TITLE PAGE

THE CRISIS OF THE GENDER EGALITARIAN FAMILY MODEL

Author: Darel E. Paul
Willmott Family Third Century Professor of Political Science
Chair, Program in Political Economy
Williams College
Williamstown, MA 01267
United States

dpaul@williams.edu

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7647-3416

Disclosure:

The author declares no funding sources apart from his employer, Williams College, and no conflicts of interest.

THE CRISIS OF THE GENDER EGALITARIAN FAMILY MODEL

ABSTRACT

A decade ago, gender egalitarianism achieved the status of demographic common sense as the only successful basis for family (re)production in highly developed countries. However recent trends demonstrate that the case for the gender egalitarian family model is mistaken. Its empirical claims, founded in the positive relationship between female labor force participation and fertility, are dependent on the transient experience of the Nordic countries in the 1990s and 2000s as well as on a selection effect in the analysis of comparative national data. Its theoretical argument is based on assumptions of declining plausibility as the twenty-first century unfolds. A reckoning with the problems of this family model is essential for social scientists seeking explanations for the fertility and family declines of the past fifteen years.

1 INTRODUCTION

It has been a decade since gender egalitarianism achieved the status of demographic common sense as the only successful basis for family (re)production in highly developed countries. Led by some of the most prominent sociologists in the discipline (Esping-Andersen 2014; Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider 2014; Goldscheider et al. 2015), this position argues that a "gender revolution" is generating a new "gender egalitarian equilibrium" in which women need not choose between family and work. Nowhere is this revolution more advanced than in the Nordic countries. Enabled by government policies such as generous maternity leave and state-provided daycare as well as by husbands/partners embracing childcare and domestic labor, Nordic women are said to uniquely realize the possibilities of both motherhood and career. In short, "feminism and pronatalism work together" (Chesnais 1998, 96), an argument now platformed by the International Monetary Fund (Doepke et al. 2022).

Yet the owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk. Just as the gender egalitarian family model became common sense, the family in Nordic countries began a new and marked decline. In Sweden, widely considered the work-family "gold standard" (Boling 2015, 206), the total fertility rate (TFR) has since 2017 been consistently below the 'near replacement' line of 1.8; in 2023 Sweden's TFR was just 1.45 (Statistics Sweden 2024), a new national record low more typical of "stalled" or "incomplete" gender-revolutionized Germany (Esping-Andersen 2014, 141). One sees the same evidence in Sweden's completed cohort fertility rate that sifts out large short-term fertility fluctuations for which the country is well known. Swedish women born in 1973 (age 50 in 2023) gave birth to the fewest number of children in sixty years (since the cohort born in 1913) while Swedish women born in 1983 (age 40 in 2023) had a cohort fertility rate of

just 1.81, the lowest since the cohorts born in 1900-11 whose peak childbearing years came during the Great Depression (Human Fertility Database). A decline in marriage and union formation has accompanied these declines in fertility. Cantalini et al. (2024) show that the risk of first marriage in Sweden began falling in 2012 and steeply so after 2016. The likelihood of marrying in Sweden in 2021 was half the level of 2008 and around 25% below the prior low of 1998. The country has also witnessed a continuous decline in the risk of cohabitation formation since recording of such unions began in 2011. Most notable are the steep declines in the likelihood of Swedish parents to form either first marriages or consensual unions; by 2021 they were doing so at around half the rate or less from a decade earlier.

The story is the same across the Nordic countries.[1] In 2023 Denmark recorded a total fertility rate (1.50) only slightly higher than Sweden while Norway (1.40) and Finland (1.26) were distinctly lower. Iceland's fertility rate (1.59) was higher than Sweden's yet undergoing a steep decline, having had an above-replacement TFR as recently as 2012. Iceland, Norway, and Finland, like Sweden, all set national fertility rate record lows in 2023 with data going back to the mid-nineteenth century. Finland has fallen to "lowest low" levels measured by both period and completed cohort fertility, and in 2023 recorded its fewest number of total live births since 1836 when the national population was just one-quarter its present size.

