdale, Florida's population — are added to the world's population every day. (For perspective, that's a number greater than the populations of more than half of the US state capitals.) The human population has never been higher than it is today in all of history, and it will be higher tomorrow. And this increase has come on rapidly: The world's human population was just around 6.1 billion in the year 2000, and it's already reached a little over 8.2 billion today. When you plot it out on a graph, it's striking.

The UN projects this growth will continue for decades, possibly peaking in the 2080s and falling by the end of the century. But this assumption, that population growth will halt by the end of the 21st century, is just a prediction based on shifting

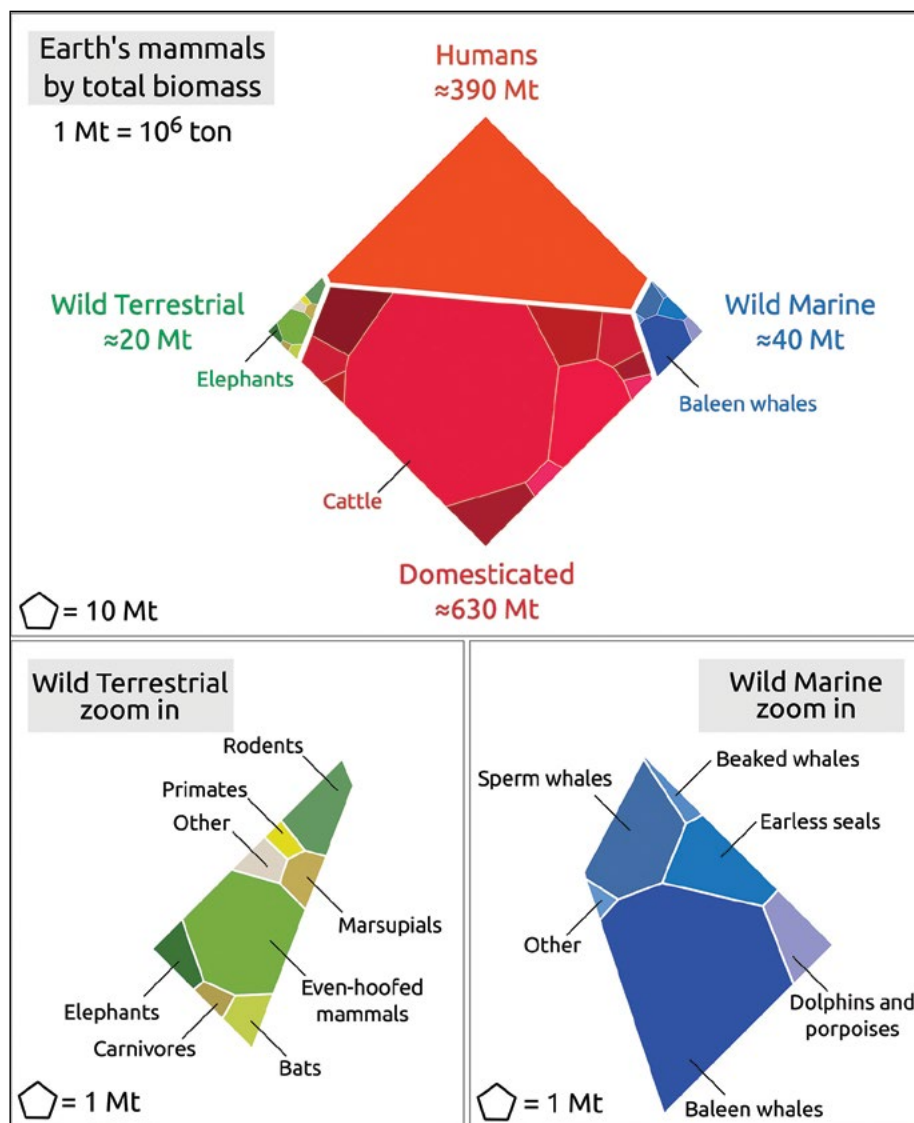
factors like life expectancy. The human population may hypothetically, barring external pressures, continue to grow well beyond 2100.

To get a sense of the bias in Lewis-Kraus's *New Yorker* article, that statistic about South Korea — that only 230,000 people were born in a single year in the country with the world's lowest birth rate — is presented as an alarming, even dystopian, figure worthy of urgent attention. For perspective, though, that number is about the same as the total number of chimpanzees alive in the world (a species that has a real fertility crisis and is trending toward extinction).² Chimps are *Homo sapiens*' next closest relative among other animals, and so they are a good proxy for a natural great ape population density. Of course, the dearth of chimps is not "natural," as it's being largely driven by human encroachment, but this disparity should put into perspective how

² There are even fewer orangutans.

A family of chimpanzees
Tiago Estima, Dreamstime.com





Top: the global biomass distribution of the mammalian class, represented by a Voronoi diagram. The area of each cell is proportional to the biomass contribution of each group. The global mammalian biomass distribution is dominated by humans and domesticated mammals, including livestock and pets. **Bottom:** enlarged view of the biomass of wild terrestrial (left, grouped by order) and marine mammals (right, grouped by family, or few families). Greenspoon, L. et al. (2023) "The global biomass of wild mammals." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS).

out of balance the human population and birth rate are. For more perspective, consider these statistics on global biomass: Livestock mass is 30 times the wild terrestrial mammal biomass and 15 times the marine mammal biomass. Humans' collective body mass is six times greater than all wild mammals. Human-made material, including plastics and buildings, weighs more than all life combined.

The *New Yorker* article also mentions Augustus, the second Caesar and first emperor of Rome, and his fixation "on the decadent urban elite's apparent refusal to perpetuate itself." Lewis-Kraus suggests that the Roman elite may have declined to the

point of extinction — or at least of leaving little genetic legacy in the European population. And yet, humans did not go extinct, nor did the global population collapse. In 100 AD, 85 years after Augustus's death and the height of the Roman Empire, there were at most 400 million human beings in the world.¹ If 95% of today's human beings were to evaporate overnight, we would still have a global population higher than 400 million. That's more people than existed during Rome's greatest territorial extent, a time after Homer,

¹ The lower-end estimate is 170 million, or just 2% of today's population.

