

Secularization, Fertility Decline, and the Role of Immigration in Advanced Societies

Introduction

Advanced industrial societies have experienced two striking demographic shifts in recent decades: a **rise in secularism/atheism** and a **fall in fertility rates**. Many developed countries now have total fertility rates far below the replacement level of ~2.1 children per woman ¹ ², alongside unprecedented levels of religious disaffiliation ³. This report explores whether these trends are correlated and how **immigration** factors into the equation. We examine: (1) historical and current data on atheism and fertility in developed societies; (2) fertility differences between secular vs. religious populations (and natives vs. immigrants); (3) theories about a **"tipping point"** when secularism becomes dominant; (4) how immigration affects fertility patterns and offsets demographic decline; and (5) broader systemic or philosophical interpretations of these shifts. The goal is to understand if rising atheism is linked to fertility decline, and whether immigration acts not just as an economic fix but as a **systemic mechanism restoring demographic vitality** and ensuring continuity of human culture. Key findings are summarized in the conclusion.

Secularization and Low Fertility Trends in Developed Societies

Historical Decline in Fertility: Developed nations have seen a dramatic drop in birth rates over the past half-century. In the **OECD countries**, for example, average fertility fell from about 2.84 children per woman in 1970 to only 1.58 in 2021 ⁴. By the mid-1990s, most affluent societies had already sunk well below replacement fertility, a trend that continued into the 2000s and 2010s. Many European and East Asian countries today have **TFRs in the 1.0–1.7 range**, with some hitting record lows around 1.3 or even below 1.0 in extreme cases (e.g. South Korea's TFR ~0.8 in 2021 ²). Meanwhile, world fertility as a whole has been in **"relentless decline"** since peaking around 1965 ⁵, as large parts of the globe undergo the later stages of the demographic transition. Figure 1 illustrates the gap between fertility in secular regions versus the world average.

Total Fertility Rates of Unaffiliated by Region, 2010-2015			
	ALL RELIGIONS	UNAFFIL.	DIFF.*
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.8	4.3	-0.5
Latin America- Caribbean	2.2	2.3	0.1
North America	2.0	1.6	-0.4
Asia-Pacific	2.1	1.6	-0.6
Europe	1.6	1.4	-0.2
World	2.5	1.7	-0.8

* Differences are calculated from unrounded numbers. Only regions for which there are sufficient data are shown.
Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050
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Figure 1: Total Fertility Rates of the religiously Unaffiliated vs. overall population, by region (2010–2015). Globally, unaffiliated women bear far fewer children (1.7 on average) than the world as a whole (2.5). In secular regions like Europe and North America, unaffiliated fertility is well below replacement ⁶ ⁷ .

Rise of Secularism/Atheism: In tandem with falling birth rates, many advanced societies have become markedly more secular. Surveys show **declining religious affiliation and belief** across Western Europe, North America, East Asia, and other high-income regions. For example, in **Britain**, the share of adults with *no religion* jumped from 31% in 1983 to 53% by 2017 ³ . Younger generations are especially secular – nearly 75% of British 18–24 year-olds identified as having no religion in recent surveys ⁸ . Similar trends appear throughout Europe (e.g. the Czech Republic, Sweden, the Netherlands, etc.) and in countries like Japan, where roughly 70% of people report having no personal religious faith ⁹ ¹⁰ . Even the United States – long an outlier in religiosity among wealthy nations – has seen rapid secularization since the 1990s ¹¹ . The U.S. unaffiliated (“nones”) now comprise roughly 30% of the adult population, up from ~16% in 2007 ¹² . Social surveys and **World Values Survey** data indicate that virtually all high-income societies have recently reached a **“tipping point”** of secularization, with religiosity declining at an accelerated pace after 2007 ¹³ ¹⁴ .

