



FEBRUARY 27 2026

TOWARD A HEADWING ECONOMY OF FREEDOM, PEACE AND SHARED PROSPERITY

POST CONFERENCE REPORT

THE CRISIS OF FAMILY FORMATION AND ITS THREAT TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROSPERITY

Today we are experiencing a global fertility crisis that many are calling “the most crucial economic issue of our time.” Understanding the scale and causes of this crisis, was the purpose of this forum. What are the crucial levers that are needed to reverse the trends now emerging from population demographics? Are there viable solutions to enhance fertility through government and economic policies or is a changing culture the bigger problem to overcome where decisions on marriage and children are being delayed. Solving this problem is of paramount importance.

IAED recognizes the truth that the economic and social stability of a nation is fundamentally rooted in the health of its families. Values and ethics such as mutual responsibility, cooperation and empathy are first acquired within the family and form the bedrock for all broader social interactions, including being productive members of society and its economy.

This conference series, Toward a Headwing Economy, springs from a paper IAED has drafted outlining a roadmap toward an economy of Freedom, Peace and Shared Prosperity. We have called this a “Headwing Economics” Framework paper. In it we highlight the importance of an economy where the cultural sphere informs the economic and political spheres to create an environment where healthy families grounded in strong values can flourish.

[Read the Headwing Economics
Framework Paper](#)

Video Link:
[Session 1: Introduction](#)
[Alan Jessen](#)

THE GREAT CRISIS OF LOW BIRTHRATES THREATENING OUR FUTURE AND THE BIGGEST LEVERS TO REVERSE IT

Daniel Hess: Pronatalist advocate, writing @MoreBirths

The Forum began with a presentation by Dan Hess describing how the global fertility crisis must be understood and viewed through the lens of economics and the devastating consequences that may undermine the stability of societies. According to economist Jesus Fernandez-Villaverde, “If we are unable to address our fertility crisis there will be an economic crisis that could have an impact measured in the quadrillions of dollars.”

For perspective:

- The replacement fertility is 2.1 births per woman.
- The current rate in the United States is 1.6
- In Hong Kong it is .074
- In Korea it is .08
- In most developed countries it is below 2.



Why we don’t see the problem.

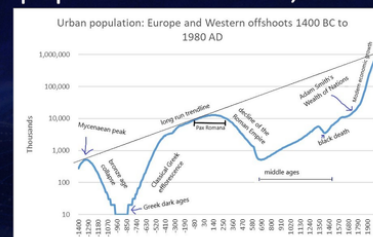
The chart on the left is what we see when we look at South Korea’s total population – it is nearly at an all-time high. Yet if you look at the population pyramid, you see that the younger generation is almost completely missing. There are very few children which translates into a dim future.

With fewer people, won’t we be more prosperous and the climate healthier?

The answer is No.

Historically, civilization itself tracks population. When population declines, you lose economies of scale; you lose technology; and so many markers of civilization. Budgets decline leaving less discretionary spending on environmental needs.

Through history: When populations rose, civilization rose When population declined, civilization fell



All the advanced countries are having extremely few children

- Consider: The 44 countries of Europe (including Russia) now have fewer children every year than just one African country (Nigeria).
- But Nigeria is extremely poor: its economic production per capita is only 1/100 that of leading European countries. Are very poor countries somehow going carry the economic burden of the whole world?



The crisis is getting worse each year

Out of more than 100 countries that have fallen below replacement fertility since 1950, only two have returned to have above replacement fertility – Mongolia and Kazakhstan. Once a country falls below, they seem to be stuck below that level.

Is there a way to turn things around?

1. Pronatal Culture

Consider Israel: Highly educated, urban, technological
Most countries like this have very low birthrates

The biggest reason for better Israeli fertility?
Intense belief in the importance of having children, a national mission, constantly instilled, felt by everyone



What are the biggest levers that can lift birth rates?

