

# DEMOGRAPHIC AND GENDER-RELATED TRENDS

Their Effect on Nations, Regions,  
and the International System

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**W**e in this audience believe that the restored gospel is the cure for the world’s ills. But it is interesting to explore in a more substantive fashion how that proposition actually plays out on the world stage. Today we will do just that, focusing on two important, world-changing trends in demography and gender relations.

## THE FIRST WORLD-CHANGING TREND: SUBREPLACEMENT BIRTH RATES

At least three major civilizations of the world—Western, Slavic, and Japanese—are no longer replacing themselves. China is no longer replacing itself either, though it must be placed in a separate category because this lack of replacement has largely been an artifact of the government’s coercive one-child policy. Though this finding of subreplacement birth rates

in many countries has been reported widely in the media, we need to step back and contemplate the meaning of this phenomenon, which should startle us. No plague, war, or famine has caused this. Outside of a few small and isolated tribes in history, no significant human collective, let alone a major civilization, has voluntarily stopped replacing itself unless it embraced female infanticide, which these three have not. Furthermore, the civilizations in question are the most advanced, the most prosperous, and those with the longest experience—or at least rhetorical tradition, in the case of the former Warsaw Pact nations—of expansive political freedoms. Comparatively speaking, these civilizations are “haves,” not “have-nots,” with representation in powerful international bodies such as the G8. Subreplacement birth rates among the “haves” and increasingly among even the “have-nots” of the world represent an important and unprecedented development in human history, which calls for investigation.

Furthermore, there are some interesting subnational distinctions we should be aware of. For example, in the United States, the total fertility rates of non-Hispanic whites, blacks, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and American Indians are subreplacement; it is the fertility rate of Hispanics that keeps the United States within spitting distance of the replacement level.<sup>1</sup> In Europe, the fertility rates of immigrants from primarily Muslim countries pull up the birthrates of most nations, though in Europe—with a few exceptions, such as France, Ireland, and Iceland—countries are nowhere near spitting distance from replacement levels.<sup>2</sup> For example, in Germany now, one-quarter of all births are to foreign women. Interestingly, overall, the number of births in Germany last year was less than the number of births in Germany in the final year of World War II.<sup>3</sup> The population of both the United States and Europe is growing overall, but that is due exclusively to immigration, not to fertility. Furthermore, it has been noted that the fertility rates of second- and third-generation immigrants decline almost to the level of the native population.

Note also that there are some interesting non-Western nations with subreplacement birth rates: Turkey, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, and others. And, counterintuitively, some of these nations have a predominately Muslim population.

Of interest to this audience is that the gap between the US state with the highest fertility rate (Utah) and the lowest fertility rate (Vermont) is considerably larger than the gap between the European states with the highest and lowest fertility.<sup>4</sup>

Now these subreplacement or near-subreplacement rates have some important demographic consequences. First, the proportion of the population that is elderly increases while the proportion of young people declines. The median age of the populations of Europe is now well over thirty-five. This certainly will have important ramifications for the welfare states of Europe. States will have to budget for an increasing burden of elder care because traditional social security systems are based on having several workers per elderly person. In some countries now, the ratio is one worker to one elderly person. And what happens to a wealthy economy when it begins to lose manpower? Issues of outsourcing, worker protections, and other contemporary controversies begin to emerge.

A second important consequence is cultural transition. Given the sub-national differences in fertility, North America will become predominantly Hispanic by approximately mid century. Europe is poised to become predominantly Muslim at about the same time. It has been noted that these two population groups are much less likely to assimilate than previous immigrant populations. This lack of assimilation signals a different vision than that of the traditional melting pot. It signals real cultural and linguistic shifts within the richest and most powerful nations of the international system.

What is also very important about these demographic transitions is that they have been highly resistant to policy manipulation. Large financial incentives to give birth have been offered for many years by European nations with low birthrates; even extremely generous packages simply do not result in replacement or above-replacement birth rates.