Correlation Between Secularism and Fertility: There is strong evidence that these two phenomena – rising secularism and falling fertility – are **interrelated**. At the cross-national level, countries that are more secular tend to have lower birth rates. A recent analysis of 181 countries found that **“societal secularism” is a powerful predictor of fertility rates** – even more so than individuals’ own religiosity ¹⁵ ¹⁶ . In secular countries, *everyone* (even religious people) tends to have fewer children on average ¹⁷ . For instance, highly secular environments like **Japan, Spain, or Scandinavia** exhibit some of the world’s lowest fertility rates (around 1.3–1.7), whereas more traditionally religious societies (even at similar income levels) often have higher rates. The cultural context seems to matter: **“A country’s characteristics matter for fertility rates, not just individuals’ characteristics,”** explains sociologist Landon Schnabel, meaning that living in a more secular, modernized society shapes people’s family size decisions across the board ¹⁸ .

To illustrate, consider a few developed countries (see Table 1):

Country	% Non-religious Population	Total Fertility Rate
United Kingdom	53% no affiliation (2017) ³	1.74 (2017) ⁴
Sweden	~73% non-religious (2016 Gallup) ¹⁹	1.70 (2020) ²⁰
Japan	~70% no personal religion (2015) ⁹	1.37 (2021) ²
United States	~23% unaffiliated (2019) ²¹	1.64 (2020) ²²

Table 1: Secularization and Fertility in Selected Advanced Countries. High levels of non-religion often coincide with low birth rates.

While many factors influence fertility (education, income, gender equality, etc.), **secular values and modern lifestyles** tend to encourage later marriages/childbearing, smaller families, or childlessness. Conversely, more religious cultures traditionally promote family growth. As one global study noted, throughout history “*virtually all major world religions encouraged high fertility*” under conditions of high infant mortality, embedding norms against behaviors that limit childbearing (e.g. contraception, abortion, delayed marriage) ²³. When those pro-natal norms erode in a secular age of low mortality, fertility naturally falls. Indeed, political scientist Ronald Inglehart observes that in the 21st century, **almost all high-income societies reached a tipping point where dominant norms shifted from promoting fertility to prioritizing individual choice** in family matters ²⁴. In other words, personal fulfillment and autonomy became paramount, replacing the older religious imperative to “be fruitful and multiply.” This **value shift** helps explain why advanced secular societies have so few babies today – it’s not simply about economics, but a deeper cultural transformation.

Fertility Gaps: Religious vs. Secular Populations (and Natives vs. Immigrants)

Beneath aggregate trends, there are pronounced **fertility differentials** between people of differing beliefs and backgrounds. In general, **atheists and the non-religious have fewer children on average than their religious counterparts**, and in many Western countries **immigrants have more children than native-born citizens**. These gaps shed light on how secularization links to fertility, and how immigration is altering demographic patterns.

- **Within-Country Religious Gaps:** Numerous studies confirm that *devoutly religious individuals tend to have higher fertility* than the less religious, even within the same society. In the United States, for example, **Christians have about 0.4 more children on average than the religiously unaffiliated**. Pew Research finds U.S. Christians (ages 40–59) report a completed fertility of ~2.2 children, compared to ~1.8 for those with no religion ²⁵. A similar gap appears in Canada, where a 2023 survey showed *religious Canadian women have about 1.8 children on average vs. only 1.3 for non-religious women* ²⁶. Such differences are large – Canada’s study author called the ~0.5 child gap “a pretty big gap” ²⁷ – and persist even after controlling for education or income. The reasons include lifestyle and worldview: religious women tend to marry earlier and desire larger families than secular women ²⁸ ²⁹. They often view childbearing as a fulfillment of faith or a natural stage of life, whereas secular individuals more often prioritize personal goals before (or instead of) parenthood.
- **Global Patterns:** On a global scale, predominantly secular populations consistently show **sub-replacement fertility**. As Figure 1 (above) showed, the **world’s “unaffiliated” population has a TFR of only ~1.7**, versus 2.5 for the world overall ⁶. In highly secular European countries,

unaffiliated fertility is especially low – e.g. only ~1.0 in Spain and 0.9 in Austria ⁷ . In contrast, religious groups (like Muslims, Christians, Hindus) in the aggregate have higher fertility. This is why demographers project the *global share of religiously unaffiliated people will actually decline in coming decades – not because secularization is reversing, but because nonreligious populations are concentrated in low-fertility, aging societies* ³⁰ ³¹ . For instance, one Pew projection noted that by 2050 the unaffiliated will drop from 16% to ~13% of the world population, as their growth is outpaced by higher-fertility religious populations ³² . In effect, secular societies are reproducing more slowly**, which over long timeframes may limit their demographic weight (unless bolstered by other sources of growth, like conversion or immigration).

