

A Dying Creed?: The Demographic Contradictions of Liberal Capitalism

This proposal aims to test the thesis that the population of the developed world will become increasingly religious and conservative in the long-term, reversing decades - even centuries - of liberal secularisation. Not only will strongly religious populations grow, but their growth will undermine the very foundations of Enlightenment modernity. There will be no mass conversions or sudden shifts in the western *weltanschauung*. Instead, an antimodern religiosity will spread largely through demographic advantage. An analogy may be drawn with early Christianity, which grew from some 40 converts in 30 C.E. to over 6 million adherents in 300 C.E. Religious sociologist Rodney Stark claims that an important component of this growth came from Christians' mortality advantage over pagans. This allowed Christians to maintain a population growth rate of 40 percent per decade. Coincidentally, the Mormon church in the United States has managed to grow - through higher fertility rather than lower mortality - at the 40 percent rate for the past century, thus retaining its 70 percent share of Utah's population in the face of large-scale non-Mormon in-migration. (Stark 1997) A similar dynamic enabled the descendants of 5-10,000 17th century French settlers to expand to over 8 million French-Canadians and thereby retain their demographic position in the face of rapid British immigration in the 1815-1930 period.

Contemporary Relevance and Current Research

Ideological and Social-Theoretical Implications

This thesis suggests that demographically-mediated cultural contradictions will displace class contradictions as the principal challenge to liberal-capitalist modernity. For Marx, the contradictions between capital's need for labour to create value and the falling rate of profit (as capital accumulated) leads to a collapse of the capitalist system. (Marx [1887] 1999) By contrast, Daniel Bell sees a 'cultural contradiction' between liberal capitalism's individualistic cultural ethic and its Calvinist production imperatives. In contrast to Marx, however, no mechanism is postulated for the collapse of the system other than a vague fragmentation or moral decay. (Bell [1976] 1996) Culturalists like Bell or Hegel hold that ideas like Islam or the scientific method conquer directly through persuasion and conversion. But 'assimilation' of ideas is only one possible vector for their spread. Demographic advantage can spread an idea like Christianity even in the absence of any large-scale 'assimilation' of outsiders.

The Role of Demography

Demography has not been absent as a concern among sociologists and historians, but the discrediting of the Malthusian hypothesis has led to a considerable neglect of this aspect of human development. (Dallas 2000) Demography was long seen as the handmaiden of technological change. The demic expansion of Bantu populations from West Africa into Southern Africa, or the geographic expansion of Steppe and European peoples to the south and west are cited as examples. (Cavalli-Sforza 1994; Diamond 1998) Recent scholarship in historical demography, however, stresses that fertility was an independent demographic variable even before 1800. (Tilly 1978; Wrigley & Schofield 1989)

In an age of declining mortality, fertility (along with migration) is becoming an increasingly important inter-group demographic determinant. Furthermore, in our modern age of democratisation and state reflexivity (ie. population demarcation), demographic changes are more likely to be politicised than previously. In short, one's group needs to 'win' the census to take power. (Horowitz 1985) In Bosnia, Lebanon, Kosovo, Israel/Palestine, India, Northern Ireland and Fiji, to take just a few cases, demographic dynamics have been linked to violent ethnic conflict. (Toft 2002; Slack and Doyon 2001) Indeed, one need look no further than the large cities of the West to see the impact that inter-ethnic fertility differences and immigration have had on the cultural and political landscape. (Kennedy and Connelly 1994; Weiner and Teitelbaum 2001) The fertility of non-Europeans is rapidly converging with that of Europe, however the same cannot be said for the fertility of the religious. Given the capacity of ethnic 'others' to change the complexion of the West, is it not plausible to presume that the religiously committed can similarly transform society and politics through demographic advantage?

The Decline of the Great Economic Questions

One of the key reasons for the growing importance of demography as an engine of history and ideology is that the economic goalposts have been narrowing throughout the twentieth century rendering culture (linked to fertility differences) more important. Books like Arthur Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* (1949), Daniel Bell's *End of Ideology* (1960), Francis Fukuyama's *End of History and the Last Man* (1992) or Anthony Giddens *The Third Way* (1998) all speak to a common theme. Namely the exhaustion of chiliastic hopes and grand economic ideologies and a growing recognition by all political parties that economic problems can only be solved by some difference-splitting between state socialism and the free market. Modern macroeconomics has also helped mitigate the worst excesses of cyclical instability, and a new synthesis of monetarist and fiscal policy has emerged. In essence, the great economic questions have been largely reduced to questions of incrementalism and technocratic management.