Herodotus, Pythagoras, Pericles, Socrates, Plato, Thucydides, Alexander, Aristotle, Julius Caesar, Livy, Virgil, Jesus, and many other important figures had all made their contributions to the Western world. This population level, which amounts to 5% or one-twentieth that of today (at most), was hardly a threat to civilization, and much less to the human species.²

What's going on here? Are these ostensibly rational and educated commentators, whether authoritarian, liberal, or egalitarian, all suffering from the same mass delusion, tricking themselves into thinking there's a scarcity of human beings? Or is there a more rational explanation: Could they actually be bound by shared ideological commitments?

In her *Atlantic* piece, Bruenig argues that the left should claim the right-wing birth rate rhetoric in order to justify putting forward modest welfare policy increases. Well, at least for those who have children. But at the same time, instead of taking a moment to wonder if Millennials having fewer kids will really lead to human extinction, she unfurls her banners and from the parapet declares triumphantly: “humankind is excellent — the paragon of animals”! This is a pretty unequivocal reinforcement of a particular human supremacist ethic. This ethic, also gleefully championed by fascists like Matt Walsh, is central to the value system currently annihilating life on Earth and is apparently shared by every commentator on this issue. This idea can be found running through not just Bruenig's leftism and Walsh's rightism, but through Ezra Klein's centrism as well. His “abundance agenda” espouses spreading human development and quietly accepting the demise of all the wildlife that would have otherwise inhabited the land being developed, or whose habitat will suffer the consequences of expanded fossil fuel energy systems, like catastrophic climate change.

² It was a threat to other species, however, with Rome in particular eradicating huge numbers of large animals.

There are other more discrete ideological commitments that bind these apparently politically disparate commentators together in their panic over birth rates.

One driver is nationalism. Pundits advocating for national supremacy in the international arena are often also those advocating for higher domestic populations (and working themselves into a frenzy about non-existent declines). The stated reason is that countries need large, productive labor forces and militaries to outcompete other countries for relative standing. Liberal commentator Matthew Yglesias, for example, has been clear about this motivation since his 2020 book *One Billion Americans*, in which he argues that the US needs to increase its population to compete with China (and others). The 20th century fascist movements were also very open about their imperative to out-



Statue of Augustus Caesar
Brancaleone, Dreamstime.com

Since when does the ideology that denies the existence of climate change, ignores the true sixth mass extinction event that the Earth is currently experiencing, defunds medical research, denies the danger of pandemics, salivates over nuclear war with enemies, and shrugs off hormone-disrupting pollution truly demonstrate a belief that “humanity ought to persist on this Earth”?

populate, and thus outcompete, national rivals. Italy’s fascist dictator Benito Mussolini instituted policies that sought to increase the country’s birth rate by reducing women’s employment and access to contraception, and instituting harsher punishments for abortions, which Mussolini outlawed. He explicitly justified these policies as necessary for defeating rivals and expanding Italian colonies in Africa. It should be noted that these policies didn’t work to increase the birth rate. Contemporary autocrat Vladimir Putin has also tried to engineer a birth rate increase with authoritarianism. That will also probably fail.

Another motivation for birth rate panic, aside from nationalism (and connected to it), is plain old class war. Oligarchs are desperate to maintain an army of slaves¹ and soldiers — slaves to serve them, soldiers to protect them from threats internal and external. Self-proclaimed “theocratic

¹ There are technically more slaves alive today than existed during the Atlantic slave trade: “Although slavery is illegal in every country in the modern world, it still exists, and even on the narrowest definition of slavery it’s likely that there are far more slaves now than there were victims of the Atlantic slave trade,” according to a BBC report. Some on the political right also talk about legalizing slavery or make the outrageous claim that slavery was beneficial to Black people.

fascist” Matt Walsh recently posted online that young people foregoing procreation because they don’t have sufficient financial resources are “cop[ping] out.” Because, he argues, much poorer people throughout history have been capable of having children, young people in the US should as well, regardless of their finances.² But this is misleading for a few reasons. First, just because younger people are having fewer kids now, that doesn’t mean they never will. In the US today, surveys of middle-aged women and men find that not having had children

is far rarer than having had children. According to government health statistics, “Among women and men aged 40–49 in 2015–2019, 84.3% of women had given birth and 76.5% of men had fathered a child.” This suggests that a vast majority of Americans eventually become parents. There’s no reason to believe that Millennials and Zoomers will widely deviate from this tendency, especially if they begin to catch up with older generations in household wealth.

But the bigger problem with Walsh’s argument is that it only makes sense if you care about the quantity of human life more than the quality of human life. Sure, it is technically low-cost to impregnate someone. But in the US, providing a stable, healthy, safe, and enriching upbringing for a child has become increasingly difficult due to rising costs of living, stagnant wages, and disinvestment in public goods and services. When someone is making a choice about whether to have a child, they ought to be anticipating loving that child and wanting the best for them. So a rational person should look at the conditions in which the child would be raised and make an educated judgment about whether they would

² If the statistics hold, a vast majority of Millennials and Zoomers will have at least one child.



A raccoon kit searching for its family after their habitat was cleared for a new housing development
Jason Ondreicka, Dreamstime.com

be able to provide safety and stability. The world as it is simply contains a scarcity of these things, and they are diminishing thanks primarily to the actions of leaders committed to Walsh's ideology. Walsh doesn't care about this: He is a rich guy who sits around spouting his opinion for lots of money. He sees your children as occupying the lower classes; he sees them as the slaves who will wait on him and his class or the soldiers who will protect them. He is fine with your children living miserable lives, as long as they fulfill these roles. Other positions that the right wing promotes reveal their utter contempt for children's quality of life: cutting childcare, defunding school lunches, eliminating universal public education, and expanding child labor.

