

# Demographic trends, pronatalism, and nationalist ideologies in the late twentieth century

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## Abstract

This article explores the relationship between demographic trends and nationalist ideologies through an analysis of fertility policies in France, Romania, Singapore and Israel. Each of these countries has sought to increase birthrates through government initiatives. I examine the extent to which pronatalist programmes in these countries reflect ethno-nationalist ideologies, as opposed to more inclusive civic/cultural nationalist visions, and find that policies are moving in a more civic/cultural nationalist direction. Pronatalist policies are less often specifically aimed at dominant racial/ethnic groups and are less oriented towards 'traditional' gender roles. I argue that ethno-nationalist visions of the nation may become less influential, in part due to demographic imperatives.

**Keywords:** Nationalism; pronatalism; France; Israel; Romania; Singapore.

In this article, I examine the relationship between demographic trends, government attempts to control those trends, and the nationalist ideologies behind such attempts. Demographic trends change both the size and the character of national communities. Fertility and immigration policies are attempts to forestall or control those changes. Nationalism is a central ideological impetus behind governments' desire to control certain demographic changes; in turn, the population policies themselves and discussion about them reveal how national communities are constructed and reconstructed.

This project specifically explores pronatalist policies in countries that consider fertility too low. My interest is how, given the magnitude of ethno-nationalist sentiment, as revealed in much of the existing research on pronatalism, it has come to pass that many pronatalist policies have become increasingly inclusive and perhaps indicative of 'civic/cultural' rather than 'ethnic' nationalism. Debates over immigration reveal a tension between a desire to limit the number of immigrants – in part out

of fear that immigration will alter the character of national communities – and a perceived need for more workers (see Castles and Miller 1998; also Hjerm 1998). Fertility policies, and political discussions about those policies, reveal similar tensions.

### **Linking nationalism and demography, historically and theoretically**

A national community, or nation, is an imagined community of people that has a sense of itself as a political entity (Anderson 1995; Nielsen 1999). Nationalism is often defined as an ideology of self-determination. However, in established nation-states, nationalism can be conceptualized as a concern with constructing or maintaining the identity or character of the national community; thus, nationalism exists both in established states as well as newly emerging ones.<sup>1</sup> National identity refers to the feelings of solidarity accompanying membership in the nation. National identity changes as national communities are re-imagined in conjunction with cultural, political, economic and demographic changes. What it means to be ‘French’ or ‘Canadian,’ etc., is complex and multidimensional (see Smith 1991); it is also contested and never inevitable.

The literature often divides nationalism into two ideal types: ethno-nationalism and civic nationalism (see Keating 1996). The ethno-national vision emphasizes a homogeneous national community with a shared ancestry and, thus, a shared race/ethnicity, language and religion. This model has negative implications for ‘minority’ citizens, as they do not fit with the dominant national image. Ethno-nationalism also tends to emphasize ‘traditional’ gender roles. In so asserting, I follow other authors who have made this claim or variations of it (for an extensive discussion of gender and nation, see Yuval-Davis 1997). To illustrate, Charles and Hintjens (1998, p. 4), state that the gender order imagined by ethno-nationalism ‘... is generally rooted in an idealized past, in an agrarian society, and women’s role as mothers and guardians of cultural identity, symbolizing stability in the face of change, is paramount’ (see also Moghadam 1994).

Civic nationalism has been conceptualized as citizen-based rather than ancestry-based. Ideally, membership is open to anyone residing in a politically-defined territory. It has been seen as compatible with Enlightenment ideals of rationalism and individualism (see articles in Beiner 1999 for discussion). Recently, some authors have argued that civic nationalism is a misleading and inaccurate concept (see Nielsen 1999; Yak 1999). For example, Nielsen (1999) argues that while civic nationalism has been conceptualized as a purely political form of nationalism, in fact, it has historically been based on a liberal democratic *culture*. Ideals about freedom and individual rights reflect a worldview that springs from Western European thought. Thus, there is always a cultural component, even to civic nationalism. What is important for

purposes of this article, however, is that there do exist nationalisms that are more state-based and inclusive than ethno-nationalisms; these I shall group under the term 'civic/cultural nationalism'.<sup>2</sup> Civic/cultural nationalism is somewhat more adaptable than ethno-nationalism because it theoretically includes all citizens, regardless of ethnic background, and is seemingly able to accept a broader definition of appropriate gender roles.

Often, each ideal type of nationalism is equated with a specific state (e.g. France as an example of 'civic' and Germany as an example of 'ethnic' nationalism) but versions of each often operate simultaneously within states (see Smith 1991). Thus, though many of France's laws and policies reflect a strong civic/cultural nationalist history, the extreme right in that country would like to achieve a more ethno-nationalist vision in the state's laws and policies. For example, the extreme right supports strict limitations on immigration and would expel from the country some non-citizen residents, while more left-leaning nationalists believe France benefits from immigration and should welcome immigrants into the national community. Germany, on the other hand, has a long history of ethno-national-inspired laws and policies. However, there exist in Germany efforts to expand the narrow ethno-nationalist vision. For example, citizenship laws changed in the 1990s to make it possible for people who were non-ethnic German to become naturalized citizens (Hjerm 1998).