A Pronatal Culture

In the case of Israel, it includes a national mission in the importance of having children that is constantly instilled and felt by everyone.

The 2nd and 3rd biggest levers to raise birth rates are Marriage and Religiosity.

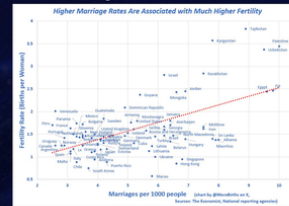
The difference in fertility between low marriage and high marriage countries is two times. But it's not just marriage, its early marriage. We've had this very strong trend toward later partnering and marriage.

The problem is that the fecundability curve, (the ability to get pregnant) peaks at age 20 and is dramatically lower by age 30.

Almost all research says that religiosity has a very large impact on fertility. If we really want to see a two-fold or three-fold increase in fertility, we have to talk about these large drivers. Religiosity is one of the largest.

2. Marriage

The difference in fertility between low marriage and high marriage countries is 2x! There is not a single country that achieves above replacement fertility with a low marriage rate.



We need to sell marriage to young people. Most young people don't know:

- Married people are happier
- Married people are healthier and live longer
- Married people are wealthier.

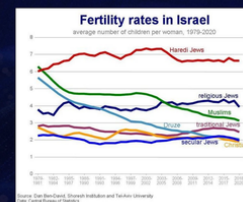
Maybe we need arranged marriage and matchmaking again!



3. Religiosity

Almost every high fertility group in the world has a religious basis

All the research says the same thing. Religiosity has a large impact on fertility (especially when the religion teaches pronatal beliefs). We need to move the needle by 2x or 3x, not 3% or 5%. Even if it uncomfortable we must be honest.



The United States grew from 2.5 million to 76 million, 1776-1900. Fastest growth in world history, partly because America was very religious. But religious freedom is crucial. Like businesses, there is churn, some churches always dying, new ones always rising.



The two other big factors are Housing and Education. Research data shows that, contrary to what people think, the main issue with housing is not as simple as affordability. Housing type and size is really the driver. Fertility in the urban core of London, for example, is 0.55 whereas it is 1.5 to 2.0 in the suburbs where housing is more “family suitable”.

Education is also a factor in lower birth rates. Sex education for young people almost entirely focuses on how to avoid pregnancy, and almost not at all on how to build a family, prioritizing having children early to avoid the disappointments of starting later and then not having the children they wish for – which is called the fertility gap. Unplanned childlessness can lead to loneliness and isolation later in life.

Is there a way to turn things around?

Video Link:

[Session 2: Daniel Hess](#)

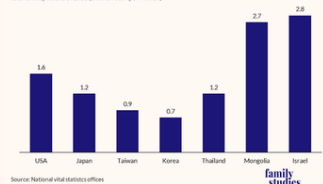
WHY FERTILITY FALLS AND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Dr. Lyman Stone: Institute for Family Studies

Dr. Stone's talk focused on East Asia as examples of falling birth rates. As a population demographer, he looks to the data to find answers to his questions. He started with this question: What explains the great variation in fertility between high-income industrialized countries? The second question is that despite an acceleration in falling fertility rates throughout Asia, Korean fertility seems to have bottomed out and is rising. Why?

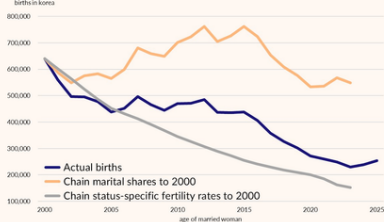
What explains this?

There is enormous variation in fertility among industrialized countries
total fertility rate as of 2023 (children born per woman)



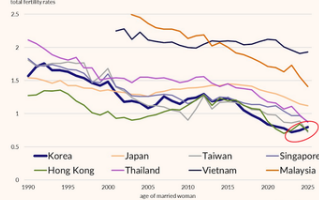
It really is just marriage!