Vladimir Putin has recently declared the subreplacement birth rates of Russia a national security issue and has offered \$9,200 for the birth of second babies, among other initiatives. But if the experiences of Europe with such incentives prove a guide, even these incentives will be insufficient to reverse Russia's decline.<sup>5</sup>

## THE SECOND WORLD—CHANGING TREND: GENDERCIDE

There is something else going on that is worthy of our investigation, a trend of equally immense significance and importance. About a year ago, the first Human Security Report was unveiled, showing that deaths from interstate and intrastate conflict had significantly attenuated over the last four decades to some of the lowest levels seen since recording began. But then the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces issued its own report several months later, showing that one class of deaths had not only not abated but had actually increased significantly over the last forty years: deaths of females in peacetime. In fact, they went so far as to term this a “hidden gendercide,” an appalling loss of human life hidden precisely because we see its source as “natural,” unlike war, and so what is thought of as natural becomes invisible to us.<sup>6</sup>

I urge you to read the full report, but in this chapter I will focus on one particular aspect of the gendercide that is increasing at an alarming rate in several of the most populous Asian countries: female infanticide and female-fetus abortion.<sup>7</sup>

That there is an abnormal deficit of females in Asia can be fairly readily confirmed through standard demographic analysis. There are established ranges for normal variation in overall population sex ratios as well as in early childhood and birth sex ratios. These ratios are adjusted for country-specific circumstances, such as, for example, maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates. When we use official census data, it is then a relatively straightforward task to determine if there are fewer women than could reasonably be expected in a given population. Of course, there are perturbing variables: for example, many of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf have very abnormal sex ratios favoring males, but this is due to the high number of guest workers, predominantly male, that labor in the oil economies of these states. Once these types of factors have been taken into account, we find that a deficit of females in Asia is a real phenomenon.

To see the scale of the deficit, some comparisons are in order. If we examine overall population sex ratios, the ratio for Latin America, for example, is 98 males per 100 females (using 2000 US Census Bureau figures)—the

corresponding figure for Asia is 104.4 males per 100 females. But one must also keep in mind the sheer size of the populations of Asia: India and China alone compose approximately 38 percent of the world's population. Thus, the overall sex ratio of the world is 101.3 males to 100 females, despite the fact that the ratios for the rest of the world (excluding Oceania) range from 93.1 (Europe) to 98.9 (Africa).

Birth sex ratios in several Asian countries are also outside of the established norm of 105–107 boys born for every 100 girls. The Indian government's estimate of its birth sex ratio is approximately 113 boys born for every 100 girls, with some locales noting ratios of 156 and higher. The Chinese government states that its birth sex ratio is approximately 119, though some Chinese scholars have gone on record as stating the birth sex ratio is at least 121. Again, in some locations, the ratio is higher: the island of Hainan's birth sex ratio is 135. Other countries of concern include Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Taiwan, Afghanistan, and South Korea. No data is available for North Korea.

Another indicator of gender imbalance is early childhood mortality. Boys typically have a higher early childhood mortality rate, which virtually cancels out their birth sex ratio numerical advantage by age five. The reasons for this higher mortality include sex-linked genetic mutations, such as hemophilia, as well as higher death rates for boys from common childhood diseases, such as dysentery. However, in some of the Asian nations just mentioned, early childhood mortality rates for girls are actually higher than those for boys. Furthermore, orphanage populations are predominantly female in these nations.

Other statistics also factor into the observed gender imbalance. In the West, for example, male suicides far outnumber female suicides. But in countries with deficits of women, female suicides outnumber male suicides. In fact, approximately 55 percent of all female suicides in the world are Chinese women of childbearing age.

What forces drive the deficit of females in Asian nations such as India and China? How do we account for the disappearance of so many women from these populations (estimated conservatively at over ninety million missing women in seven Asian countries alone)?

Some scholars assert that there may be a physical cause at work preventing female births, such as the disease hepatitis B, antigens of which have been associated with higher birth sex ratios. This may well be a contributing factor. However, it is worth considering the following experience of the municipality of Shenzhen in southern China. Alarmed at the municipality's rising birth sex ratio, which reached 118 in 2002, local officials instituted a strict crackdown on black market ultrasound clinics. Offering two hundred yuan for tips as to where these clinics could be found, officials then vigorously prosecuted the owners of the machines and the technicians using them, with prison terms affixed. By 2004—that is, in just two years—the birth sex ratio had dropped to 108.