Nationalism arose historically in conjunction with ideas of modern sovereignty, which are dependent on a concept of a 'people' (Greenfeld 1996). If government is to represent 'the people', it becomes important to define who constitutes a people and to mark the boundaries of that people or, 'nation'. Craig Calhoun (1997, p. 123) writes that

Nationalism plays a crucial, though often unexamined, role in the modern discourse of political legitimacy. Legitimacy turns, in much of that discourse, on the extent to which specific institutions of rule represent or serve the interests of "the people"; nationalism is the rhetoric or discourse in which attempts are made to establish who the relevant people are.

While modern governments are theoretically supposed to represent 'the people', they also actively construct 'the people'. Throughout the nineteenth and (especially) the twentieth centuries, as the nation-state became the predominant political unit in a global political system, states have been active participants in creating and maintaining national communities through, for example, national education systems, national railways and the imposition of national languages (Eley and Suny 1996). Through such programmes, states generally sought to use nationalist ideology which imagines 'the people' as homogeneous and only superficially divided by class, status, locality, etc. But attempts to forge such

homogeneous national communities have always been incomplete; for example, 'minority' groups often remain separate from the dominant community (Hutchinson 2000).

Censuses have played an important role in states' efforts to define and assess who comprises the people. Demographic trends revealed in censuses (and other demographic studies) can lead to population policies designed to change those trends. For example, in Quebec, studies revealing a decline in the French-speaking population led to policies designed to counteract that trend.

Census categories – including questions about language (see Hobsbawm 1990) and also questions about race/ethnicity/religion – do not merely reflect an objective image of the residents of a state; they are also tools of nation-building, of marking group boundaries not only in relation to other nation-states but also internally, between groups that may more clearly belong to the national community and those with more tenuous ties to that community.

Over time, censuses around the world have become more standardized, but questions about race, ethnicity and religion vary widely. For example, historically, one crucial task of the US Census has been to count the number of people in various racial and ethnic categories. Because these data exist, social scientists and policy-makers use the categories, thus causing them to have real consequences. In France, by contrast, the census asks no questions about race or ethnicity, thus limiting the extent to which these constructs can become part of official state policy or discourse (see Body-Gendrot 1995).<sup>3</sup>

Categories vary not only between countries but also over time. As ideas about race/ethnicity and nation change, and as groups of people (e.g. 'African Americans' or 'Asian Americans') change in size, so do the ways in which censuses define groups. Racial categories on the US Census, for example, have changed almost every decade since 1890 (Nobles 2000). Most recently, after a long history of asking respondents to choose only one racial identity, the 2000 Census allowed respondents to choose more than one.

In addition to variations across space and time, racial/ethnic/religious categories, once defined, can be quite fluid. Numbers of people counted in census categories can grow or shrink as a result of assimilation (see Lallikka 1996) or because of social/cultural trends that make it more or less desirable to claim a dominant or non-dominant racial/ethnic identity at a given historical moment (see, for example, Nagel 1997 on changes in American Indian ethnic identification).

### **Research on demographic trends and nationalism**

For the most part, the researchers most concerned with population trends, demographers, have not explored the social construction of

national communities and the role of demographers and demographic data in this construction. An exception to this tendency is the work of Teitelbaum and Winter (1998, p. 6), who contend that countries in Western and Eastern Europe and North America face political problems arising from low fertility and international immigration. They argue (1998, p. 4) that although 'the way these issues are perceived and configured varies across national boundaries . . .' the overall story is one of ' . . . volatile debates about fertility, international migration, and national identity'.

Feminist research on pronatalism has revealed how nationalism shapes the interpretation of demographic data and the formulation of demographic policy. Case studies by Yuval-Davis (1989), Heng and Devan (1992), Maroney (1992), Hamilton (1995), and Bracewell (1996) have revealed how nationalist (implicitly conceptualized as ethno-nationalist) discourse tends to define women as the biological reproducers of the national community and racial/ethnic minorities as 'outsiders'. I use this idea as a starting point in examining the extent to which fertility policies (pronatalist efforts) in four countries reflect ethno-nationalist ideas and to ask if such policies have moved in any direction on an ethno-nationalist – civic/cultural nationalist continuum.

In my effort to better understand the relationship between demographic trends and the nature of nationalist efforts to alter the existing or projected composition of the national group, I use pronatalist policies as indicators. To some extent, all population policies, specifically fertility, immigration and citizenship policies, reflect government leaders' desire to manage (or 'engineer') their populations and may reveal ideas about a future national character or national identity. State policies are often the result of compromises; for example, public opinion may be anti-immigration while some businesses may be pro-immigration. However, they often illuminate dominant ideological trends; along these lines, they may indicate the relative power of ideology-based groups (e.g. ethno-nationalists) to achieve their vision.<sup>4</sup>

To explore links between demography and nationalism, I first briefly sketch past and current pronatalist efforts in France, Romania, Israel and Singapore. I examine pronatalist efforts in these particular countries because each one has a different nationalist history.<sup>5</sup> France is an example of a national community that arose out of a previously existing state institutional structure. Romania's nationalism was, like most other Eastern European nationalisms, created mainly by intellectuals and artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Israel is perhaps a unique case, with its religious base and Zionist origins. Finally, Singapore is a multi-ethnic state forged from a prior British colony.

Each of these countries explicitly claims to encourage births through pronatalist programmes (United Nations 1996, 2000). Government efforts to raise fertility typically involve incentives, which could include

family allowances, tax breaks for families with children, parental leave policies, subsidized housing and/or subsidized child care.<sup>6</sup> Policies can also include measures pertaining to reproductive health; they may, for example, make it harder to control fertility by limiting access to birth control or, more commonly, abortion. Governments may also use propaganda to encourage people to have children.