Korea would have stable births if marriage wasn't declining



What explains this?

Why is Korean fertility stabilizing now?



“The first thing we want to ask is what makes a society good for having kids?”

How would we even know if a society is good for kids?” The first way is to look at “marital-specific fertility rates”, such as people who are married, partnered, co-residential and etc. What are their odds of having a child? Some of his conclusions are from the data:

- Israel has a higher marital fertility rate than Mongolia; Mongolia has more married couples
- Marriage is having an enormous regulatory impact on the fertility rate.
- Japanese couples have a higher likelihood of having a child than U.S. couples, but the U.S. has higher fertility. Why? U.S. has a higher marriage rate, particularly at younger ages.
- In Taiwan, once they get married, they have babies; it just takes a long time to get married
- Korea has relatively high marital fertility, but very low overall fertility. Korea's births can be explained by the change in the share of people who are married.

What we've learned so far...

Couples are still deciding to have kids in Asia at pretty high rates

But *fewer couples* are forming

And this explains most fertility decline

If it's marriage, then...

Should we even care about pronatal policy?

Yes:

1. Helping families is good anyways
2. Bigger families can partially offset lower marriage
3. Some people may postpone marriage because they don't think they can afford kids!
4. Cures don't always fix causes

So if marriage is the real problem, should we care about pronatal policies? Dr. Stone says YES and gives 4 reasons:

Just because declining marriage is the cause of fertility decline doesn't mean that the solution has to be raising marriage back to 2000 levels. There might be other solutions, such as increasing fertility within existing marriages.

The question becomes how might pronatalism policies make that happen?

Empirical studies have looked at how cash payments influence fertility rates. If you pay for something, you tend to get more of it.

Do financial incentives raise fertility rates?

Only slightly, it appears, unless significant sums were spent, as the example in Korea shows. Big spending might be "worth it", but there might also be moral hazards and other consequences of higher government spending.

Yet there is a second path that seeks to target and boost marriage.

When Korea rolled out a 1 million Won bonus for getting married (approximately \$670 US) in 2024, marriage rates rose immediately. Cash for marriage might have some of the same moral hazard or other cost issues that are of concern, but at the end of the day, you can subsidize marriage and get more of it. Still, Dr. Stone echoes what Dan Hess mentioned, that cultural, social, religious influences matter a lot and arguably matter more than finances. The problem, he says, is that they are very hard to study because demographers almost never measure cultural and social influences on marriage.

He concluded by saying that in 2026, the Institute for Family Studies is undertaking a study to do just that! They will conduct a Global Fertility Culture Survey asking questions relating to culture, such as what your mother-in-law or your peer group thinks of you having kids? Do you think kids in your country have a good childhood these days? Would you be happy having kids? They will ask about school experiences and upbringing and friendships with social media, coworkers and different social influences that are known to impact fertility decisions.

Video Link:
[Session 3: Dr. Lyman Stone](#)

The first two presenters have spoken to the big picture of what the data on fertility is showing us – namely that the decline of birth rates is real across the developed world and it is a stubborn trend that is difficult to reverse. History has shown that civilization's rise and fall is related to a rising or declining of its native population. Declining marriage rates were singled out by the demographers as the primary cause of the fertility crisis.

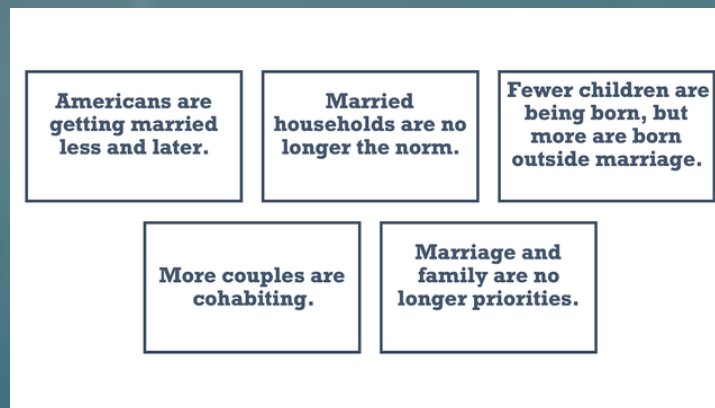
The third presentation takes a deeper look at marriage and family structures through the eyes of children and what creates a healthy society.