Bruenig's column about pronatalism, "The Pro-Baby Coalition of the Far Right," is mistitled. There is no coalition on the right that is "probably." Bruenig's claim that "yielding to the far right the notion that humanity ought to persist on this Earth strikes me as absurd" reveals how out of touch this viewpoint is and how insincere she seems to be. Since when does the ideology that denies the existence of climate change, ignores the true sixth mass extinction event that the Earth is currently experiencing, defunds medical research, denies the danger of pandemics, salivates over nuclear war with enemies, and shrugs off hormone-disrupting pollution truly demonstrate a belief that "humanity ought to persist on this Earth"? When authoritarians bemoan falling birth



Humanity is nowhere near going the way of the dodo. These two are on display at the Natural History Museum in London.
Miroslav Posavec, Dreamstime.com

rates, they're not really concerned about children's health and wellbeing or about imminent human extinction. They're concerned with maintaining a certain system of production that is dependent on cheap, abundant, and disposable labor.

There are a couple of other important motivations behind this birth rate panic. One is racial: Most of those who champion higher birth rates tend not

to extend that advocacy to non-white people. This is especially true of Elon Musk, who has openly endorsed the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory online and is reportedly "concerned about what he called Third World countries having higher birth rates than the US and Europe." It's hard to see such calls to procreate as anything other than racist fearmongering.

Another motivation relates to gender. As Mussolini demonstrated, engineering fertility is a way of controlling women, getting them out of the labor market and tied to domestic servitude. Many of the pundits calling for increasing the birth rate are also those who advocate for a "trad" lifestyle in which women are financially dependent on their spouses and are unable to do anything but domestic

When authoritarians bemoan falling birth rates, they're not really concerned about children's health and wellbeing or about imminent human extinction. They're concerned with maintaining a certain system of production that is dependent on cheap, abundant, and disposable labor.

labor. Again, these are not confined to right-wing extremists. Elizabeth Bruenig, the leftist *Atlantic* writer, is against abortion philosophically and practically seems to favor policies that make it less accessible. She also advocates for women to have children while they are young. Ezra Klein and libertarian economist Tyler Cowen recently enjoyed a sprawling discussion¹ that included a consideration of the “abundance agenda” for birth rates. While Klein is skeptical of some of the practical suggestions Cowen makes for using political engineering to increase birth rates, he is very friendly to the philosophy underlying them. He agrees with Cowen, who says that he should be “obsessed with fertility decline.” “I kind of am,” replies Klein. Cowen explicitly voices paranoia over being “replace[d]” by non-whites and Klein lauds the unapologetically large families common in Israel. Ultimately, Cowen says, “cultural conservatism” is the way to go:

“The more uncertain we are about birth subsidies, [...] doesn’t that mean we should all the more commit to some kind of revival of cultural conservatism on matters of family? [...] Families should be expected to have three or four children, and that’s the alternative. Yes, we should try subsidies, but the more uncertain we are, we’ve just got to go the Ross Douhat² route. I think he has five kids now. Good for him.”

To which Klein replies, “I don’t think this is wrong. I just don’t think it’s doable.” Klein is right about the practicality of the idea, and he goes on to say that “shaming” people into parenthood doesn’t work. Beyond “shaming,” though, the idea that one is “expected to have three or four children” implies that there might be some negative consequence imposed on people who do not fulfill this requirement. In a society that has already outlawed the constitutional

right to an abortion for people who must do the childbearing, these consequences might well play out worse for women than men. There are few examples of government intrusion in a more intimate and consequential aspect of life.

One exchange is particularly revealing of the right-wing obsession with the birth rate. Cowen says:

“What if someone said, *a true abundance agenda [is] to zero out Medicare and Medicaid, [...] and spend all of that on science and birth subsidies and Social Security for that matter.* [...] Christian Scientists — they still have decent life expectancy. [...] We’d have many more people. It’d be a much younger society, more dynamic society. Scientific advances would mean we’d cure many more diseases, forms of cancer. People would probably live longer. Why not do that? Just go crazy on innovation and number of births.”

Here he moves beyond the imperative to control women and onto the next great right-wing tenet: eliminate welfare. Essentially, Cowen is suggesting eliminating programs for the elderly and the poor and diverting that money to subsidize childbearing people. His mention of Christian Science is telling, as adherents of this sect tend not to live as long as the general population. He doesn’t say it explicitly, but by focusing on eliminating welfare for older and poorer citizens, he is advocating for a demographic strategy of producing lots of offspring and letting the ones he deems less evolutionarily fit, mainly the older and poorer, die off. This is called “r-selection” among other species. It’s a strategy used by creatures, like some rodents, fish, and insects, often when there is environmental scarcity of resources. Apparently, it’s a strategy that Cowen sees fit for humans. We need to call this what it is: a clear example of 19th-century social Darwinism and a grim case of, like Walsh, another far-right authoritarian advocating for quantity of human life over quality of life. It is a view of life that is fundamentally incompatible with maximizing wellbeing, health, and happiness for all.

¹ Tyler Cowen, “Ezra Klein on the Abundance Agenda (Ep. 236),” *Conversations With Tyler*, March 19, 2025, conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/ezra-klein-3/

² Douhat is a conservative columnist for *The New York Times*.

There already is a mass extinction event occurring today — driven in no small part by human-induced climate change and other human pressures — in which many species are facing catastrophic declines, and it would be far less likely to be happening with a lower human population.