Although forty-four countries claim to have policies to either raise or maintain fertility levels (UN 2000), many low fertility countries do not, in fact, claim to have pronatalist programmes. There is an extremist stigma attached to such policies in Western European countries, where pronatalism is linked politically to the far right. Most Western European countries have generous family benefits that were, prior to WWII, at least partially attached to pronatalist agendas. Currently, in Western Europe, pronatalist ideologies tend to be downplayed.<sup>7</sup> Many Eastern European countries, meanwhile, have explicitly encouraged births for decades.

I explore to what extent the fertility policies of France, Romania, Israel and Singapore, all explicitly pronatalist, reflect ethno-nationalist ideologies. In the past, leaders of these countries have expressed concern with birth rates in ethno-nationalist terms. For example, Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion (1971) wrote,

If the Jewish birthrate is not increased, it is doubtful that the Jewish State will survive . . . Any Jewish woman who, as far as it depends on her, does not bring into the world at least four healthy children is shirking her duty to the nation, like a soldier who evades military service.

In Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated in 1990, ' . . . 50% of graduate girls will either marry down, marry foreigners or stay unmarried. It is a very unhappy position for any country to be in' (quoted in McDonald 1990, p. 25). A Singapore government official stated that well-educated women 'are not fulfilling their function of having families' (quoted in Mydans 1988). In Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu (deposed in 1989) declared, in 1984, 'One of the most important duties of women, mothers and educators is to devote themselves to the raising of new generations in the spirit of ardent patriotism, of respect and esteem for the glorious past of the people, of the desire to sacrifice its entire life to the flourishing of the socialist Homeland and the ideals of the communism . . .' (Ceaușescu 1984). Giscard d'Estaing of France stated, ' . . . the biological future of the society in which our children and grandchildren will live depends on the family. If families do not fulfil their biological function of keeping alive the French population, if the number of our children no longer suffices to ensure the replacement of the elders by the young, our country will become weakened, enfeebled and dull' (quoted in McIntosh 1983, p. 82). And current French President Jacques

Chirac has expressed a 'Euro-nationalism'. He once proclaimed in a newspaper interview,

In demographic terms, Europe is vanishing. Twenty or so years from now, our countries will be empty and no matter what our technological strength, we shall be incapable of putting it to use. It is a major problem to which the French are not paying enough attention (Chirac, quoted in *Population and Development Review* 1985).

Because ethno-nationalists see the national community as sharing a common ethnicity, language and religion, ethno-nationalist-inspired pronatalist programmes would be designed to encourage births to dominant ethnic groups or discourage them to non-dominant groups. Previous research has shown that the above-listed countries have, in past pronatalist efforts, treated certain sub-groups differently from the dominant population (Yuval-Davis 1989; Heng and Devan 1992; Kligman 1992).

Because ethno-nationalists tend to view the nation as 'a family' and tend to glorify the past, one would expect ethno-nationalist inspired pronatalist policies to favour 'traditional' roles for women, encouraging them to stay at home with children rather than to participate in the paid labour force. Such policies might also be expected to discourage single parenthood. In addition, ethno-nationalists generally oppose abortion for members of their ethnic group (see, for example, Le Pen 1984). In the following sections, I briefly review the policies of each country and, in doing so, pay attention to ethno-nationalist and civic/cultural nationalist ideologies as they are represented in policy.

## **France**

In France, the first comprehensive, pronatalist family policy was instituted in 1939. Although current Prime Minister Jospin has recently steered policy away from pronatalism, France continues to have a wide array of pronatalist initiatives, including lengthy parental leaves, subsidized child care, subsidized housing for families, tax incentives, and generous family allowances. Incentives also exist for businesses to create part-time jobs to facilitate combining parenting and labour force participation.

Early French nationalist-oriented pronatalists (as opposed to religious pronatalists) were mostly concerned about economic and military competition with Germany. Differences in fertility within France were generally not a key issue and early programmes were extended to all legal residents, regardless of citizenship. However, a backlash against immigrants sparked debate during the 1980s and 1990s over whether pronatalist incentives should be offered to 'non-French'. Jean Marie Le Pen's

right-wing National Front party as well as the more moderate Rally for the Republic party (Jacques Chirac's party) supported measures to limit pronatalist family benefits to the 'French' (King 1998). At the local level, pronatalist-inspired family policies have been instituted by towns that implicitly exclude non-citizens – for example, by requiring recipients to be registered voters (see Delanoe 1998; Herzberg 1998).

Ultimately, however, French lawmakers have opted for including non-citizen, legal immigrants in all family programmes, even though many on the political right oppose this (King 1998). On the flip side, no official efforts have been made to limit births to immigrant residents. If anything, French pronatalist programmes have become more inclusive over the past two decades, as residents of the French Overseas Departments (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion and Guyana) have gained access to a fuller array of benefits than they previously received (King 2001).