- **Immigrants vs. Natives:** Immigration often injects populations from higher-fertility regions into low-fertility host countries. As a result, **immigrants in many Western countries have higher birth rates than the native-born** (at least for a generation or two). For example, in the United States in 2017, the total fertility rate of foreign-born women was about **2.18**, compared to **1.76** for U.S.-born women ³³ . “The presence of immigrants helps to keep U.S. fertility at levels closer to the replacement rate,” notes economist Giovanni Peri ³³ . In France, immigrant mothers likewise have more children – about **2.6 vs. 1.8** for native French women (2017) – though because immigrants made up only 19% of births, they raised France’s overall TFR by a modest 0.1 (from 1.8 to 1.9) ³⁴ . In about half of European countries, the pattern is similar: immigrants’ higher fertility bumps up the national average slightly ³⁵ . (There are a few exceptions, like Denmark, where immigrants come largely from other low-fertility countries, resulting in little to no increase ³⁵ .) The **convergence effect** is also important – over time, second-generation immigrants tend to adopt the smaller family norms of their host society, causing immigrant fertility to fall in line with native levels in subsequent decades ³⁴ ³⁶ . But in the short-to-medium term, immigrant communities can contribute disproportionately to a nation’s births, partially **counterbalancing the lower fertility of the secular native population**. This is seen in the fact that many European cities have a high share of births to migrant or minority-origin mothers, and it’s one reason countries with more immigration (like France, the UK, or Sweden) often have slightly higher fertility than those with little immigration (like Italy or Japan).

In summary, **religiosity and fertility are positively linked at both individual and group levels**. Highly secular populations are having significantly fewer children, whereas religious and immigrant groups sustain higher birth rates. This creates an emerging demographic dynamic: the *growth of secularism may be self-limiting* – as secular people have fewer offspring, they rely on either conversion of the religious or an influx of people from elsewhere to maintain population share ³⁷ . We now explore what happens when secular or atheist worldviews become dominant in a society, and whether there is a “tipping point” with deeper civilizational implications.

The “Tipping Point” of Secular Dominance and Civilizational Change

As secularism expands, many advanced societies are approaching or have reached a point where traditional religious culture is no longer the majority. Several scholars have theorized about **what happens when a civilization becomes predominantly secular** – how it affects social norms, and whether there is a threshold beyond which demographic decline accelerates or triggers counter-forces.

Shift to Individual-Choice Norms: One major consequence of secular dominance is a fundamental change in norms around family and reproduction. Inglehart (2021) argues that *once societies attain high levels of economic and physical security, younger generations abandon the old pro-fertility norms that*

religions upheld ³⁸. We are witnessing that shift now: “Almost all high-income societies have recently reached a tipping point where the balance shifts from pro-fertility norms being dominant, to individual-choice norms being dominant.” ³⁹ In practical terms, this means behaviors once stigmatized (having few or no children, delaying marriage, prioritizing career or personal freedom) become widely accepted or even expected. Fertility becomes viewed as a personal decision rather than a social duty. The **psychology of an average citizen in a secular society** thus differs from that in a traditional society – the former feels little external pressure to reproduce, whereas the latter historically was conditioned to see raising a large family as a virtue or obligation. This normative tipping point helps explain the *extremely low fertility* in places like Southern Europe or East Asia today: even those who might want more children face a milieu where having a big family is no longer the norm and is often economically challenging without the old religious/community supports.