Whether delusion or propaganda or both, “demographic collapse” is a false problem. The fact is, the human population will absolutely never disappear due to a low fertility rate, unless there is some environmental impact on the physiological ability to reproduce.¹ This is not impossible, given all the known and unknown effects of chemicals and plastics permeating the environment, which are already negatively impacting hormones and reproductive health.² Microplastics have been found in every human testicle — and region of the planet — where they’ve been looked for. But even with these pressures, the human population continues to grow (while wildlife continues to decline). Even as the global fertility rate has rapidly fallen in aggregate over the last half-century, humanity’s actual population has increased dramatically. Fertility rate tells us very little, if anything, about actual population collapses. Baby booms, by definition, happen in a single generation. The human urge to reproduce is (probably) ineradicable. Without outside pressures, humans will continue to want to have children and shape the world to accommodate them and to maintain

¹ Certain groups within the population may disappear, but unlikely because they simply decided to stop having children.

² The right wing, however, has vehemently opposed regulations that would limit our exposure to chemicals that may be harmful to human fertility.

some population, even if it’s not as high as it has been at other times. The human population is currently so massive, so out of balance with the rest of life on Earth, so pathologically “abundant” that it would take decades or centuries of decline to put a noticeable dent in it — unless, that is, there is some external force which leads to mass death and reproductive crisis, like, say, the ongoing ecological crises,

pollution, nuclear war, or a deadlier pandemic than the one that’s still ongoing.

If the quantity of human life does one day stop growing and actually starts to decrease, it is likely that, in many places, if history is any guide, the quality of human life will be fine and could even increase with it. Perhaps more importantly today, the quality and quantity of non-human forms of life — which, unlike Musk’s mass-human-extinction lie, are in a state of actual mass extinction — would receive a vital respite. More forms of life would have more good opportunities to exist. As with many other issues, if the right wing’s greatest fears were to come true, it would almost certainly be fine for everybody... except, maybe, a few oligarchs. 🌍

The digital version of this article contains many links to further reading. Find it at currentaffairs.org/news/there-are-many-threats-to-humanity.-a-low-birth-rate-isnt-one-of-them.

Samuel Miller McDonald is a writer and geographer focusing on human ecology, theory, and history. He holds a doctorate from Brasenose College at the University of Oxford and degrees from Yale University and College of the Atlantic. He has written essays and analysis for *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *The New Republic*, *Current Affairs*, and elsewhere, and has contributed interviews to BBC Ideas, VICE News Tonight, and various radio and podcast programs. His first book, *Progress: How One Idea Built Civilization and Now Threatens to Destroy It*, will be published by Macmillan Publishers on December 2, 2025.



By including Population Connection in her will, Rebecca chose to invest in the future and ensure this essential work continues until we achieve our goal: a people and planet in balance. We are honored to include Rebecca in our ZPG Society!

*Rebecca Weiner,
ZPG Society Member,
and her husband, Mike,
in the Black Hills
of South Dakota*

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GLOBAL PARTNERS

Tareto Africa

Tareto Africa is a grassroots organization based in Narok County, Kenya, working to promote reproductive health and rights and eliminate harmful practices including female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV), and child marriage. Tareto was founded in 2017 by Leshan Kereto, a young Maasai man, when he became aware of the hardships girls in his community are forced to endure due to harmful patriarchal customs. When he learned about the ordeal of a 12-year-old girl who had been subjected to FGM, Leshan developed the urge to end this violation of human rights and help Maasai girls fulfill their potential. The text that follows is Leshan's own words, as written in response to questions sent to him by Olivia Nater, Population Connection Communications Manager. Photos are courtesy of Tareto Africa.

No one had informed this 12-year-old girl about the painful procedure she would go through, the healing process, and how it would change her life. Without her consent, she was mutilated, and her family would later tell her that she was “clean” and “marriageable.” I needed to understand what would make a parent subject their child to such a violation, so I took a closer look into my community. I realized that this girl was not the only one with such a painful experience — thousands of young girls aged between nine and 14 years had been subjected to FGM, and others had been married off to men as old as 50 years.

In Kenya, around four million women (or one in every five women) have been subjected

to FGM. Maasai Community, Narok, is mainly occupied by Indigenous Maasai, and has one of the highest FGM prevalence rates in the country, at 78%. There was no other choice; I had to join the fight against FGM to protect girls in my community.

The progress towards eradicating FGM has been greatly affected by global issues, mainly climate change. It is heartbreaking to see the progress we have made moving backward, the attention turning elsewhere, the momentum slowing down, and the money being redirected. Narok County is one of the counties in Kenya that has been hit hard by climate change. Due to prolonged seasons of drought, livestock has been wiped out

and people have lost their livelihoods — a situation that has forced many organizations and the Kenyan government to shift their focus to food security. However, drought has also led to an increase in FGM and child marriages. Loss of income has pushed families to marry off girls so that they may receive food and security as a result of the union and secure a dowry to help support the rest of the family and have fewer mouths to feed. And since, in the Maasai community, a girl has to be mutilated to get married (FGM signifies a girl's transition into womanhood), FGM rates have risen as well.

Child marriage is closely linked to teen pregnancy and is the leading cause of school dropout in Narok.

Additionally, during drought crises, these girls are not able to access the prenatal and delivery care they need to have safe pregnancies.

Tareto is currently focused on a project called Trees for Girls, which educates girls on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and environmental conservation. Trees for Girls, in partnership with nurses, schools, and environmentalists, will train 500 girls on SRHR and climate change adaptation actions, including tree planting. The trained girls will serve as Tareto Africa champions and will raise awareness in the community of the linkages between climate change, gender, and SRHR.

The trees will help prevent soil erosion and drought in the long term, provide breeding habitats for farm animals, increase income to the community, and build social accountability, eventually contributing to the biodiversity that keeps our world healthy and safe. 🌍



Charity Sinka, the firstborn daughter in a family of eight in Sekenani, Narok County

"First I went through FGM, which has had side effects on my reproductive health. When I was in form two, unfortunately I got pregnant, and I went back home. When my parents saw that I was pregnant, they told me they would not give me a second chance to go back to school, and the only thing they would do for me is to give me out to be married."

On the eve of Charity's forced marriage in 2022, Leshan was able to convince her family to let her remain unmarried and return to school — as long as Tareto covered all of her school fees and related expenses.