If policies vis-à-vis non-dominant citizens and non-citizen residents indicate an inclusive tendency in French pronatalist policy, what about the ethno-nationalist idea of the nation as a family and women as its biological reproducers? Feminists and others on the political left in France tend to equate pronatalism with ultra-conservatism. However, pronatalists can be found across the political spectrum. Pronatalist and other family policies in France have become progressively 'feminist' over the past three decades, especially as it has become clear that women have entered the workforce permanently. During the 1970s, French lawmakers re-oriented pronatalist family policies away from a strategy that focused on keeping women at home having babies towards a more egalitarian model (McBride Stetson 1987). Most family policy was rewritten to be gender-neutral. In the past decade, politicians have increasingly emphasized the need for family policies to help people combine labour force participation and parenting. A targeted allowance (dependent on income) now exists for single parents. And, while the need for more French children is occasionally used in anti-abortion rhetoric, abortion has been legal in France since 1975, albeit under fairly limited circumstances.<sup>8</sup> The National Front party supports more 'traditionally-minded' pronatalist efforts and opposes abortion, in part for pronatalist reasons (see, for example, Le Pen 1984) but this stance has not gained widespread support.

## **Romania**

Romania became officially pronatalist in 1966 when communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (overthrown and executed in 1989) wanted the Romanian economy to develop rapidly, for which he believed a large population of workers would be required. Ceaușescu's pronatalist efforts were closely connected to a nationalist rhetoric claiming that 'a great

nation needs a large population'. Beginning in 1966, the state used propaganda, financial incentives and, especially, the strict banning of abortion, to increase the birth rate (Kivu 1993). Romanian leaders in the post-Ceauşescu era continue to express concern over low birth rates and continue to provide some pronatalist incentives; but because the state has limited resources, policies are mainly symbolic.

Technically, there have been no official efforts to increase birth rates only to Romanian citizens, either during Ceauşescu's dictatorship or subsequently. However, Ceauşescu's vision of Romania was clearly ethno-nationalist. In speeches, he often referred to 'the great Romanian people'; and while pressing for higher birth rates, Ceauşescu allowed and even encouraged the emigration of some minority peoples. The Jewish population declined during the Ceauşescu era as a result of his policy of allowing Jewish emigration in exchange for foreign, 'hard,' currency (Haberman 1990). Likewise, many ethnic Germans emigrated, most of them to Germany (see Table 1).

Kligman found evidence indicating that the extent to which anti-abortion and other fertility policies were applied depended on one's ethnicity. Kligman (1992, p. 385) states that '... the politics of reproduction in Romania had hidden dimensions to it ... [T]he stringent measures could be more leniently applied in the case of ethnic "others"'. Hungarians and Roma (Gypsies) were less a target of pronatalist efforts than were ethnic Romanians, even though Hungarian fertility was lower than that of ethnic Romanians. Roma fertility, by contrast, was (and is) much higher than Romanian fertility; this has caused some to speculate that the drive to increase birthrates was, in part, a drive to level the fertility differences between ethnic Romanians and Roma (see *Guardian* 1984; Godwin 1985).

Romania's successive, post-Ceauşescu governments have claimed, in response to the United Nations Population Policy Survey (United

**Table 1.** *Ethnic groups in Romania, selected years*

	1930	1966	1977	1992
Total (thousands)	14,280.7	19,103.2	21,559.9	22,810.0
Ethnicity (% of total)				
Romanian	77.9	87.7	88.1	89.5
Hungarian	10.0	8.5	7.9	7.1
Roma (Gypsy)	2.1	**	1.1	1.8
German	4.0	2.0	1.6	**
Jewish	3.2	**	**	**
Other	2.8	1.3	1.1	1.1

\*\* less than 1%

Source: Romania, National Commission for Statistics 1993

Nations 2000), to be concerned with the country's slow rate of growth and to be pursuing policies to encourage childbearing. Yet the National Committee for the UN International Conference on Population and Development (Romania 1994, pp. 36–7) explains that no clear demographic agenda has been formulated. This committee report states that Romania does have some policies in place but these '... have a social protection character rather than a demographic connotation. For example, the state allowances for children and for families with many children are still granted ... [but] they are not sufficient to stimulate fertility yet.' As with pre-1989 programmes, the current policies do not officially discriminate on the basis of ethnicity.

As for gendered dimensions of Romanian pronatalist policies, prior to 1989, pronatalist efforts were severely repressive for women. Much of the propaganda was directed at women; for example, childless women were chided in the state-run media for 'opposing nature' (Kivu 1993). Financial incentives were meagre however, and provided little real help for women, who tended to have responsibility for housework, childcare and labour force participation – the 'triple burden' (see Harsanyi 1993). Contraceptives were available only on the black market (Kligman 1992). Abortion was the main form of birth control and because the procedure was illegal, it was often dangerous. Since 1990, abortion and contraceptives have become legal and available. In fact, it may be that of the Eastern European countries, Romania has become the most liberal in terms of abortion (Verdery 1996).

## **Israel**

The central principle of Israel since its founding in 1948 has been that of a *Jewish* state (see Smootha 1990 on Israel as an ethnic democracy). Thus, Israel was founded as an ethno-national ideology (defined here to include religion). Yet Israel is also a democratic state. These two ideals – a Jewish state and a democratic state – can conflict. In order for Israel to be Jewish, the Arab population must remain in the minority; thus, demographic trends have been vital to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state (see Table 2).