It is fair to say that accounts such as these provide support for the thesis that the modern gender imbalance in Asia, as with historical gender imbalances in Asia and elsewhere, is largely a man-made phenomenon. Girls are being culled from the population, whether through prenatal sex identification and selective abortions that target females; or through relative neglect (compared to male offspring) in early childhood, including abandonment; or through desperate life circumstances that might result in suicide. The gender imbalance in Asia is primarily the result of son preference and the profound devaluation of female life.

One could justifiably suggest that this value ordering is not confined to Asia; why, then, is the deficit of women found almost exclusively there? This question can be approached only through a multifactorial cultural analysis, which we will not detail in this short chapter. Suffice it to say that one must examine variables such as religious prohibition or sanction of the practice; traditions of patrilocality and old-age security obtained through male offspring; issues of dowry, hypergyny, and caste purity in India; and the effect of interventions such as the one-child policy in China. Other factors to consider include the web of incentives, disincentives, and capabilities surrounding the issue of prenatal sex-determination technology.

Both China and India have announced new initiatives intended to help correct the increasingly skewed nature of birth sex ratios. China is offering old-age pensions and waiving certain school fees for families with only daughters. India has begun sting operations to enforce laws against prenatal sex identification by physicians. It is too early to tell whether these

measures will be effective, and in the meantime, the horse has left the barn for the next two decades or more. We anticipate there will be twenty-eight to thirty million young adult men in excess of young adult women in India in 2020 and thirty to thirty-three million in China. Other nations in the region, such as Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Taiwan, and South Korea, have abnormal gender ratios. It will be interesting to watch the consequences of this gendercide in Asia unfold and affect domestic stability as well as regional and international security. Will the prospects for peace and democracy in Asia diminish in lockstep with the value of daughters there?

### THE LINK

I'd like to propose that these two world-changing trends, population decline and gendercide, are intrinsically linked. At first that might seem rather counterintuitive—after all, gendercide is not a defining feature of, for example, Sweden. In fact, on most measures of gender parity, a country like Sweden, with low birth rates (and also low marriage rates and high divorce rates), comes out looking quite good.

In fact, some less-than-insightful commentators have opined that it is this very elevated status for women in nations like Sweden that has led to these low birth rates, implying that it is women who are mostly responsible for population decline, since they have left the home for the workplace in droves. And then they imply that if only we could somehow reverse the status of women and return to a more patriarchal type of society (patriarchy meaning a fallen patriarchy when men rule over women), then we would have higher birth rates. A lead article in *Foreign Policy* magazine<sup>8</sup> called “The Return of Patriarchy” argued just that. Of course, the author was trying to be sensational because it sells magazines, but I have even heard this line of reasoning from Latter-day Saints who should know better.

I would like to suggest that population decline and gendercide are actually two faces of the very same problem: misogyny. I'd like to suggest that if we really scratch the surface of disparate countries such as Sweden and Pakistan, we will see them as benchmarks along a road from high fertility and high gendercide to low fertility and the absence of overt

gendercide but the presence of a more insidious and more modern misogyny. Let me describe three phases of evolving misogyny as I see them.

In the first stage, we see traditional hierarchy of men over women. Yes, there is marriage in these cultures, but it is marriage between a superior and an inferior. The superior male dominates and represses the inferior female. Birth rates are high, but marriage is not the source of joy within society. Men find pleasure in the double standard of sexual fidelity. Men permit themselves abuse of women, for whom they have contempt. Women find themselves in a position of terrible vulnerability and come to view marriage and men with grave suspicion and even fear. But men aren't happy either—when your lover is the equivalent of an animal in your eyes, how can you expect to find happiness? You can find pleasure, but happiness will forever elude you.

In the second phase, we see societies that have come to the conclusion that both men and women are people, and people should be treated equally. But given the structural inequality of power between men and women, this conclusion results in the idealized person being male in nature. Both men and women are now judged by standards of maleness—they can be equal as long as they are both just like men. We enter a period where the difference between men and women is being consciously erased in the hopes that that will elevate the situation of women. Women who emulate men may find a secure place in society; those who choose a more traditionally female role will find themselves again in a position of great vulnerability. Women begin to have contempt for their own biology, for that is the source of potential vulnerability. Women no longer trust marriage as a viable way to survive economically, especially while raising children.