"Now I proudly volunteer with Tareto Africa through the Population Connection-supported Trees for Girls project, educating young girls about their bodies, the dangers of harmful traditional practices, and the importance of environmental conservation to prevent drought — one of the factors that drive families to force their daughters into marriage."

Visit taretoafrica.org to learn more about Tareto's incredible impacts!

VIRTUAL EVENTS

Supporters Enjoy Cool Virtual Events During Steamy Summer

By Natalie Widel, Director of Digital Marketing

Population Connection stayed cool enjoying our summer 2025 virtual events! You can find recordings here, and see what we have in store for the coming months at popconnect.org/virtual-events. Virtual events are offered to all Population Connection members and supporters. Curious about how to join? Email us at engage@popconnect.org. We hope to “see” you soon!

June

We held the first event of a special new virtual series, Partner Perspectives: Site Visits in Guatemala, in June. Senior Analyst Hannah Evans spent two weeks in Guatemala this spring, visiting four of our recent Global Partner grantees who operate in the country. This first event featured Seeds for a Future, an organization dedicated to providing long-term training for rural families and communities in Guatemala to grow their own sustainable and healthy food.

Together with Leilani Yats, Executive Director of Seeds for a Future, Hannah discussed the food security challenges facing many rural Guatemalan families and Seeds’ innovative programs to combat them. Founded in 2007, Seeds has

served over 32,000 families to date, working hard to turn the tide on malnutrition, growth stunting among children, and other issues caused by lack of access to plentiful and nutritious food.

July

In celebration of World Population Day, the Population Connection Communications team gave a presentation entitled: Population Panic? Unpacking Public Perception and Media Messaging. During this event, they discussed the findings from a survey we ran with highly regarded polling firm YouGov, in an effort to evaluate Americans’ understanding of and concerns around population issues.

Some key takeaways from the survey include:

1. The general public is ill-informed about population sizes and trends, which is likely being exacerbated by the barrage of media stories about declining fertility rates.
2. Most respondents are not concerned about declining birth rates or global population growth, though concern over population growth is higher than concern over low birth rates.
3. Conservatives are more concerned about declining birth rates and changing family norms, while liberals are more concerned about global population growth and its environmental impacts.
4. There is clearly a need for organizations like Population Connection to continue to push back against “baby bust” misinformation, and to raise awareness of population trends and impacts.

We also hosted David Lin, Chief Science Officer of the Global Footprint Network, for an event marking Earth Overshoot Day — the date when humanity has used up nature’s entire annual “budget” of renewable ecological resources and services. It fell on July 24 this year, meaning that humanity is currently using nature 80% faster than Earth’s ecosystems can regenerate. David joined us to discuss in more detail what “overshoot” means for our planet, and ways we can work together to #MoveTheDate to later in the year going forward.

August

The second installment of our Partner Perspectives series took place in August. This event focused on our Global

Partner Maya Health Alliance, also known as Wuqu’ Kawoq. Hannah led the presentation, along with Anne Kraemer, co-founder and CEO of Maya Health Alliance.

Since 2007, Maya Health Alliance has been advancing quality health care services in rural regions of Guatemala. Their approach combines medicine, culture, and language local to each community to overcome common barriers to care. Their programs improve women’s health, maternal and infant health, and chronic disease outcomes. Hannah provided an important overview of Guatemala’s demographic trends before diving into photos and stories from her site visit.

Every other month, Population Connection members and supporters meet via Zoom to discuss a book or long-form publication and how the ideas presented relate to population issues. During our August meeting, we discussed *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2024*, edited by Bill McKibben and Jaime Green. This compelling anthology brings together 20 powerful essays that reflect on a year marked by environmental upheaval and awe-inspiring natural phenomena. From wildfires and biodiversity loss to innovative efforts to protect wildlife, these stories offer both urgency and hope as we consider humanity’s evolving relationship with the planet. 🌍



Hannah Evans (far right) visiting a community nursery at the headquarters of Seeds for a Future in Chocó, Guatemala

Trump to Destroy Contraceptives, Costing Lives

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs, and Anna Newberry, Stanback Governmental Relations Fellow

Leading Democrats introduce bill to prevent destruction of contraceptives by Trump administration

In early June, *The Washington Post* reported that the US had some \$12 million in contraceptives and HIV prevention medication stuck in warehouses overseas that would be destroyed unless they could be sold. The supplies had already been purchased but were being withheld from the agencies contracted to provide them to people around the world.

In response, Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Brian Schatz (D-HI) introduced the Saving Lives and Taxpayer Dollars Act to prevent the destruction of the commodities and impose requirements on the administration to prevent the imminent spoilage of emergency food aid sitting in a Houston warehouse.

Sen. Shaheen said, “This bill will save lives and prevent the

wasting of taxpayer dollars by ensuring that already paid-for life-saving commodities, like food and medicine, are delivered to people in need instead of being pointlessly trashed. At a moment when the Trump administration has made devastating cuts to foreign assistance, it is disappointing that the State Department would sign off on spending money to actually destroy paid-for commodities that would save lives and are waiting to be deployed. Food and family planning commodities are desperately needed in conflict affected countries, like Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo where famine is taking hold. Women are at high risk for sexual violence in conflict settings.”

Sen. Schatz added, “Intentionally destroying health care products or letting food and medication that the United States government has already paid for as part of our foreign assistance efforts rot and expire in warehouses

is absurd. It’s a total waste of taxpayer dollars and is needlessly costing lives around the world. Our bill requires the administration to follow common sense and distribute foreign assistance commodities before they expire.”

House Republicans release foreign aid spending bill

On July 14, Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee released their draft of the National Security and State Department Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations bill. It calls for a family planning spending cap of \$461 million — a significant cut from previous years, but a rejection of the administration’s calls to eliminate family planning funding entirely. The bill also bars support to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the world’s largest multilateral provider of reproductive health care, and writes the administration’s Global Gag Rule into law.