Jewish concern with demographic trends is revealed in public discourse about demographic data. For example, at the 1987 World Jewish Population Conference, President Chaim Herzog stated that the theme of the conference '... is really no less than the collective life of the Jewish people – how to counter the alarming threat of our shrinking numbers in the world, how to strengthen our demographic position in Israel, our national center' (quoted in DellaPergola and Cohen 1992, pp. 11–14).<sup>9</sup>

Jewish fertility is much lower than Arab fertility: currently, the total fertility rate (TFR) of the Muslim population of Israel is 4.69 and the TFR of the Jewish population is 2.53 (Goldscheider 1996). In the past,

**Table 2.** Religious groups in Israel, selected years

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1998
Total (thousands)	1370.10	2150.40	3022.10	3921.70	4821.70	6041.4
Religion (% of total)						
Jewish	87.80	88.80	85.40	83.70	81.80	79.2
Moslem	8.50	7.70	10.90	12.70	14.00	14.9
Christian	2.60	2.30	2.50	2.30	2.40	2.1
Druze	1.09	1.08	1.18	1.29	1.71	1.6
Religion Unclassified	–	–	–	–	–	2.1

**Source:** Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics 2000

the fertility difference between Moslems and Jews was even greater. This has led many Jewish leaders to worry about losing the Jewish majority in Israel, which would certainly threaten Israel's existence as a Jewish state (Portugese 1998). The main tactic for maintaining a Jewish majority has been to encourage Jewish immigration into Israel. However, numerous leaders and activists have advocated pronatalist initiatives as well (see Portugese 1998). Although, compared to other explicitly pronatalist countries, Israeli efforts to encourage fertility have been weak, state leaders have created a demography centre, instituted child allowances, and have often sought to restrict abortion, in part for pronatalist reasons.

The Demography Center, which, as part of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, takes an active role in research and advising on the question of national fertility. The official description of the Center reflects an ethno-nationalist orientation: 'The Demography Center promotes the formulation of comprehensive government demographic policy meant to maintain a suitable level of Jewish population growth, and acts systematically to implement this policy . . .' (Israel, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, web page). Moslems and Druze comprise 16.5 per cent of the population of Israel (Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics 1999); one of Demography Center's mandates is to advise Israeli leaders on how to keep the Jewish population growing, presumably relative to the non-Jewish population.

Israel instituted child allowances (or family allowances) in 1959. The child allowance legislation emerged in part from pronatalist motivations, and in part from Israel's socialist principles (Doran and Kramer 1991). The child allowance system, similar to that of France, is pronatalist in that families receive more money per child as they have more children. A separate child allowance system, launched in 1970, provided allowances to families in which a member had served in the Israeli Defense Forces. While Arab citizens of Israel were always eligible for

the regular family allowances, they were almost always excluded from programmes which targeted families of veterans.<sup>10</sup> This was an effort to encourage births only to Jews. In 1994, however, after much debate, the Veteran's Allowance was extended to Arab citizens of Israel (see King 2001 for discussion of this). Thus, currently, the family allowance system does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity or religion.

Ethno-nationalist ideology in Israel has been less insistent on women's roles as mother and homemaker than in some other locales. Although the Israeli myth of gender equality has been shattered by feminist authors (see, for example, Swirski and Safir 1991), the idea of women as workers and builders of the nation has persisted alongside calls for women to biologically reproduce the Jewish population.

Reproductive health policies have been closely linked to demographic concerns in Israel and this has, in part, contributed to limited access to abortion. Most women in Western Europe and the United States had legal access to contraceptives and abortion by the late 1970s. However, Israeli women's access to abortion and contraception was limited by both religious and pronatalist opposition (Yishai 1993). Feminists and others who sought to increase access to legal abortion in Israel encountered fierce opposition from both religious and ethno-nationalist factions. In 1977, abortion was legalized under very specific circumstances; currently, women must obtain approval from a hospital committee in order to have an abortion (Portugese 1998). According to Portugese (1998, p. 144), 'At first glance, it might appear as if Israeli women enjoy relatively liberal access to abortion . . . Upon close examination, however, the elusiveness of that freedom begins to show.' Portugese outlines the many obstacles facing Israeli women seeking abortion, including expense, bureaucratic hurdles, and the necessity to prove one's need for the procedure to a hospital committee.' Portugese (1998, p. 148) states, 'This state of affairs was not arrived at by chance. Instead, it should be seen as one of the components of the government's pronatalist fertility policy'. Thus, in Israel, both ethno-nationalist, religious, and civic/cultural nationalist ideologies have resulted in a mix of progressive and regressive policies as regards women.

## **Singapore**

Singapore became an independent nation-state in 1965 and almost immediately launched a fertility policy designed to *lower* birth rates. By the 1980s, however, fertility was below the replacement level of 2.1 and the government did an about-face, switching to a pronatalist orientation (Lee *et al.* 1991). Since 1983, Singapore has offered a set of incentives to encourage citizens to have more children.

Singapore's population is ethnically diverse (see Table 3), with approximately 77 per cent Chinese, 14 per cent Malay, and 8 per cent

**Table 3.** Ethnic groups in Singapore, selected years

	1957	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total (thousands)	1,445.9	2,013.6	2,282.1	2,705.1	3,263.2
Ethnicity (% of total)					
Chinese	75.4	77.0	78.3	77.7	76.8
Malays	13.6	14.8	14.4	14.1	13.9
Indians	9.0	7.0	6.3	7.1	7.9
Others	2.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.4

**Sources:** Singapore, Ministry of Health 1994; Singapore, Department of Statistics 2000a and 2000b

Indian (Singapore, Department of Statistics 2000a). In the mid-1980s, demographic reports showing that the Chinese fertility rate had become significantly lower than that of other ethnic groups caused concern among Singapore's leaders. The national English-language daily newspaper, *The Straits Times*, published a graphic entitled, 'Lop-sided Birth Rates', showing the number of births to Chinese, Malays, Indians and 'Others' together with the numbers needed for the replacement of each group. According to the graph, the Chinese were only at 65 per cent of replacement, whereas the Malays were at 107 per cent and the Indians at 93 per cent (see *The Straits Times* 1986). Clearly, the worry about birth rates seemed to be over Chinese birth rates (see also Balakrishnan 1991).

