

# worries over a population implosion

by deborah carr

In 1968, doomsayer Paul Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb* famously predicted starvation and disaster in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Echoing the argument of 18<sup>th</sup> century political economist Thomas Malthus, Ehrlich feared the pace of population growth would outstrip the pace of food production and "hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now."

Ehrlich's catastrophic predictions didn't come true. In fact, for many demographers, old fears of too many people have been replaced by new fears of too few people.

In most developed and a growing number of developing nations, experts worry birth rates have dropped to such a low point that their populations are no longer "replacing" themselves. For populations to do so, the average couple must give birth to 2.1 babies—that extra .1 accounts for the fact that a small proportion of infants don't survive until their own reproductive years.

In nearly all developed nations, however, couples are having far fewer than 2.1 babies. And population control programs in countries with historically high birth rates, like China and India, have been so successful that national leaders fear their populations will shrink in the coming century. Even sub-Saharan Africa, the one region of the world with consistently high rates of birth, is projected to have birth rates just above the replacement level by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century.

The U.S. Census Bureau has estimated current and future total fertility rates (TFRs) for each of the world's nations. A TFR is the average number of babies that would be born to a woman over her lifetime were she to experience her nation's current age-specific fertility rates.

The four world regions with the lowest fertility rates are all in Europe. In 2008, TFRs in The Baltics, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States were 1.28, 1.37, 1.55, and 1.57, respectively. The North American TFR is just below the replacement rate, at 2.05, with the United States a bit higher (2.09).

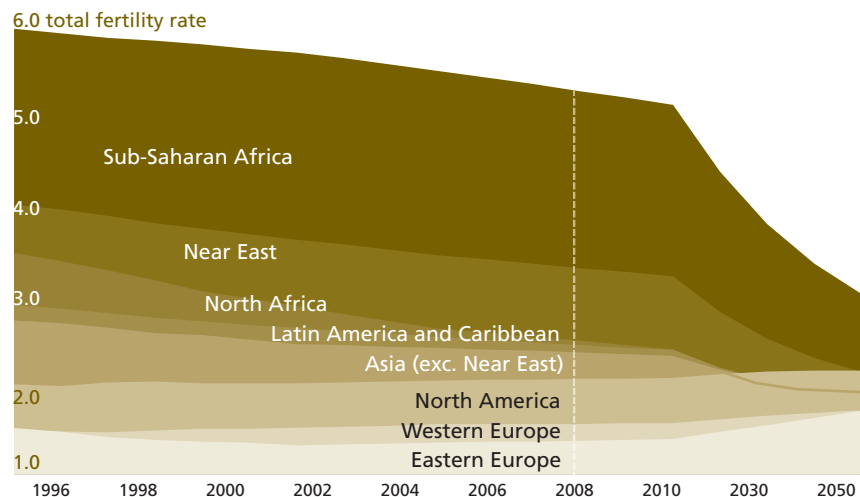
The world's highest fertility rates are in Africa, followed by parts of Asia and Latin America. The Islamic nations of North Africa have an average TFR of 2.47, yet this ranges from just 1.9 in Tunisia to more than 6.0 in Western Sahara.

complete more years of schooling, delay marriage, enter rewarding jobs, and take greater control of their own reproduction, however, birth rates may continue to inch downward.

Although Ehrlich and Malthus feared rapid population growth would ultimately lead to starvation and dehydration, because natural resources would be consumed faster than they could be produced, today's political leaders fear slow population growth will damage the vitality and economic strength of their nations.

Fewer young people may mean labor shortages, fewer workers paying

## Total fertility rates by region



The Near East also has tremendous variety in its nation's fertility rates, ranging from just below the replacement rate in Cyprus, Lebanon, and Turkey to more than 6.0 in Oman, the Gaza Strip, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Fertility rates in sub-Saharan Africa sit at 5.18. Demographers anticipate these rates will decline steadily in the coming decades but not reach the projected world average of 2.13 by 2050.

As women of developing nations

into public pension programs that support large and growing elderly populations, and fewer people of reproductive age who can give birth to the next generation of students, workers, and parents. These fears are leading nations to search for innovative policies to increase birth rates.