Men begin to abandon marriage and tout a single standard of promiscuity for both men and women as the route to equality in sexual relations in society—now both sexes have the equal right to completely uncommitted sex. Men also begin to abandon their children, seeing them as unintended consequences of sexual relations for whom they hold no responsibility. No wonder women begin to believe that having children is akin to committing economic suicide. A woman can have children, or she can have a relationship with a man: it will be increasingly difficult to find



a man to be an equal and committed partner in raising children, and birth rates will decline precipitously.

The final stage has not yet come about, but in an era of amazing breakthroughs in advanced reproductive technology, it may come to pass sooner than we would like to believe. At some point, the sexes will go their separate ways. They will no longer need each other for anything, except, perhaps, recreational sex. There are already advances that promise men the ability to have children without women and promise women the chance to have children without men. This stage is the culmination of the sexes' inability to imagine how to live together in harmony: They have tried hierarchy, and it doesn't work. They have tried erasing the differences between men and women, and that doesn't work. Eventually, they will stop trying altogether and give the entire project up as hopeless.

## THE LDS CONNECTION

Now, you've been waiting patiently to hear the LDS connection in all of this, and we are now to the point where we can speak of this intelligibly.

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the strongest and most progressive force for women in the world today. The most profound feminist act one can commit is to share that gospel. It is the restored gospel that tells us that equality in the context of difference is desirable and attainable, something the world completely disbelieves. Think about the revolutionary aspects of our gospel concerning men and women:

“God” means an exalted man and an exalted woman united in eternal marriage.

We have always been either male or female, and we always will be.

Our male and female bodies are great gifts to us.

The highest heaven involves being married forever and having children forever.

Men and women, though different in some respects, stand as equals before the Lord and before each other.

Eve did not sin in partaking of the fruit in Eden and is to be honored for her role in the Fall.

In fact, the two trees in the garden can be said to represent the two equally important stewardships of men and women.

What is the cure for low birth rates? What is the cure for gendercide? The cure for both is the very same thing—the teachings of the gospel concerning men and women, which preach a full and equal partnership between men and women, symbolized by the covenant of eternal marriage. This is the only way of life that does not ultimately end in sterility.

Let me read you the letter to the editor I wrote to *Foreign Policy* in response to the article on patriarchy:

To The Editor:

Phillip Longman (“The Return of Patriarchy”) has put forward a noteworthy and persuasive argument concerning the evolutionary advantage of human social systems that reward paternal investment in family and children. But he is too quick to suggest that such a system is inescapably patriarchal, in the sense of female submission to male head of household. There are alternative systems that provide for the first without the odious second, and it is only such systems that are able to prevent what Longman rightly and refreshingly points out as the ultimate sterility of patriarchy. I offer my own culture as such an alternative system: I consider myself a feminist and am a full professor of political science. My husband and I have six children and would be happy to have more. We have an equitable marriage: he does the cooking; I do the laundry; we share the childcare. We are completely faithful to each other and have a happy marriage without taint of domination or abuse. From my perspective as a woman, why wouldn’t I want to have many children with a wonderful man who is committed to me, our children, and our marriage? No patriarchal hierarchy or female submission is required to produce our above-average birthrate. And what my husband and I are extending into the future is not some inanimate abstraction like the family name but a vibrant living culture of gender equity and love—a truly joint male-female project of world

improvement. Now that is the type of family system that endures and does not decay and become sterile. Find yourself a belief system that rewards its men not only for paternal investment in family and children but also for sexual fidelity, equal partnership between men and women, and abhorrence of domination or abuse in marriage, as we did—and then see what happens to birthrates. All in all, a far better and more effective prescription than the advocacy of traditional patriarchy.

Yes, we must understand what the key question is in order to find the cure for these stubborn and tragic ills afflicting the human family. Where in the world can we find a group of men dedicated to

advocating a single standard of sexual fidelity?

getting and staying married?

upholding the equality, safety, and flourishing of women?

having children and actively taking part in raising them?

valuing their daughters as much as they value their sons?

abhorring abuse, pornography, and neglect?

affirming parity in burden sharing, including housework and decision-making, within marriage?

Where can we find this group of men? Why, right here in this audience: the men who hold priesthood offices in our Church are described by the answers they would give to these questions.