The committee is planning

to take the bill up after the deadline for this issue. Senate Appropriations leaders have not yet announced any plans.

Reproductive health care for millions threatened

On July 4, Trump signed into law H.R.1, the so-called “One Big Beautiful Bill,” following its passage in Congress by the slimmest of margins, mostly along party lines. While heralded by the administration as “beautiful,” the new law is, in fact, a sweeping ideological assault on access to reproductive health care and a dismantling of core elements of domestic safety net programs. H.R.1 targets Medicaid and Planned Parenthood, codifying restrictions that will shutter clinics, block patients from receiving care, and deepen longstanding inequities in the US health system.

The House originally approved the bill in late May on a 21–214 vote, with one Republican joining Democrats in opposition. After intense negotiations and last-minute amendments, the Senate passed the bill on July 1, with JD Vance providing the tiebreaking vote. It narrowly passed the House again on July 3, clearing the path for Trump’s Independence Day signing.


The bill’s massive cuts to Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program

(CHIP) will remove coverage from some 10.5 million people. The Medicaid cuts specifically put some 300 rural hospitals across the country at imminent risk of closure. Many of these hospitals have already shuttered their maternity units.

The new law bars any organization “primarily engaged in family planning” from participating in Medicaid for one year. The provision initially sought to “defund” Planned Parenthood for 10 years but was reduced to one year by a Senate parliamentary ruling. The ruling came days after the Supreme Court sided against Planned Parenthood in *Medina v. Planned Parenthood South Atlantic*, ruling that states can prohibit Medicaid funding for any health care services provided by Planned Parenthood. On July 28, a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction blocking the provision that defunds Planned Parenthood.

Medicaid is the single largest payer for reproductive health services and covers some 40% of births in the United States. Planned Parenthood is the largest network of providers of family planning to patients covered by Medicaid. According to the Guttmacher Institute, Planned Parenthood health centers served 1.6 million of the 4.7 million

contraceptive clients seen by safety-net family planning centers in 2020. By banning Medicaid reimbursements, H.R.1 effectively strips Planned Parenthood of its ability to provide preventative care — birth control, STI testing and treatment, cancer screenings, and pregnancy care — to millions of Americans. The ban puts up to 200 Planned Parenthood health centers at risk of closing, denying vulnerable people the care they need.

According to internal estimates from Planned Parenthood, nearly 60% of the clinics at risk are in medically underserved areas. For patients in rural or low-income regions, the impact will most likely be immediate and devastating, leaving them with few alternatives for reproductive health care. Supporters of this bar on Medicaid payments claim that federally qualified health centers would be able to readily step in to replace Planned Parenthood. However, Guttmacher estimates that federally qualified centers would have to increase their capacity by an impossible 56%. Rep. Jasmine Crockett (D-TX) said, “You’re ripping care away from the very people our health care system is supposed to protect — working families, women of color, people living on the edge.” 

FIELD + OUTREACH


#Fight4HER at the WorldPride Street Festival

By Rebecca Harrington, Senior Director of Advocacy and Outreach

After a politically devastating first half of the year, the Field team, on behalf of our sister organization, Population Connection Action Fund, was thrilled to participate in WorldPride DC 2025 on the 50th anniversary of Pride celebrations in the nation's capital. Despite five long months of attacks on abortion, contraception, health care coverage, and LGBTQ+ rights, this year's Pride festivities in June were filled with joy, hope, and resolve.

We hosted a booth during the two-day WorldPride Street Festival, a huge gathering of progressive organizations and businesses overflowing with fun giveaways, opportunities to take action, and kind, dedicated staff and volunteers.

Our booth was in action all day Saturday and Sunday, where we talked with thousands of festivalgoers about attacks on reproductive rights — broadly, and specifically against the LGBTQ+ community — recruited people to join our #Fight4HER campaign, asked people to take action on the Global HER Act, and handed out lots of specially designed swag, including the very popular “Repro Rights Fan” handheld fans, #Fight4HER t-shirts, and “Repro Health and Rights for All” and “Trans Rights Are Human Rights” stickers.

After weathering the horrifying first months of the Trump 2.0 administration, it was inspiring to spend a weekend in such an open, inclusive, joyful, creative, and fun space. We're so grateful to WorldPride for having us, and we look forward to hosting a booth again at next year's Capital Pride Festival. 

“The spirit of activism at the Population Connection Action Fund booth at the WorldPride Street Festival was palpable. People from all backgrounds came together to defend reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ health care and join the #Fight4HER campaign. In the face of repressive policies, our staff and festival attendees demonstrated that comprehensive reproductive health care is a human right worth fighting for.”

– 2025 Stanback Summer Fellow



Visitors to our booth sending digital messages to their members of Congress, asking them to support family planning and reproductive health care for all

“Volunteering at WorldPride this year was an unforgettable experience. The energy, the joy, and the sense of community were inspiring. The event was incredibly hopeful, and I left feeling recharged and ready to continue this fight.”

– Victoria Wright, Director of Planned Giving

“It was great to engage with folks from around the world who were gathered in DC to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community. So many were excited to defend reproductive health and rights for all!”

– Lauren Salmieri, National Field Director

“Tabling at WorldPride was incredible! The energy was unmatched. A lot of the great conversations I had with reproductive rights allies were centered on the administration’s attacks on critical health care services. We recruited activists who visited our booth to email their members of Congress, asking them to defend family planning services. It was inspiring to chat with people eager to join the fight for reproductive freedom.”

– Stephanie Wolfe, Membership Relations Coordinator



Rebecca Harrington, Lauren Salmieri, and Marian Starkey closing out the festival on Sunday evening

POPULATION EDUCATION


Messages on Innovation and Adaptability Winners of the 2024–2025 Student Video Contest

By Sally Watanabe, Student Engagement Fellow

This year, we celebrated the 14th annual World of 8 Billion International Student Video Contest, with over 3,250 submissions from students in 67 countries and 45 states plus DC. Our global topics included Child Wellbeing, Rainforest Ecosystems, and Sanitation. We were inspired by the effort students put into researching and brainstorming creative, sustainable solutions to issues related to these themes. Through the winning videos, our staff learned about composting toilets, bioremediation techniques, solar-powered vaccine refrigerators, and more. Winners were judged by 51 global experts in sustainability, education, and activism.