Throughout history, nations have resorted to desperate measures to increase their population sizes. In 1927, Mussolini launched his Battle for

Births—with the goal of five children per Italian family. Bachelors were hit by high taxation while large families received tax breaks and public accolades. In Nazi Germany, women of Aryan stock (even unmarried women) were given cash, tax breaks, and even medals for bearing many babies. Romanian dictator Nicolau Ceausescu banned abortion in 1966 in an attempt to increase his nation's population growth rates.

Other policies have taken a different tack to increase dwindling labor forces. In the 1960s and 1970s, Germany's guest worker program opened borders to young workers, mostly from southern Europe and North

Africa. Experts agree that immigration restrictions are unlikely to be dramatically loosened today, however, given the current economic, political, and social climate in Europe and the United States.

The best way to increase birth rates, according to most experts, is to create a climate where both mothers and fathers can better blend childrearing responsibilities with careers. For example, Sweden provides flexible work arrangements for both parents, along with state-subsidized, high-quality child care. Other countries provide tax and cash incentives. One town in Italy recently began to offer couples €10,000 for each baby they bear. Nevertheless, the effec-

tiveness of cash transfers is questionable. One study finds that each 25 percent increase in cash allowances is accompanied by just a .6 percent increase in birth rates.

Some experts say no amount of cash will change couples' minds about their childbearing; those with a strong desire to remain childless or have just one child won't budge. Quality of life, it seems, is more important to young people than contributing to their nations' population growth.

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## youth will be served

by jeff goodwin

"Which groups voted for Barack?"

This was the burning question sociologists and political scientists were asking about President Obama's victory last November. But another question is equally if not more important: "Which groups swung the vote from the Republican to the Democratic party between 2004 and 2008?" While George W. Bush captured 50.7 percent of the vote in 2004, John McCain won just under 46.0 percent in 2008.

Experts say elections are often won or lost by subtle shifts in group voting patterns—especially large groups that historically lean strongly toward one party or the other. In the historic election of 2008, however, *nearly all* demographic groups voted more Democratic than in 2004.

Among the groups showing double-digit swings toward the Democratic candidate were wealthy voters with household incomes over \$200,000 per year (a remarkable 17 percent change since 2004) and Latinos (12 percent change). Frequent churchgoers and

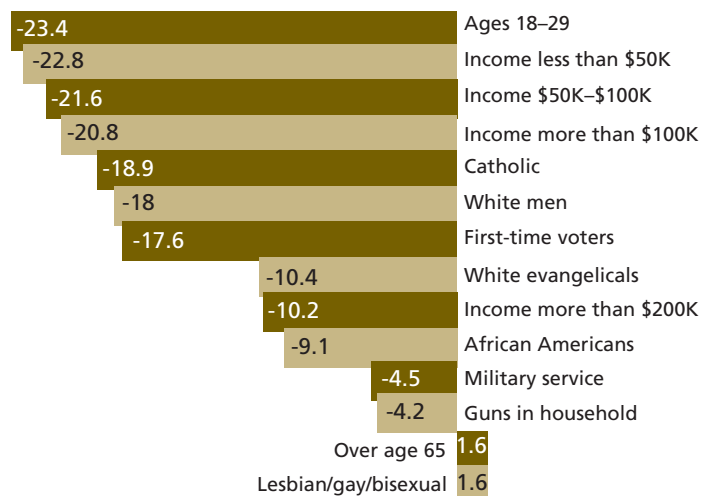
African Americans also shifted—or shifted even further—toward the Democrats. These groups, however, make up too small a proportion of the overall electorate to account for Obama's victory.

To weigh a group's impact on the overall shift of votes from one election to the next, we have to consider both the swing in their voting patterns and

their size within the electorate.

Specifically, this "impact" can be calculated by multiplying the percentage change in the group's vote for the Republican Party between 2004 and 2008 by the group's proportion within the overall electorate in 2008. This product is then multiplied by a constant (1,000) to make the result more intu-

### Impact on the declining Republican vote, 2004–2008



Source: Author's calculations based on exit polls by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International