Such trends demand a reconsideration of the gender egalitarian common sense. At the very least, gender egalitarianism has proven no defense against the general post-2010 fertility and family decline of the postindustrial West. The concurrence of Nordic patterns with those of the "familialist" countries of continental Europe (Esping-Andersen 1999) calls into question the role of gender egalitarian policy and culture in (re)producing the family beyond levels seen in the

[1] Fertility figures in this paragraph are from national statistical databases.

rest of the OECD. Such questioning extends to the original macro-level empirical foundation of the gender egalitarian family model argument, namely the positive correlation between fertility and female labor force participation.

This article argues that both the empirical and the theoretical case for the gender egalitarian family model are largely mistaken. Its empirical edifice was constructed on conclusions drawn from the transient experience of the Nordic countries in the 1990s and 2000s as well as on a selection effect in the analysis of comparative national data. Its theoretical foundation lies in assumptions of declining plausibility as the twenty-first century unfolds. A reckoning with problems of this family model is important for social scientists grasping for explanations of the steep fertility declines of the past ten to fifteen years (Kearney et al. 2022; Campisi et al. 2023). It is also important for policymakers who have come to believe a particular model of the family is prescriptive for solving all manner of social problems and who are now in need of at least supplementary if not alternative roadmaps for policy intervention.

2 ESTABLISHING THE GENDER EGALITARIAN FAMILY MODEL

In the 1970s two significant social transformations began in the advanced industrialized world. First, women's – particularly married women's – labor force participation rates (LFPRs) increased and the wage gap between men and women decreased. Second, fertility rates and marriage rates fell while divorce rates rose (Mincer 1985). After many decades' dominance of the male breadwinner/female housewife model of the family, such changes were disorienting and led to arguments that these transformations were related. As (married) women entered the workforce, households shifted their labor away from household production – including the

production of children – toward market production. Rising female wages and increased specialization in market rather than household production likewise decreased the utility of marriage and increased the likelihood of divorce (Becker 1981). An incompatibility between female labor force participation and the family thus expressed itself prior to the 1970s as a combination of low female LFPRs, high fertility, and low divorce rates. In the 1970s and 1980s it manifested as a combination of rising female LFPRs, falling fertility, and rising divorce rates.

In the 1990s scholars began to observe a surprising reversal of this relationship between household and market production. Sundström and Stafford (1992) appear to be the first to have done so in the case of Sweden. Comparing several EU countries in the early and mid-1990s, Chesnais (1996, 1998) later argued that "feminism and pronatalism work together" while citing the Swedish experience in particular. Esping-Andersen was the first to offer a simple statistical analysis. Comparing 19 OECD countries with data from 1960 and 1992, he showed how the relationship between female LFPR and the fertility rate "has, literally, flip-flopped," offering Nordic Denmark as representative of a welfare system in which "female careers and children can become fairly compatible" (Esping-Andersen 1999, 68). Ahn and Mira (2002) found that "the cross-country correlation between female [labor force] participation rates and fertility rates has reversed its sign" led by the Nordics (and the United States). Comparing OECD country data in the years 1970 and 1996, Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) argued likewise that in the Nordic countries (and the United States) "women have found ways to combine work and child rearing".

This transformation in the relationship between female market-based labor and the family is taken as a central dimension of the "gender revolution" that swept over Western countries in the 1970s and persists to this day. According to Goldscheider (2014; Goldscheider et al. 2015), this revolution consists of two halves. The first is marked by the contradictions of a gender

inegalitarian society undergoing the gender revolution. As gender equality progresses in the public sphere but lags in the private, rising female LFPR is met by low fertility and high divorce rates. Inegalitarian male-female relationships reinforced by the state's promotion of the male breadwinner/female housewife family model destabilizes and weakens the family. The second half of the gender revolution is realized in the private sphere. Gender egalitarianism takes hold within the family as fathers/husbands take up childcare and household responsibilities. High female LFPR is now matched with high(er) fertility and marriage (or long-term cohabitation) rates. Egalitarian male-female relationships reinforced by the state's promotion of a dual-earner/dual-carer family model stabilizes and strengthens the family.