Self-Reinforcing Cycle vs. Demographic Feedback: Some theories posit that once secular, low-fertility patterns set in, they can become **self-reinforcing**. The concept of the “**Second Demographic Transition**” (SDT) in demography captures this idea: advanced societies enter a stage of *post-materialist values* (individualism, self-expression, secular-rational thinking) leading to sustained below-replacement fertility and new family forms (cohabitation, childfree lifestyles, etc.) ⁴⁰ ⁴¹. Under SDT theory, secularization and low fertility are intertwined in a long-term equilibrium – a society might remain highly secular and slowly aging/shrinking unless an outside force intervenes. However, another view is that **demography itself provides a feedback mechanism**: if one segment of society stops reproducing, over time that segment’s influence wanes relative to groups that continue to have children. In a secular-majority nation, the remaining religious minority – if it maintains higher fertility – will grow in proportion over generations, potentially reasserting traditional norms in the future. This is the thesis of scholar **Eric Kaufmann**, who provocatively asks “*Shall the religious inherit the Earth?*” given current fertility differentials. He notes that even in secular Europe, devout subsets (whether native religious communities or religious immigrant groups) have maintained significantly higher birth rates, which could slow or reverse the march of secularism in the long run ⁴² ⁴³. **Example:** In the US, the most religious Americans in 2019 had fertility comparable to women in high-fertility developing countries (e.g. India or Saudi Arabia), while the least religious Americans had a fertility rate akin to ultralow-fertility countries like Japan or Italy ⁴². This staggering gap suggests that if high secularism leads to fewer babies, then over time a larger share of the next generation will come from the more religious minority – potentially tipping the balance back toward religiosity (absent other factors like continued secularizing through education or switching).

Importantly, the above dynamic can be overwhelmed by **religious switching**: currently, many children raised in religious families in the West end up leaving religion (converting to “none”) in adulthood ⁴⁴. High secular retention and the global spread of secular ideals via education/media have so far kept secularization rising despite the fertility disadvantage. But the interplay of **low fertility vs. high retention** will determine whether a secular society can sustain itself purely through native reproduction. So far, highly secular nations have avoided collapse by either some *fertility uptick at older ages (with policies)* or through **immigration** of people from more religious, higher-fertility regions. This leads us to the role of migration as a potential “release valve” or balancing mechanism when a civilization hits the secular low-fertility wall.

Immigration as a Demographic Counterbalance

Faced with shrinking workforces and graying populations, many advanced secular countries have turned to **immigration** to fill the demographic gap. Immigration is often discussed as an economic strategy (to fuel labor markets and support aging populations), but it also can be seen as a **systemic**

demographic mechanism that restores vitality to societies that might otherwise decline. We explore how immigration affects fertility patterns and population dynamics:

- **Offsetting Population Decline:** Net immigration has become the **primary source of population growth** in most aging, low-fertility societies. Since around 1990, virtually all population increase in Europe has come from immigrants, not native births ⁴⁵. In fact, between 2000 and 2018, about **80% of Europe's population growth was due to immigration** (and in North America, one-third) ⁴⁵. Recent Pew Research analysis found that in **14 countries** from 2000–2020, *immigration accounted for over 100% of population growth* – meaning those countries would have shrunk in population if they hadn't received new immigrants ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷. Another 17 countries had overall declines, but would have lost even more people if not for immigrant inflows moderating the drop ⁴⁶. Notably, many of these are advanced economies (e.g. Germany, Italy, Russia, etc.) with long-term birth deficits. The **United Nations Population Division** explicitly notes that in dozens of countries “immigration is expected to mitigate population decline due to low fertility and an aging population” ⁴⁸. In short, without migration, a large portion of developed nations would already be in absolute population decline due to their fertility shortfall.
- **Rejuvenating Age Structure:** Immigrants tend to arrive as **young adults**, which directly helps rejuvenate the age structure of an aging society. By adding people in their 20s and 30s (often prime childbearing and working ages), immigration lowers the average age and the dependency ratio (more workers per retiree) ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰. For example, in the U.S., immigrants' fertility (around 2.1) has kept the overall TFR closer to replacement than it would be with natives alone ³³, and immigrants' younger age profile boosts the labor force and tax base ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰. In countries like Germany, the influx of young migrants in the 2010s slightly raised birth counts and tempered the rapid aging of the population (one study even found native fertility ticked up in response to an influx of refugees, possibly due to improved optimism or government support coinciding with migration waves) ⁵¹ ⁵². While immigration **cannot completely reverse population aging** – immigrants also age over time – a steady flow can significantly **slow the pace** of aging and buy time for societies to adjust ⁵⁰ ⁵³. Demographers sometimes call this an “aging gracefully” strategy ⁵⁴.
- **Impact on Fertility Rates:** As noted, immigrants often have higher fertility initially, which can **bump up the host country's overall birth rate modestly**. We saw France's example where the national TFR rose ~0.1 due to immigrants ³⁴. In the U.S., immigration has prevented what would likely be an even steeper fertility decline – without the immigrant population, the U.S. TFR would be markedly lower. That said, immigration is **not a panacea for low fertility**. To maintain a stable or growing population purely via migration, very large numbers of immigrants are required if native fertility stays ultra-low. The UN's famous “*Replacement Migration*” report (2000) illustrated that countries like Italy or Japan would need improbably high immigration levels to fully offset aging and decline in the long run. Nonetheless, **moderate immigration can stabilize population size and avert population collapse**. The IMF's analysis concludes bluntly: “*The bottom line is that only net immigration can ensure population stability or growth in the aging advanced economies of the North.*” ⁵⁵. In other words, for countries averaging 1.3–1.7 children per woman, there are essentially two choices: either raise fertility (which has proven very difficult despite pro-natalist policies), or accept immigration to make up the difference.
- **Cultural and Social Revitalization:** Beyond the numbers, one can view immigration as **injecting new cultural energy and resilience** into aging secular societies. Immigrants often bring more traditional family structures, entrepreneurial drive, and youthful optimism – traits sometimes less abundant in graying, highly individualistic cultures. For instance, communities of immigrants