CROSSROADS: AMERICAN FAMILY LIFE AT THE INTERSECTION OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Delano Squires: Heritage Foundation

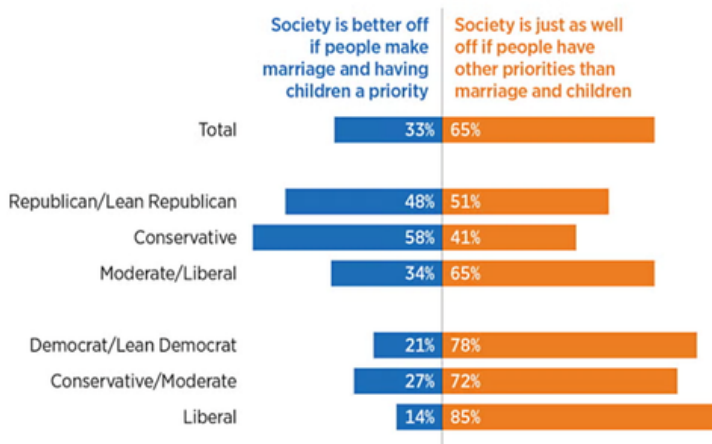
Summing up the state of marriage in America today

- Marriage has changed from early and often to less and later
- Median age for marriage is now 31 – up from 23 in 1980
- Only 47% of households are married couples
- 40% of children are born to unmarried parents
- 25% of children live with a single parent – the highest in the industrialized world.
- More families are cohabiting. In 2022 one in five new homes purchases were an unmarried couple purchasing a home together.



The results from a Pew Research Center survey on the perceptions on the importance of marriage and children shows that large percentages of people feel other priorities outweigh having children. Marriage and family are no longer a priority.

Perceptions on Importance of Marriage and Children by Political Ideology



NOTE: Figures have been rounded.

SOURCE: Pew Research Center. For more information, see the appendix.

SR310 heritage.org

Cornerstone vs. Capstone

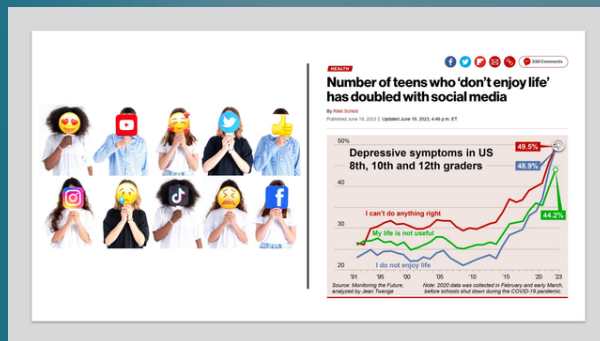


Our Marriage model has changed from a cornerstone marriage model where couples build a life together to a capstone model where individuals build their lives first and then look for marriage later – with negative effects on fertility rates. But is important because children are important. They are the lifeblood of families and the family is the cornerstone of any society.

And going deeper, Mr. Squires argues that more than total fertility output, the goal is to ensure that more children are raised in a married two-parent home. Why? Children have a right to their parents because the act of creation comes with an implied obligation towards stewardship. And that right is best exercised in a loving, low conflict home with a married mom and dad. Research clearly supports the position that children do better when raised in two-parent homes. How did this change in marriage patterns happen? Squires boils the complex issues involved into two primary cultural shocks that have destabilized or disrupted the relationships between men women and the institution of marriage.