During the 1980s, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew claimed to be most concerned about the 'quality of Singapore's human capital'. Plans were made to encourage the most highly educated Singaporeans to have more children. The resulting fertility policies were implicitly bifurcated along racial/ethnic lines, because the Chinese Singaporeans tended to be the most highly educated. In addition, while the fertility policies of the 1980s encouraged highly educated citizens (mostly Chinese) to have more children, they encouraged less educated citizens (most often Malay and Indian) *not* to have children (Heng and Devan 1992; Pyle 1997). The 'Graduate Mothers Program' was instituted to raise the fertility of university-educated women through tax incentives and choice of schools for their children. This programme was accompanied by an anti-natalist initiative whereby citizens with lower educational status would receive cash if they agreed to be sterilized. These initiatives proved unpopular among Singapore's citizens and the programme was terminated in 1985.

Currently, Singapore encourages all citizens to have children by providing tax incentives, child-care subsidies, a co-savings scheme, housing priorities to those with three or more children, state-subsidized maternity leave, and state-sponsored dating services (Singapore, Ministry of Community Development 1995). Since 1987, the government's slogan

has been: 'Have three children, or more if you can afford it.' Current Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (2000) proclaimed in his National Day Rally speech, 'If our current fertility rate stays at 1.48, without immigration, in fifty years, our resident population will fall from 3.2 million to 2.7 million . . . How can we support our elders? How can we defend ourselves? . . . You may ask, why not just bring in more foreign workers to ease our labour shortage? And more foreign talent to enlarge our intellectual pool? My answer is simple: we will bring in foreigners and new immigrants. They will compliment our needs, but they cannot replace us . . . we must at least try to arrest the problem. Not to try is to give up on Singapore.'

Pronatalist rhetoric in the 1980s and early 1990s often cast women as responsible for the low birth rate (Heng and Devan 1992). But Singapore's leaders have had to walk a narrow line, because the country's economic development strategies necessitate that a large percentage of the female population works for pay (Pyle 1997). There has been an acceptance that many or most women are involved in careers and would not be likely to give them up in order to have children. In 1992, Singapore's Minister for Health and Community Development, Yeo Cheow Tong (Yeo 1992) stated, 'Singapore's current population policy provides strong support for working mothers. We understand the burden on working women in their multiple roles as workers, mothers, and wives . . .' While policies and pronatalist rhetoric of the 1980s could be viewed as reactionary in terms of gender equality (discussing birth rates in 1987, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew bemoaned the fact that it was too late to return to the 'good old days' of polygamy – Holloway 1987), leaders are apparently now focusing more on 'families' rather than 'mothers'. Thus Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (2000), stated, 'Financial incentives must be coupled with programmes that address the issues of finding a balance between family and work responsibilities. We must therefore create a total environment conducive to raising a family'. The Prime Minister's plan – which includes all Singaporeans (it is not restricted to ethnic Chinese) – thus includes not only financial incentives to parents but also child-care centres and 'family friendly' work arrangements.

### **Explaining policy shifts**

Examining pronatalist initiatives in four countries illuminates two key tensions. First, a tension exists in each country between a more ethno-nationalist vision of a 'traditional', family versus an outlook allowing for more egalitarian gender roles. With the possible exception of Israel (which historically espoused egalitarian gender roles), in the countries examined here, pronatalist policies have seemingly moved away from an approach that saw women as primarily responsible for the nation's birth rate to one that focuses on helping people to combine parenthood and

labour force participation. Women have now entered the paid labour force in most economically 'developed' countries (to varying degrees, of course). Though the causal direction is unclear (Weeks 1996), this has usually occurred in conjunction with the transition to smaller family size. Some national leaders have seen in the demographic trend towards small families women's abandonment of their maternal role. The ethno-nationalist view of the nation as a family is thus threatened. Civic/cultural nationalism, however, can tolerate more egalitarian gender roles. How can this apparent move towards gender equity be explained? Pragmatically, there is a need in many countries for women's labour force participation. As populations age and as fertility continues to remain low or to decline, women's labour force participation becomes increasingly necessary. In addition, families often need women's salaries in order to maintain the standard of living they desire. Thus, for practical reasons, government leaders have increasingly moved away from ethno-nationalist ideas of women as stay-at-home mothers and have begun to construct policies to help combine parenting and labour force participation.

In addition, contraceptives and abortion are legally available to residents of these countries. Feminist movements in some locales have clearly influenced policy, especially in the area of reproductive rights (see for example, McBride Stetson 1987). International organizations, such as International Planned Parenthood, have also been influential in increasing access to family planning. Such non-governmental organizations have, for example, been active in Romania subsequent to Ceaușescu's overthrow.