may have higher participation in religious or community life (churches, mosques, extended family networks), indirectly **bolstering social cohesion or birth rates** in areas that had become atomized. This is a double-edged sword: it can create social tensions or integration challenges, but it also **stimulates societal renewal**. Historically, one thinks of how “**barbarian**” **migrations revitalized the late Roman Empire** or how the infusion of young migrant labor sustained American growth in the late 20th century. From a demographic systems perspective, **migration flows act as a balancing feedback loop** – regions with surplus young people and higher fertility send migrants to regions with deficits, thus evening out human distribution and ensuring the *continuity of communities*. Indeed, **experts emphasize that future population growth vs. decline in many countries will hinge on immigration levels** in the coming decades ⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ . If a country shuts its doors entirely while its native births remain far below replacement, eventual population contraction is almost certain (as seen in Japan’s current trajectory). By contrast, countries embracing immigration (like Canada, Australia, etc., which explicitly use immigration to drive growth) can maintain a *dynamic equilibrium*, growing slowly despite low native fertility.

In summary, **immigration currently functions as a critical demographic lever** for advanced secular nations: it mitigates worker shortages, props up birth numbers modestly, and delays the negative effects of population aging. Many policymakers frame it in economic terms, but it can also be seen in almost *biological* terms – as if an organism (society) is receiving a transfusion of fresh cells to compensate for reproductive senescence. This leads us to some more speculative, big-picture ways to interpret these trends within civilizational or systems theory frameworks.

Civilizational Flow and Evolutionary Perspectives

Stepping back, one can ask: *Is there a larger meaning or pattern to the cycle of secularization, fertility decline, and compensatory immigration?* Several thinkers, from historians to systems theorists, have proposed that these dynamics are part of a **civilizational flow or psychological transformation** that unfolds over time. While these ideas are speculative, they provide a useful lens:

- **Systems Theory (Homeostasis in Human Populations):** In systems thinking, societies can be viewed as complex adaptive systems that seek **homeostasis**. When one part of the system changes drastically – e.g. when advanced societies shift to low fertility and risk population loss – other parts of the global system respond (often unintentionally) to restore balance. **International migration can be seen as a homeostatic response:** regions under demographic pressure (high fertility, population surplus, fewer economic opportunities) send people to regions of demographic deficit (low fertility, aging, labor shortages). This resembles a pressure equalization or a flow from high concentration to low. The result is a **rebalancing of human resources** – younger populations move to support older ones, and human capital flows to where it’s needed. In this view, immigration is almost a **natural subsystem behavior** of global civilization, ensuring that human **consciousness and culture continue** in areas that might otherwise stagnate from lack of reproduction. It’s as if the *system “wants” to preserve continuity*, and thus people migrate to where the opportunities (created by population aging) are. Of course, this is not conscious or centrally planned – it emerges from millions of individual decisions under the push-pull of economics and life aspirations. But the net effect is that the **global population system adapts**, preventing severe local declines (to a point). Demographers sometimes refer to migration as an “automatic stabilizer” for population, though in practice it’s imperfect (policies and politics can obstruct the flow, as seen by countries reluctant to accept migrants despite needing them).