The first is the expansion of the welfare state. For example, in 1950 social welfare spending was about \$1 billion. By 1985 it had blown to \$62 billion. Essentially Uncle Sam assumed the role of husband to millions of women and father to millions of children, starting in the 1960's.

Secondly and at the same time, "you have the rise of second-wave feminism, which was beaming out to women through the academy, media, and through protests, the idea that femininity is weak, masculinity is toxic, marriage is oppressive, the home is a prison, and children are a burden." Though many things were going on, these two big issues were disrupting the traditional roles that men and women played in society. And as a result there has been a breakdown in trusting relationships between men and women – especially on the fringes of both the right and the left where loud voices are preaching that the traditional way of forming a family is no longer beneficial to them.



Another Challenge

"Young people are facing enormous pressures, many of them coming from online. ... more kids are reporting that they don't enjoy life. Children who don't have any responsibilities to take care of a family or home are reporting greater levels of depression." This carries over to having a hard time forming healthy and productive families.

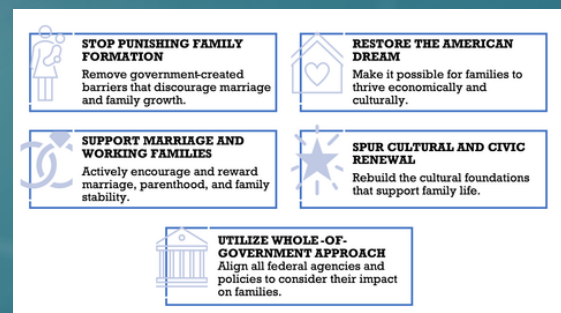
Squires argues that pro-natalism policies are not enough. "The focus here should be on promoting marriage, not just more children as an output measure."

So how do we move forward? Heritage Foundation's recent Family Policy Report has five top-line recommendations, amounting to a whole-of-government approach to remove barriers and improve affordability.

What stood out were two final points:

- Spur a cultural and civic renewal by rebuilding the cultural foundations that support family life.
- Emphasize the goal of multi-generational family success where children are born early enough to give children the benefits of being able to learn from their grandparents, and grandparents the benefit of being able to enjoy life with their grandchildren.

This is the model we should be shooting for!



Video Link:

Session 4: Delano Squires

If God is only Male

- Women are routinely sidelined
- Marriage is not part of God's logos
- The family is not given full value
- Non-marital sex is not a big deal
- Salvation only for the individualism
- Male domination continues...
- No sustainable peace or prosperity

Feminine Attributes in the Logos

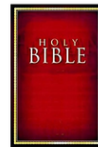
1. God becomes our "Heavenly Parent"
2. A balanced and gender-inclusive trinity!
3. Womanhood is part of God's essence
4. Marriage becomes our most sacred calling
5. Human sexuality is to be only within marriage
6. Highest cultural values → from marriage & family
7. Huge benefits to children, families, & society

He presented three proofs of God's Femininity: Science, the Bible and Theology.

Science

Romans 1:20 reveals God's nature is found in creation. Science teaches that all things are created under a pair-system principle of male and female or positive and negative qualities. Therefore God our Creator must also have masculine and feminine attributes.

God's Nature in Creation



Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made...

Rom. 1:20 (RSV)

Bible

The Bible has many images in both the Old and New Testaments portraying God having feminine characteristics

Here are just a few examples in which the Bible reveals God's nature through feminine characteristics and metaphors:

- God made man and woman in His image (Gen. 1:27)
- God comforts his people like a mother comforts her child (Isaiah 66:13)
- Like a woman would never forget her nursing child, God will not forget his children (Isaiah 49:15)
- God gave us birth (Deut. 32:18)

Imagery in 20 Bible verses, in both the Old and New Testaments, portrays God having feminine characteristics.

Affirmation:

God has feminine attributes.

Theology

Admittedly, this can be controversial, but he indicated that it is important to know that Logos and Theology are different. Logos is the Word of God and never changes; Theology is the Study of God's Nature and this has changed and should change, as Jesus himself "updated" theology from God as "Adonai", to God as "Father".