Second, there is, in each country, a desire on the part of some leaders to strive for racial/ethnic homogeneity or, at least to ensure the dominance of a particular ethnic group. In Israel and Singapore there have existed, in the recent past, pronatalist incentives implicitly targeted towards members of the dominant ethnic and racial groups (see Balakrishnan 1989 on Singapore). Similar efforts in Romania under Ceaușescu apparently existed but were unofficial. Some factions in France have sought to limit pronatalist incentives to 'French only', but ultimately pronatalist-oriented family benefits have continued to be extended to all legal residents. However, the evolution of pronatalist policies in these four explicitly pronatalist states indicates that, though the situation in each locale is complex and the result of unique social, cultural, political and economic issues, policies have become indicative of civic/cultural nationalism rather than ethno-nationalism in recent years.

While each country has its own political and economic rationale for developing policies in the way that it has done, at a global level, the shift towards including ethnic and racial minorities in pronatalist programmes can be explained in part by international norms regarding universal

human rights (Soysal 1994). Soysal argues that there has been a shift in the organizing principle of citizenship, whereby '... the logic of personhood supersedes the logic of national citizenship' (1994, p. 164). In examining Western European countries, Soysal argues that a normative global climate emphasizing universal human rights has led national governments to extend to non-citizen, legal immigrants almost all rights and responsibilities extended to citizens. The right to vote is often the only right from which non-citizens continue to be excluded.

The idea of universal human rights is applicable not only to Western Europe but all democratic states. International pressure influences how governments deal with non-dominant populations within their borders and increasingly the world community frowns on differential treatment of racial/ethnic minorities or non-dominant populations by national governments. In addition, there are pragmatic reasons for including non-dominant populations in all types of social benefits, including pronatalist benefits. For example, Castles and Miller (1998, p. 39) state that, 'Immigration of culturally diverse people presents nation-states with a dilemma: incorporation of the newcomers as citizens may undermine myths of cultural homogeneity; but failure to incorporate them may lead to divided societies, marked by severe inequality and conflict.' The same may be said for non-dominant groups of (non-immigrant) citizens: failure to include 'minority' citizens in social programmes can lead to divisiveness.

The apparent move towards a more civic/cultural nationalism in the area of fertility policy in no way indicates that such an ideology is prevalent in all policy arenas in any of these countries. For while international pressure to uphold universal human rights may influence states to extend family benefits to all citizens or residents, international norms *do* uphold the right of nation-states to control who enters and resides in state boundaries. Thus, debates over immigration can be very reflective of nationalist ideologies.

Controlling immigration is an internationally acceptable way for states to plan and control their populations. However, as documented by Castles and Miller (1998), differing rates of population growth in poor and wealthy countries aggravates immigration pressure and as long as both population growth and economic development differ dramatically between poor and wealthy countries, immigration – legal or undocumented – will continue.

While many Western European states actively recruited immigrant labour in the post-WWII era, by the 1970s, most states had restricted immigration. Some low fertility countries, such as Canada, have chosen to actively encourage immigration and espouse explicitly multicultural policies (rather than assimilation policies) for immigrants. Some countries, such as Israel, encourage immigration only by specific ethnic groups. Other countries have had guestworker policies whereby immigrants may

enter the country for a specific amount of time. Whatever the case, low-fertility means that without immigration, populations will age and will ultimately shrink in size. While ethno-nationalists may argue for limited immigration (or no immigration), government leaders concerned with paying for social benefits and business leaders concerned about the availability of workers tend to support policies allowing immigration.

### **Demography and nationalisms**

Demographic changes can affect the identity of the imagined national community in at least three ways. First, demographic trends can change the character of a national community when the population of the state as a whole declines. Over the past two or three decades, fertility in almost all Western and Eastern European countries, Canada, Australia, and many Asian countries has fallen to 'below replacement', meaning that the average woman has fewer than 2.1 children. If fertility continues to be below replacement level, in the absence of immigration, the number of people living in the state, and comprising 'the nation' shrinks. Ideas about shared destiny are often important in nationalist ideology; this is problematic if the national community is apparently dying out. Low fertility is also important to national communities because a smaller population can alter the balance of power relative to other nations. Numbers of people are often equated with increased economic and military power (Bookman 1998) and thus a large population may imply more strength in the international system of nations.

Second, migration can cause changes in national identity. Take Kosovo, for example, which had a Serbian majority until the late nineteenth century. Out-migration of Serbs, coupled with in-migration of Albanians (as well as high Albanian fertility) have changed the ethnic composition of Kosovo over the past century. Nationalist Serbs and nationalist Albanians now fight over the national identity of the area. The United States provides a different type of example. The United States has a long history of immigration but the predominant national identity was white and European for much of the country's history. Immigrants from all over Europe often changed their names to fit into this mould and assimilated into an Anglo-dominated national culture. This is changing with the increase in immigration from non-European countries; 'multiculturalism' is slowly taking the place of the older assimilation model.

Third, demographic change can alter the balance of power between dominant and non-dominant populations within states (Bookman 1998). For example, fertility rates of ethnic or religious groups within states often vary. Members of the dominant national group are likely to be more affluent than members of other groups (e.g. racial/ethnic minorities) and because fertility is inversely associated with economic status

and educational levels (Weeks 1996), birth rates of dominant groups are typically lower than those of other groups in a country. When demographers discover a downward fertility trend, some leaders worry that the numerical strength of the dominant group is in decline vis-à-vis other groups. Leaders and activists have tried to combat the perceived threat in many different ways such as encouraging assimilation (including repressive initiatives like English only movements in the United States, or the banning of head scarves worn by Muslim girls in French public schools) or restricting immigration. Pronatalist policies are one way leaders have attempted to ensure the dominance of their own group by increasing the number of members. In recent years, however, the countries examined in this article steered away from addressing differential fertility within state borders in favour of broader efforts to encourage births to all citizens or residents.