- **Cultural Evolution and “Demographic Dialectic”:** From a cultural evolution standpoint, one could argue that secular modernity, for all its technological and ethical achievements, introduces an evolutionary *disadvantage* – lower reproductive success. Meanwhile, more traditional or religious subcultures retain a higher **biological fitness** (in the sense of producing more offspring). Over the long term, this sets up a kind of **dialectic or cycle**: secular ideologies spread and dominate due to the appeal of modern life, but then those societies begin to dwindle numerically; simultaneously, the populations that hold on to higher-fertility cultural traits (often rooted in religion or strong communal values) increase their share. Eventually, the pendulum may swing – the future population may tilt back toward those more pro-natal values, either through internal resurgence or through the incorporation of immigrants from more traditional societies. This doesn’t necessarily mean a reversion to old-time religion per se, but possibly a *synthesis*: the secular society might absorb the energy of the incoming youthful populations, leading to a culturally transformed but demographically sustainable new society. We can see hints of this in places like **France or the UK**, where the growing influence of immigrant communities (many with devout Muslim, Hindu, or Christian practices) is changing the cultural landscape that had become largely secular. Some futurists even suggest that *ideologies or memes that encourage reproduction have a built-in long-term advantage* – thus, humanity might cyclically return to such memes after a secular phase, simply because those memes propagate themselves via demography.
- **Psychological Transformation:** On an individual level, the progression to a secular, low-fertility society marks a profound psychological shift – Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy comes to mind, where once material needs are met, people pursue self-actualization, often delaying or forgoing childbearing in the process. This could be viewed as a society achieving a certain **psychological stage** (post-material values, as Inglehart would say). However, some psychologists and philosophers question the sustainability of a culture where **parenthood and legacy are de-emphasized**. The continuity of “human consciousness” – meaning the transmission of knowledge, values, and indeed people to carry them – relies on each generation producing and mentoring the next. When a society psychologically disconnects from this – prioritizing the present self over future offspring – it might experience an existential drift or even nihilism (as evidenced by rising rates of loneliness and anomie in some ultrasecular, aging nations). Immigration can inject a different psychological outlook: many immigrants come with aspirations for family and future, rekindling a focus on legacy in the host society. In a way, **immigration can be seen as a psychological renewal** for an aging culture, reintroducing the perspectives of youth, hope, and family-centered life that may have faded. This might help the host society rediscover a balance between individual and community/future-oriented values.
- **Historical Analogies:** History offers analogies of great civilizations that went through cycles of **growth, intellectual flourishing, demographic stagnation, and then renewal via outside populations**. The late **Roman Empire** experienced declining birth rates among its Roman citizenry and a turn toward Epicurean/secular lifestyles; it was ultimately reinvigorated (and transformed) by influxes of peoples from the frontiers (who were often more rugged or traditional in outlook). The concept of “civilizational fatigue” is often cited – advanced cultures might lose the will or need to reproduce, until new blood revives them. While the past had migrations often through conquest or colonization, today’s process is more gradual and voluntary, but some see a parallel. From the view of **systems/cyclic historians** (e.g. Ibn Khaldun’s theory of *asabiyyah* or Peter Turchin’s cliodynamics), a society that becomes wealthy and secular may lose social cohesion (decline in *asabiyyah*) and see population decline, making it ripe for younger, hungrier populations to fill the void – whether through migration or differential growth. Immigration in the modern context could thus be interpreted as *an antidote to*

civilizational stagnation, injecting the “primitive vigor” that historian Arnold Toynbee noted often comes from outside the dominant culture and helps spur a new cycle.

It is important to stress that these philosophical perspectives are **speculative**. Not all scholars agree that secular societies are doomed to fail or that immigration is a deliberate “mechanism” rather than a contingent phenomenon. However, thinking in these terms underscores the interconnectedness of cultural and demographic change. Humanity as a whole can be seen as one evolving entity – as one part loses momentum, another part supplies it with fresh energy. Immigration, then, is more than just an economic tool; it’s part of the *flow of human existence*, enabling the continuity of communities and “human consciousness” across time and space, even as individual societies transform psychologically.