What he is suggesting is that if God has feminine characteristics, then we can call God our Heavenly Parent, not just Heavenly Father. He presented a series of slides on Gen 1:27 sharing the insight that man is created in the image of God as an individual, but ALSO that a man representing God's male characteristics and woman representing God's female characteristics is MORE in the image of God. The Three Great Blessings affirm this conclusion and thus calls for marriage in the 2nd Blessing in order that we may multiply and fulfill what God is seeking – Godly Offspring. (a few of the slides are shown here)

God's Original Logos

Gen. 1:27

So God created man in His own image,
in the image of God He created him;

Image of God as an individual Gen. 1:27(a)

male and female He created them.

Image of God as a couple Gen. 1:27(b)

Quoted by Jesus in Matt. 19:4-5



NASB

Gen. 1:27(b)

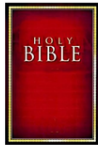
**Together, a man and woman
are more in God's image.**



Three Great Blessings: Gen. 1:28

Image of God as
an **INDIVIDUAL**
Gen. 1:27(a)

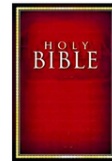
Image of God as
a **COUPLE**
Gen. 1:27(b)



And God blessed them, and God said
to them, "Be fruitful and multiply ...
and have dominion over every living
thing that moves upon the earth.

Gen. 1:28 (RSV)

God's Dream



Has not the one God made you?
You belong to him in body and
spirit. And what does the one God
seek? **Godly offspring...**

Malachi 2:15 (NIV)

Every Religion Honors Marriage



Christian



Confucian



Sikh



Hindu (Nepali)



Buddhist



Muslim

Solve: Population Death Spiral

1. Honor womanhood
2. Honor motherhood
3. Honor marriage
4. Honor family
5. Live in 3-generation families
6. Create a culture with these values are embedded in every element of society.

By updating our theology with a deeper understanding of God's feminine nature, we are recognizing a more inclusive trinity and honoring womanhood, motherhood and recognizing the sacred purpose of life to experience the fullness of God's image in marriage and family.

Video Link:

Session 5: Robert Kittel

RESPONDENT TO THE SPEAKERS

Lynn Walsh: UPF Office of the Family at the United Nations

“My response is that the Theology of Marriage really would spark the cultural revolution needed to reinvigorate marriage and the desire for children. Religion is often misconstrued as conveying a demeaning message about women, but the theology of marriage is quite the opposite. It resolves a fundamental historical imbalance by recognizing God not as exclusively masculine, but as a divine parent, embodying both masculine and feminine characteristics. More profoundly, the union of man and woman mirrors the inner unity of God himself. Marriage then is not merely symbolic, it is ontological. There is no full image of God without marriage and family; marriage reveals God. This reframes marriage and procreation not as mere social conventions, but as sacred expressions of divine nature itself. It is no surprise that social science corroborates what many have long believed, and we heard very well expressed today, that a married mother and father presents the optimal family unit for children's well-being and couples' happiness.

To me, the path forward begins with recovering the case for marital commitment. For love to deepen, there must be trust and emotional safety, a space where one's whole self can be given without fear. Vows of fidelity between two imperfect people make an essential difference. Commitment is the foundation.

It has been noted, as we heard today, that religious people consistently show higher marriage and fertility rates than non-religious. Finally, are we entering a post-secular moment? The population decline is forcing us to examine our priorities. The sexual experimentation and rejection of tradition that has characterized recent decades cannot sustain communities or nations over the long term. I believe we may be approaching that reckoning, and that the work of this conference and its panelists is profoundly important in helping to shape what comes next. Thank you very much.

Video Link:

[Session 6: Lynn Walsh](#)

Video Link:

[Session 7: Discussion with all panelists](#)

Video Link:

[Full Program](#)