Nearly 300 teachers used the contest as a vehicle for diving deeper into engaged citizenship in their classrooms. For the first time, we offered mini grants of up to \$500, which helped 17 teachers purchase cameras, microphones, and editing software. More than 500 students, mostly from Title I schools, were able to participate in the contest due to these grants.

This year's winners inspired us with their innovative and adaptable approaches to improving child wellbeing, protecting rainforest ecosystems, and advancing sanitation through the lens of climate change and population growth. The insightful one-minute videos offer us hope for the future as we think critically about how to sustainably and equitably share resources and preserve them for future generations. In recognition of their thoughtful and creative work, high school winners received \$1,200 for first place, \$600 for second place, and \$300 for honorable mention. Middle school winners received \$600 for first place and \$300 for second place.

To celebrate the winners, we hosted a virtual film screening in early June, attended by the students, their families and teachers, and Population Connection staff. You can explore this year's winning videos and learn about their student producers at worldof8billion.org/winners-2025. 

High School Honorable Mentions

Transit for Children in a World of 8 Billion

Josephine Lee, Bergen
County Academies,
Hackensack, NJ

Education for New Generations

Kelly Guo, Gretchen
Whitney High School,
Cerritos, CA

Hemp: The Future of Forests

Naya Shalish, The Newman
School, Boston, MA

The Rainforest Pharmacy

Sophia Swink and Owen
Yang, Elizabethton High
School, Elizabethton, TN

Sun to Seat

Harshita Somani, Inventure
Academy, Bangalore,
Karnataka, India

Flush the Crisis, Sanitation's Fight

Ha Vy Le, College Miles
Macdonell Collegiate
Winnipeg, Manitoba,
Canada

CHILD WELLBEING

1

1st Place, High School



Immunizing the World: Solar Powered Vaccine Refrigerators

Ha Jin Sung, Choate Rosemary Hall, Wallingford, CT

Ha Jin is an accomplished viola player and dancer and

is passionate about biology and public health. She combined her interests in science and medicine with the power of advocacy to create her video, which highlights the emerging technology of solar-powered vaccine refrigerators. She hopes that this solution can increase access to life-saving immunizations for children living in rural areas.

2

2nd Place, High School



Young Lives, Big Struggles

Khyati Boruah, Sarala Birla Gyan Jyoti, Guwahati, Assam, India

Khyati is passionate about making videos and wanted to create one on child wellbeing as she could relate

to the topic, being a young person herself. She already knew that India's population is growing but was surprised to learn that teenage pregnancy is a large reason for population growth. She plans to pursue a medical career and wants to continue to work on child wellbeing issues.

1

1st Place, Middle School



Brighter Future for Every Child

Rukshona Isakova, Ismatulloh Bakhtiyorov, and Yulduz Juliboyeva, Presidential School, Jizzakh City, Uzbekistan

Rukshona, Ismatulloh, and Yulduz teamed up to create a video

envisioning a more equitable future for children by investing in education, sustainable farming, and health care. Rukshona studies physics and engineering and hopes to one day work for NASA. Ismatulloh is a multimedia artist and musician. Yulduz is passionate about historical fiction and aspires to be a writer.

2

2nd Place, Middle School



Overcoming Food Insecurity for Children

Hasini Dharmireddy and Advika Raut, Central Middle School, Eden Prairie, MN

Hasini and Advika wanted to raise awareness about food

insecurity, which is something they knew a growing population exacerbated, specifically in India, where they are both from. Hasini wants to go into the medical field. She is a chess champion and plays basketball, soccer, and badminton. Advika is a dancer and artist and created most of the drawings for their video.

RAINFOREST ECOSYSTEMS

1

1st Place, High School



The Bioremediation Blueprint: Restoring Rainforests

Anwitha Aruva and Hannah Allas, Santa Clara High School, Santa Clara, CA

Anwitha and Hannah

focused on bioremediation as a natural process to break down pollutants in the environment because it is a lesser-known sustainable solution to the health of ecosystems. Anwitha is interested in integrating sustainability into business and enjoys volunteering, reading, and baking. Hannah is interested in biology, plays the piano, and is involved in Girl Scouts and color guard.

2

2nd Place, High School



Deforestation of Rainforests

Katelyn Emdee, James River High School, Midlothian, VA

Katelyn chose the topic of rainforests because she wanted to learn more about a subject she hadn't explored

before. She focused her video on practical steps individuals can take to help save the rainforest, hoping to inspire others. Katelyn was a senior in high school when she submitted her video and is now attending Virginia Tech to study engineering. She enjoys baking and likes to unwind by playing video games.

1

1st Place, Middle School



Rainforest Deforestation

Alisha Wald, Mandela International School, Santa Fe, NM

Alisha's video addresses her concerns about human-driven deforestation, seen firsthand at her

grandparents' home in Malaysia. Using skills from her math class, Alisha created meaning out of the data she found to add credibility to her video. She is interested in engineering, aerospace, and the environment, and has won awards at the New Mexico Science and Engineering Fair and in the Aldo Leopold Writing Contest.

2

2nd Place, Middle School



The Scoop on Poop

Chloe Robbin, Olivia Whee, and Charlotte Naughton, Bedford Middle School, Westport, CT

This trio was inspired to make their video after

learning how elephant dung can be used to make paper products, reducing deforestation in rainforest ecosystems. They all love animals and wanted to raise awareness about human-caused threats to wildlife habitats. Although this was their first time creating a video for a contest, they are already working on producing more films.