Conclusion & Key Takeaways

In conclusion, **rising atheism (secularization) in advanced civilizations is indeed correlated with declining fertility**, and this demographic shift has increasingly been counterbalanced by immigration. Secular, affluent societies tend to have fewer children, which over time leads to aging and potential population decline. To sustain themselves, these societies either **must find ways to boost fertility or rely on importing people** from elsewhere. So far, immigration has played a crucial role in maintaining the population and economic vitality of many developed countries with below-replacement fertility. It functions not only as a practical solution to labor shortages and pension woes, but arguably as a systemic “**rebalancing**” force in global civilization – ensuring that regions of low birth rates are replenished and that human progress continues without interruption.

Key findings from this investigation include:

- **Secularization-Fertility Link:** Advanced societies have become markedly more secular over the last 50+ years, while their fertility rates fell to historic lows. There is a clear **negative correlation** – countries (and individuals) with less religious commitment tend to have fewer children. This correlation is driven by both direct factors (religions encouraging larger families, secular culture prioritizing other life goals) and indirect factors (modern development fostering both secular values and small family norms) ¹⁵ ²⁴ .
- **Religious vs. Secular Fertility Gaps:** Within many countries, **religious populations are out-breeding secular ones**. Devout groups (of any faith) often have above-replacement fertility, whereas secular people have low fertility. For example, U.S. weekly churchgoers have stayed near ~2.1 kids, while nones are around ~1.5–1.8 ²⁵ ⁴² . In Canada and Europe, similar gaps (0.5 children or more) are observed. This means the demographic weight of secular vs. religious segments can shift over time, potentially limiting the long-term dominance of secularism absent other influxes ²⁷ ⁴⁴ .
- **“Tipping Point” to Low-Fertility Norms:** There is evidence that when secular/modern values permeate a society beyond a certain point, a **tipping point** is reached where family formation patterns fundamentally change. High-income societies have recently shifted from **traditional pro-natal norms to individual-choice norms** in family matters ²⁴ . This transition – part of the Second Demographic Transition – has led to delayed marriage, smaller families, and acceptance of childfree lifestyles. Once this cultural shift is mainstream, fertility often remains ultra-low, as seen in parts of East Asia and Europe.
- **Immigration as Demographic Lifeline:** For many low-fertility advanced countries, **immigration has become essential to avoid population decline and extreme aging**. In the past two

decades, immigrants accounted for the bulk of population growth in numerous developed countries – in some cases, providing *over 100% of growth (offsetting what would have been decline)* ⁴⁶ . Immigrants are typically younger and have higher initial fertility, which **rejuvenates the host society** both demographically and economically ⁴⁹ ³³ . While immigration alone cannot completely solve aging (and is subject to political limits), it significantly cushions the demographic blow of secular low-fertility. Countries open to immigration have fared much better in maintaining their workforce and population size than those with strict barriers.

- **Systemic/Civilizational Perspective:** The interplay of secularism, fertility, and immigration can be viewed through a broader lens: **a dynamic equilibrium in human civilization**. As one part of the world (or one cultural mode) slows down in reproduction, another part fills the gap. This can be interpreted as a kind of *homeostatic or evolutionary mechanism* ensuring the continuity of human societies (“human consciousness”) despite local downturns. Advanced secular nations, by importing people from more youthful, oftentimes more religious populations, may experience a form of **cultural renewal** or transformation that addresses their stagnation. Over generations, this might lead to a blending or cyclic renewal of values – the secular world infusing modern ideas into newcomers, while newcomers re-infuse family-centric vigor into the secular world.

In essence, **secularism and low fertility go hand-in-hand in modern societies**, presenting a challenge to the sustainability of those societies. Immigration has emerged as a key compensating factor – not just economically but biologically and culturally. It is as if global civilization has a built-in corrective: when some populations stop growing, others will move to where they are needed, preventing decline from becoming collapse. Whether this is seen as a conscious policy choice or an organic systemic process, the outcome is that humanity persists and evolves. The continuity of communities, cultures, and the collective human enterprise is thus maintained – if not through high native birth rates, then through the **great exchange of people** that characterizes our era.

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