One of the most important ways that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can shine as a beacon in these latter days is to loudly and repeatedly proclaim the truths concerning how God wants gender relations to be conducted: a single standard of fidelity, commitment to marriage, equal partnership in marriage, no subordination or hierarchy in the relation between men and women, and no tolerance for the abuse of women or children. Our Church authorities have been strong in their depiction of the equality of women and men before the Lord and before each other. And this depiction has involved standing up to traditional

practices that undermine this ideal. In fact, lately, I've been daydreaming about a billboard campaign for the Church. Imagine a set of billboards placed in prominent positions in the major metropolises of the world. Consider the following quotes from various authorities on the subject.

"There is not a president and vice president in a family. We have co-presidents working together eternally for the good of their family. . . . They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward."<sup>9</sup>

"God our Eternal Father ordained that men and women should be companions. That implies equality. . . . There is no basis in the gospel for inferiority or superiority between the husband and wife. Do you think that God our Eternal Father loves his daughters less than he loves his sons? No man can demean or belittle his wife as a daughter of God without giving offense to her Father in Heaven."<sup>10</sup>

"Any man who abuses or demeans his wife physically or spiritually is guilty of grievous sin and in need of sincere and serious repentance. . . . A man should always speak to his wife lovingly and kindly, treating her with the utmost respect."<sup>11</sup>

"There is no task, however menial, connected with the care of babies, the nurturing of children, or with the maintenance of the home that is not the husband's equal obligation. The tasks which come with parenthood, which many consider to be below other tasks, are simply above them."<sup>12</sup>

"Some Christians condemn Eve for her act, concluding that she and her daughters are somehow flawed by it. Not the Latter-day Saints! Informed by revelation, we celebrate Eve's act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall."<sup>13</sup>

"Is yours a culture where the husband exerts a domineering, authoritarian role, making all of the important decisions for the family? That pattern needs to be tempered so that both husband and wife act as equal partners, making decisions in unity for themselves and their family."<sup>14</sup>

"The Lord forbids and his Church condemns any and every intimate relationship outside of marriage. Infidelity on the part of a man breaks the heart of his wife and loses her confidence and the confidence of his children. Be faithful in your marriage covenants in thought, word, and deed."<sup>15</sup>

“The Church cannot bow down before any traditions that demean or devalue the daughters of God.”<sup>16</sup>

Remember that the bottom line for God in judging a society is actually family relations—not the presence of the gospel. Think of the Nephites during Jacob’s time. The Nephites have the gospel, they have a prophet, they have a temple and temple ordinances, they have the scriptures. They have an abundance of spiritual riches in their midst. And yet Jacob says they will be destroyed while the Lamanites, who have none of these things, will be preserved. Why is that so? Well, you know the answer (read Jacob 3:7). Because of their abominable treatment of women, they had lost the vision of the true nature of God. And once that vision is lost, it cannot be reclaimed. But in societies where men and women love each other, support each other, and are faithful to one another, and likewise parents to children, the vision of the true nature of God is retained—and where it is retained, the restored gospel can be reintroduced and eventually find a welcoming home.

As the Church rises in support of women and as priesthood holders begin to conceive of themselves as part of a covenant brotherhood that has sworn to uphold, among other things, the equality, safety, and flourishing of all the daughters of God, you will see the eyes of all women turn to this Church. And when the eyes of the women turn and they begin to assess their men according to the Lord’s criteria, you will see men begin to turn as well. For men are clearly no victors in any of the forms of civilizational misogyny—they suffer profoundly as well. Misogyny breeds misery for men as well as women.

It is only this third way, the Lord’s way, that brings joy to both men and women, safety to men and women, and a fountain of everlasting life for all. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and his wife, Patricia, said the following:

In times of difficulty and stress ahead, it will be the women of the Church, as well as the men, who will speak persuasively of God’s plan, of His eternal government, and of His priesthood assignments. In the years ahead, some of the great defenders of priesthood roles for men will be women speaking to other women. A woman can speak to another woman in language men would not normally use and with a fervor men would not dare invoke. God has a view of women, who they are, what they do incomparably, and what eternally they

will be. Women must seize that vision and embrace it, or they—and the human family with it—will perish.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

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