The Emerging Cultural Divide: Liberals and Traditionalists

The great economic battles between capitalists and socialists have been fought to a stalemate, so culture becomes more important. Samuel Huntington, noting the fading of the Cold War and the upsurge of political Islam, places cultural conflict between civilisations at the centre of his paradigm. (Huntington 1996) Cultural attitudes have shifted in a liberal direction since the 1960s in the West, a trend documented in successive values surveys. (Inglehart 1990; Mayer 1992) This cultural liberalisation process has also fed a rapid secularisation of European society through cultural and structural differentiation. In addition, religion has had its functions usurped by the state and its credibility undermined by scientists. (Bruce 2002)

On the other hand, there are interesting countercurrents at play. In the United States, the religiosity of the population has been stable for almost forty years, despite 1990s increases in the unchurched population. (Hout and Fischer 2002) In Europe - especially England - church attendance has been plummeting. (Brierley 2000) Yet, even in Europe, 'newer' Protestant sects, while small, have experienced growth in the midst of rapid religious decline while Islam has remained an important focal point for European-born Muslims. Steve Bruce acknowledges exceptions to his secularisation

thesis, and suggests that in societies where liberalism is not entrenched, his thesis may not apply. But liberalism and secularisation are also linked *within* western societies. Recent research confirms the relationship between religiosity and conservatism. (Norris & Inglehart 2004) This emerged strongly in the 2000 and 2004 US elections, when weekly religious attenders supported Bush 2-1 while non-attenders supported Clinton or Kerry by a similar margin. Likewise, white evangelical Protestants voted 78 percent for Bush while secular Americans voted 67 percent for Kerry. An influential Pew Forum survey based on regression analysis of 2004 election survey data shows that church attendance is now tied with race as the most significant predictor of American voting behaviour. Economic issues rank well behind. (Church Central 2003; Pew 2005: 5,11)

Demography: the Achilles Heel of Liberalism

This project will suggest that demography provides the missing mechanism by which liberal-capitalist democracies (and hence Fukuyama's 'end of history') may fail. The European-origin populations which expanded in the 1750-1900 period due to superior technology and lower mortality went into relative decline during the twentieth century due to declining fertility. As a result, Europe's share of world population cascaded from 26 percent of the world total in 1900 to 12 percent in 2000 and is projected to reach just 6 percent of the total in 2050. This means that Europeans will form a global minority with the same demographic presence as non-whites currently possess in Britain today.

Europe's population has now peaked and will begin to decline unless augmented by a politically impossible rate of immigration. Total fertility rates in Europe have been below replacement for over thirty years (currently at around 1.3-1.5) but the momentum of the post-war baby boom has ensured a comfortable period of slowing population growth. This demographic cushion is now over. The slide will begin in the current 2000-2005 period with a loss of some 650,000 people per year, increasing to an annual loss of 3 million per annum by 2050. The rest of the world appears to be following suit: total fertility rates in the *developing* world stood at 6.16 children per woman in 1950, but remain at just 2.92 today and are in free fall. UN demographers now predict that current trends will see world fertility fall below the replacement level to just 1.85 children per woman. (Wattenberg 2004)

In short, humanity has entered a period of profound demographic change. Two recent best-selling books, Ben Wattenberg's *Fewer* (2002) and Philip Longman's *Empty Cradle* (2004) highlight some of the earth-shattering policy implications of declining fertility. Putting to one side the authors' unduly pro-growth agenda, it remains the case that population decline has the potential to become a major global issue. More important for our study is the link between religiosity and fertility, noted by Longman and a number of academic writers. (Simons 1980) One study of religiosity and fertility in 13 Catholic OECD countries suggests that religiosity is increasingly important as a determinant of fertility. Moreover, conservative denominations tend to have high fertility rates. (Adsera 2003, 2004) In the United States, conservative Protestants have fertility rates higher than those of liberal denominations and roughly twice that of secular Americans. Demographic advantages based on fertility account for 76 percent of the growth of the evangelical Protestant population since 1972 and help to explain the stalling of theological liberalism during the past few decades. (Roof & McKinney 1987; Hout et al. 2001) One could argue that the current demographic transition is leading to an evolutionary process whereby

religious communities that reject the modern ethos are among the only demographically growing islands in a sea of below replacement fertility.