SANITATION

1

1st Place, High School



Flushing Out the Crisis: Ending Open Defecation in Uganda

Lynette Mujaasi Kaye,
Viva College, Jinja,
Uganda

Lynette was motivated to create her video by seeing firsthand

the consequences of open defecation in her community, noting that families often have six to eight children and lack access to toilets and handwashing facilities. She enjoys writing for a menstrual non-profit and has a small business making bracelets in her free time. Lynette hopes to have a career as a lawyer or journalist.

2

2nd Place, High School



Sustaining Sanitation

Noelle Kim, Fairmont
Preparatory Academy,
Anaheim, CA

Noelle is interested in the relationship between climate change and sanitation challenges in

crowded cities. Her video investigates composting toilets, rainwater collection, and artificial wetlands to preserve freshwater resources. She has led student teams in other innovation contests and is now a freshman at Caltech, pursuing a degree in aerospace engineering.

1

1st Place, Middle School



Rain, Runoff, and 8 Billion: How Population Growth Pollutes Our Water

David and Danny Unatin,
Manhattan Beach Middle
School, Manhattan Beach,
CA

Brothers David and

Danny addressed the issue of water pollution runoff due to impermeable surfaces in urban areas in their video. Spending time at a lifeguard camp and learning how to help animals that wash up on shore sparked their motivation for this video topic. They contacted the UCLA SEALab and filmed part of the video in their lab, highlighting experiments studying groundwater quality and soil health.

2

2nd Place, Middle School



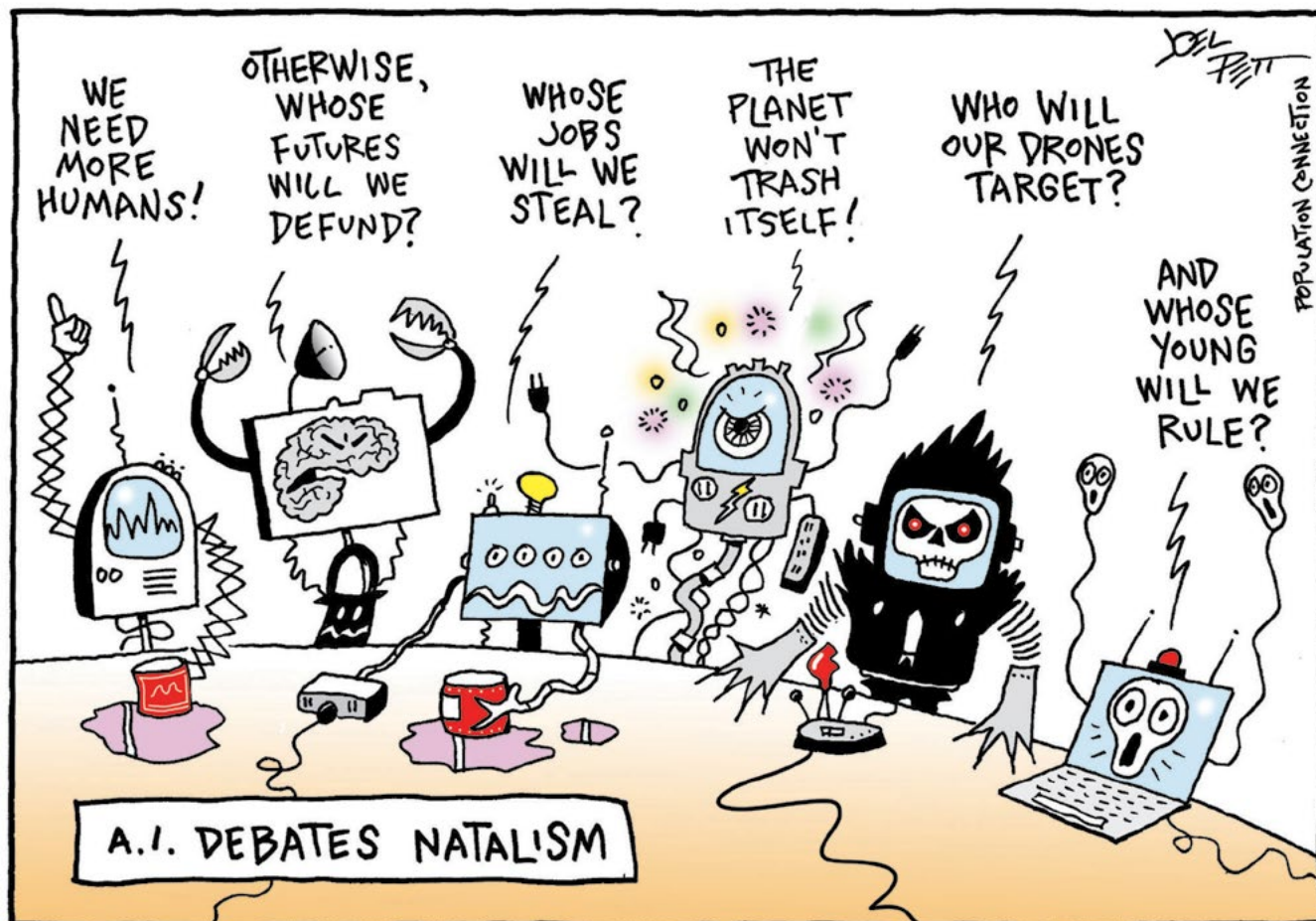
EcoSan Toilets: The Future to Sanitation Access

Aakriti Kurudumale and
Sarah Zhou, Central
Middle School, Eden
Prairie, MN

Aakriti and Sarah took on the challenge of

creating an educational video for the first time and drawing animations to explain how human waste can be transformed into plant fertilizer. Outside of making videos, Aakriti enjoys performing as a ballroom, jazz, and ballet dancer, while Sarah is a musician and competes on her school's Science Olympiad team.

CARTOON



Custom cartoon by Joel Pett

Rob & Margie Robinson
Glacier Bay National Park
President's Circle Members



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As the end of the year approaches, you can honor your commitment to a sustainable future with a tax-advantageous gift to Population Connection.

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