Because demographic trends can and do change the character of national communities, it follows that they will influence nationalist ideologies. While I would not argue that demographic trends alone cause specific changes in national identities or nationalist ideologies, they are connected to how nations imagine themselves. The trend towards smaller families and differential fertility within nation-states have implications for the 'character' of national communities. Those who see their nations as a large, extended family may react by calling for a return to traditional gender roles, limiting immigration, deporting foreigners, and/or discouraging fertility among minority peoples while encouraging births to the dominant group. Those who see the nation as a political community may be more open to the types of changes that result from demographic and other social trends.

Major demographic changes, especially differential fertility and immigration, imply three possible directions for nation-states and nationalist ideologies. First, leaders and others may re-imagine their nations – re-define what it means to be 'French', 'Québécois' or any other national grouping. In doing so, they might move to a more civic/cultural model of the national community that bases membership more on citizenship than on ancestry. National identities in some countries are more easily adaptable; but one can see traces of this trend even in historically ethno-nationalist countries like Germany, which made access to citizenship more available to non-German immigrants in 1993. Second, ethno-nationalist leaders might instead (or in addition) put pressure on their governments to engage in population engineering, attempting to alter the demographic composition of their state. While international pressure works against such attempts, government leaders have nonetheless employed forced migration, pronatalism, and genocide to try and homogenize their populations (a prominent example is that of the former Yugoslavia). Or, finally, herrenvolk democracies (see Winant 1995) could develop, in which a minority population controls the government and

resources of a country that is populated in large part by a disenfranchised majority (South Africa under apartheid exemplifies such a system). Given current demographic and economic trends, if ethno-nationalist ideas were to prevail, states in low fertility countries could become herrenvolk democracies. If states extend social and civic rights to non-citizen residents, this will not happen. The threat arises if states begin to exclude non-citizens from such rights.

With the exception of the third scenario, ethno-nationalist ideology that views the nation as an extended family that is homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, language and religion and which sees women's primary role as biological reproducer of the nation is unsustainable in the long run given current demographic trends in low fertility countries. Such countries will either shrink dramatically in size during the next century – in which case women's participation in the labour force will be more of a necessity than ever – or will increasingly admit immigrants.

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### **Notes**

1. There also exist groups that consider themselves nations though they may not have their own state. Examples include the Palestinians, or the Québécois.

2. Nielsen (1999, p. 125) uses the term 'cultural nationalism', stating, 'Ethnic nationalism, as all nationalisms, is cultural, but not all cultural nationalisms are ethnic. Cultural nationalism defines the nation in terms of a common encompassing culture. But that culture can be, and typically is in the West, a liberal democratic culture'.

3. This does not mean, of course, that racism does not exist in France; a recent survey in that country found that four in ten respondents admitted to being 'racist' or 'fairly racist' (*The Economist* 1998).

4. Other policies that could illuminate this question include education policies, language policies and other welfare policies.

5. Habermas (1998) explains that nations have been created in at least four distinct ways. In Western Europe, existing states, which already had bureaucratic systems in place, created nations. In Central and Eastern Europe, national communities were created by intellectuals and this led to the creation of states. In Asia and Africa, states were forged from prior colonies after World War II – with boundaries that had been defined by European colonizers. African leaders have had the challenge of creating a sense of national identity that coincides with state borders. Finally, in the contemporary era, new states have been created, mainly through secessions, from the former Soviet Empire. My study includes examples from the first three.

6. It is important to note that pronatalist programmes are not only understood as demographic policy. Because they often include family or child allowances, housing benefits, and/or tax incentives, pronatalist programmes are part of welfare states. Welfare states have contributed to national solidarity by redistributing wealth across class lines, thereby strengthening state-bounded national communities (see Hechter 2000; also see Keating 1996).

7. McIntosh (1983, p. 23) has argued that many countries have implicit pronatalist policies. McIntosh claims that because political elites can rarely mobilize the public in favour of broad pronatalist measures, they may prefer a 'blurring of the distinction between family and pronatalist policy'. Thus, some national leaders may favour a pronatalist agenda but pursue it by supporting family policies wherein the broader stated goal is 'helping families' rather than 'raising fertility'.

8. Access to abortion has recently expanded somewhat; until recently abortion was legal only during the first ten weeks of pregnancy but that has now been changed to the first twelve weeks.

9. Palestinians have seen demographic trends as working in their favour in their struggle with Israel. Palestinian journalists played up the demographic 'weapon' and Palestinian poets wrote verses praising their people's fertility (Steinburg 1989; Yuval-Davis 1989). A doctor at a maternity ward in Gaza told a *New York Times* reporter, 'Many people here say, "We must have more babies to compensate for our losses in Lebanon and to put pressure on the Jews to come to the negotiating table"' (quoted in Friedman 1987).

10. The exceptions were mainly Christian and Bedouin Arabs, who sometimes served in the Israeli army. Arab residents of the Occupied Territories were eligible for no family benefits.

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