Among Catholics in Europe and the United States, recent research shows that while Protestant and Catholic fertility has converged, religiosity within these denominations increasingly affects fertility. For Alicia Adsera, in Spain, 'in the context of lower church participation, religiosity has acquired a more relevant meaning for demographic behavior.' (Adsera 2004) The other context is that of below-replacement fertility. The so-called 'second demographic transition' of the post-1960s period has inaugurated a period of stable, below-replacement total fertility rates (TFR). More secular individuals tend not to desire large families. (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn 1988: 24) Moreover, while liberal-minded 'postmaterialists' do not *desire* fewer children than average, they tend to have children later in life, and hence *actually* have a lower TFR than more traditionally-minded 'materialists.' (Van de Kaa 2001)

What will the future hold for Fukuyama's 'postmodern' liberal-capitalist society when its chief exponents have a stable below-replacement TFR while committed religious groups continue to grow? Much of course depends on rates of apostasy and the religiosity of immigrants. Yet the American evidence suggests that strongly religious individuals and communities may be rejecting liberal modernity in a new way. The old denominational 'ladder of opportunity' which drew large numbers of the ambitious from conservative to liberal denominations looks to be crumbling. (Roof & McKinney 1987; Hout et al. 2001) As a result, the strongly religious may be successfully inoculating their members against the charms of liberalism. In this kind of climate, one might speculate that religiosity is like a cultural gene (coined a 'meme' by Richard Dawkins) which will allow religious cultures to survive the evolutionary bottleneck of today's demographic transition. (Dawkins 1989; Runciman 1997) This is already producing political consequences: 'red' states that supported Bush in 2004 had a 12-point fertility advantage over 'blue' Kerry states. In Israel, the secular/liberal population has a TFR nearly four times lower than that of the ultra-Orthodox. The latter are projected to make up a quarter of Israeli Jews under age 17 by 2025, a demographic earthquake which cannot but affect the volatile politics of the region. For anyone concerned with the fate of the ideas of the Enlightenment, contemporary demographics pose a striking challenge that demands urgent investigation.

Methodology

We can state the hypothesis as follows:

H⁰: Religiosity leads to higher fertility

H¹: Religiosity will eventually grow over time due to higher fertility among the religious population

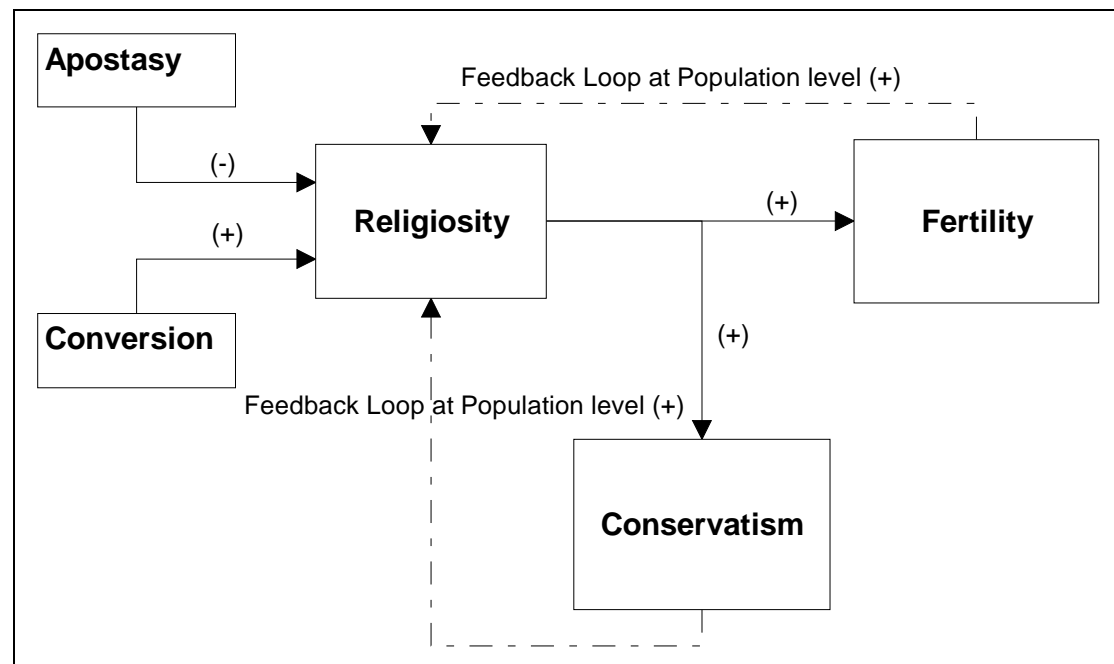
H²: Religiosity is linked to more conservative attitudes and voting patterns

H³: Religious replacement of secular populations will, over generations, erode the secular-liberal ('end of history') ethos of developed western societies

Furthermore, H¹ and H³ can only hold if:

H⁴: Trends in religious apostasy/conversion and international migration do not mitigate the trend toward growing religiosity and conservatism

We might represent the model schematically as follows:



This model is clearly a system of equations of the form $y = \int (\beta_1 + \beta_2 \dots)$. In equation 1, $y = \text{fertility}$ and $\beta_1 = \text{religiosity}$; in equation 2, $y = \text{conservatism}$ and $\beta_1 = \text{religiosity}$; $\beta_2 \dots$ represent control variables. There is certainly recurrent causation at the level of population, though not necessarily at the individual level. It may therefore be useful to test a two-stage model.

This project seeks to advance on current research in three ways:

- 1) **By conducting a time-series cross-sectional analysis of the relationship between religiosity, fertility and conservatism in the developed world.** Here we desperately need to determine whether religiosity and/or theological doctrine are increasing or decreasing in significance as predictors of fertility. The evidence is somewhat unclear. Hout et al. suggest that conservative Protestant fertility is declining while Adsera notes that religiosity is increasingly important as a determinant of fertility in Catholic Europe. A similar objective holds for the relationship between religiosity and conservatism.
- 2) **By charting the change in religious and theologically conservative populations over time to determine the degree of religious apostasy.** We need to determine how trends differ by age, period and birth cohort in order to determine whether secularisation may be slowing or reversing.
- 3) **By making demographic projections of growth in the religious population of Europe and the USA.** This will be a more speculative *longue durée*

exercise that will try and determine the likelihood and timing of ‘de-secularisation’.

- 4) **By integrating insights from the above into the ‘big picture’ of social theory, the history of ideas and theories of history.** This is, quite simply, uncharted intellectual territory.

Datasets & Statistical Techniques

The most important ‘core’ datasets for this study are the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), ONS Longitudinal Study and the European Social Survey (ESS). ESDS economic and social data will also be used.

The British Household Panel Survey & ONS Longitudinal Study

The BHPS asks a set of questions which cover a) religious denomination; b) religious attendance; c) political party vote; d) social attitudes and e) fertility behaviour. The more detailed fertility data in these datasets will allow me to regress religiosity and religious denomination on fertility and conservatism, while maintaining the usual set of controls. This will help to provide a more precise test of H^0 and H^2 above, albeit only for Britain. The BHPS, by allowing us to make linkages within households, also enables us to track inter-generational religious apostasy, thereby facilitating an evaluation of hypotheses H^1 , H^3 and H^4 . A large part of our story will revolve around the secular-religious balance within the growing non-white population. Accordingly, the BHPS will be supplemented by the ONS Longitudinal Study in order to better examine religious/fertility trends within the ethnic minority population since 1971. Due to the panel nature of the dataset, analysis will involve time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) pooling with panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE) in Stata 7.0. (Beck & Katz 1995) I have used this technique in a recent article. I will also consider the use of multilevel analysis to capture household-level effects on individuals' religiosity, attitudes and fertility.

The European Social Survey

The ESS will help provide a comparative dimension to the research. It is a rich source of cross-national survey data which explores: a) religiosity and denomination (C9-C15); and b) social and political attitudes (series B & D). Though there is no fertility question, childlessness can be examined through the question on the presence of children (in series F). Note that while ESS is very useful for a) and b) above, it is less effective in terms of assessing fertility and lacks a time-series dimension. We therefore need to triangulate the ESS with other data sources that make up for its deficiencies.

I will begin by creating a small number of factors through principal components analysis of responses to questions from series B & D with a view to isolating measures of conservatism in social attitudes and political behaviour. Next, I would seek to devise a factor for religiosity based on items from C9-C15. Statistical analysis would regress religiosity on the various conservatism factors. A similar test would be undertaken using a theological liberal/conservative dummy variable (derived from

denominational data) as the dependent. Furthermore, I would regress a dummy variable for the presence/absence of children on religiosity, denomination and conservatism with controls for age and other socioeconomic variables. For all equations, a multi-level analysis would be used, using ESS individual data as level 1 information. Level 2 (i.e. country-level variables) would be drawn partly from ESDS data on economic indicators and social spending, as well as dummy variables for national-level cultural factors. I have employed a similar multi-level analysis in a recent article, using MLwiN. This will help to shed light on H^0 and H^2 above.

I will next test for recurrent causation between religiosity, fertility and conservatism using a two-stage least-squares model due to the possibility of recursive causation. This technique corrects for cross-equation correlations between error terms.

Other Datasets

One non-core dataset, the European Values Survey (EVS), will be used to reinforce and build upon findings from the above. The EVS took place in 1981, 1990 and 2000. It complements the ESS and BHPS/ONS LS because, in addition to questions on religious denomination and attendance, political party vote and social attitudes, it asks about respondents' actual number of children and children desired. The EVS also asks about respondents' previous religious denomination, allowing one to determine the degree of switching between denominations or between religious and nonreligious populations. In addition, this non-core dataset will allow us to ascertain trends in denominational populations over time and make some projections of the religious population into the future, thereby addressing H^1 , H^3 and H^4 . We can also focus on changes in cohort fertility over time, thereby distinguishing between life cycle, period and cohort effects. Due to the panel nature of this dataset, I will use time-series cross sectional pooling with PCSEs.

Outputs and Dissemination

This research will lead to the completion of one academic journal article within the project period, which will be aimed at the top-ranked *American Political Science Review* (APSR). This will expound a two-stage least-squares model based on the link between religiosity, fertility and social/political conservatism. The second major output will be a monograph, provisionally entitled *Liberalism: A Dying Creed?* on the implications of a demographically-driven religious revival. This will be completed the year after project funding finishes. Here I will approach Harvard University Press, the publisher of my previous monograph. The proposed book will draw upon findings from the journal article, demographic projections and secondary literature on demography, the history of ideas and social theory. Finally, I will publish a shorter article in a more popular intellectual magazine like *Prospect* (where I have already published), *Foreign Affairs* or *The Atlantic Monthly*.

As with previous ESRC awards, I will maintain a website for the project and organise a seminar - at Birkbeck on the 'Politics of Demographic Change'. I am currently organising a one-day conference on the Legacy of the New York Intellectuals (notably Daniel Bell), co-sponsored by *Prospect* magazine and the Birkbeck Advanced Centre for Study in the Humanities. This is part of the Birkbeck 'Public Intellectuals' series, scheduled for the autumn of 2005. I will present in this series on

the implications of the second demographic transition for Bell's theory of the cultural contradictions of capitalism. I will also give a paper at the Centre for Population Studies of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). I have also had a paper based on this proposal accepted for presentation at the International Studies Association 2006 panel on Demography and Conflict. In 2006, I will present at a panel on the sociology of religion at the American Sociological Association, and at the (UK) Political Studies Association and British Society for Population Studies annual conferences.

Research Training

I will require training in population projection. The LSHTM has a leading UK centre for population study, and is situated near my office at Birkbeck College. It offers a one-month module beginning on 23 February, entitled 'Population Dynamics & Projections,' which I would audit. The LSHTM is also home to CeLSIUS, the support team for the ONS Longitudinal Survey, whom I will consult for the longitudinal part of the analysis. Moreover, a number of proposals are being submitted from LSHTM staff under this Initiative, opening up the possibility of cross-institutional linkages. Finally, I will seek a second opinion on my analyses from a social statistics researcher at the University of Southampton.