While all Western countries have experienced the first half of the gender revolution, in only some – above all the Nordic countries – is the second half under way. Goldscheider et al. (2015) highlight Sweden as the country in which the second half of the gender revolution is most advanced, "strengthening families" through higher fertility and relationship stability. Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) argue that a new stable pro-family "gender egalitarian equilibrium" had been reached in Scandinavia (and the Netherlands) combining both high fertility and relationship stability. Anderson and Kohler (2015) find a "gender-equity dividend" in Sweden and Denmark that produces "less voluntary childlessness" and "relatively high and stable fertility levels". De Laat and Sevilla-Sanz (2011) argue that "any … stimulant of men's contribution to home production will also promote both fertility and women's labor force participation" pointing to evidence from Norway and Sweden. Boling (2015) agrees, adding "based on my comparative studies of work-family issues, there appears to be a similar correlation between gender equality and fertility rates". Doepke et al. (2023) dubs the complementarity of female careers and family

formation “a new era” based on “a new big idea,” a position that has found support from the International Monetary Fund (Doepke et al. 2022).

Macro level correlations such as that between fertility and female LFPR have long been the foundation of the gender egalitarian common sense. Micro level studies now also play an important role. Scholars have found positive correlations between fertility as well as family formation and gender egalitarian variables such as women’s level of education (Schwartz and Han 2014), women’s income (Vitale and Arpino 2016), men’s egalitarian attitudes (Sevilla-Sanz 2009), and men’s contributions to housework and childcare (Carlson et al. 2016). In defending the gender egalitarian position on family formation, Goldscheider et al. (2015, 218) find micro level studies to be more significant and convincing due to criticisms that macro level findings may be due to omitted variable bias or ecological fallacy. At the same time, micro level correlations still depend on macro level conditions. All the positive micro level correlations are concentrated in the gender egalitarian Nordic countries (and to some extent in the United States), demonstrating the importance of social context. Moreover it is macro level relationships that indicate whether the second half of the gender revolution is, or even can be, generalized at a societal level.

3 FERTILITY

3.1 Cross-national comparisons

The earliest and still foundational evidence for the gender egalitarian family model is cross-sectional national statistical relationships between fertility and various measures of the ‘gender revolution’. Consider the panels in **Figure 1** based on data from the year 2000. **Panel A**

reproduces Figure 12(b) from Doepke et al. (2023) that the authors use to demonstrate the positive relationship between fertility and female LFPR in the contemporary period. Here we see the familiar upward sloping line strongly influenced by data points from the Nordic countries clustered at the far right end of the distribution. As the authors limit themselves to the thirteen countries for which 1980 data is also available, **Panel B** goes further to include data from all OECD countries excepting Türkiye that were members prior to the organization's expansion into Latin America and post-communist Central Europe beginning in 1994. The relationship weakens somewhat (adjusted R^2 declines from 0.29 to 0.18) but does not change significantly with a more copious consideration of cases.

[Figure 1 here]

Several methodological critiques of this analysis have been levelled, although they have not been widely acknowledged. Kögel (2004), Engelhardt et al. (2004), and Lesthaeghe (2020) each argue that the reversal from the 1960s to the 1990s and beyond is only apparent. Kögel (2004) shows that OECD countries have notable heterogeneity that goes unobserved in a simple correlation. In particular, the female LFPRs of the Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain) has always been very low compared to that of the Nordic countries, while the magnitude of the fertility decline in the Mediterranean countries since the 1960s is very large in comparison to that of the Nordics. When this heterogeneity as well as fixed country-level effects are included in the statistical model, Kögel reports that, although the negative relationship between female LFPRs and fertility does weaken over time (although only for non-Nordic non-Mediterranean countries), the sign does not change. Lesthaeghe (2020) offers a similar critique,

attributing the 'flip flop' finding to the "split correlation fallacy". He also demonstrates significant heterogeneity across European countries in both the timing of their post-1960 fertility decline and in their recuperation of fertility at older maternal ages. By separating countries into two clusters ('early' and 'late' postponers) and calculating separate correlations between period fertility rates and female LFPRs, the sign reversal disappears. In a study of six Western countries, Engelhardt et al. (2004) show that for all six there is no change in sign from the earlier to the later period (defined by country-specific breaks in the long-run slope of the regression line over the period 1960-1999/2000), although the negative relationship does weaken in all six and in the US and Sweden becomes statistically insignificant.

A selection effect can also be seen in **Figure 1 Panel C**. Expanding the dataset from 23 to 32 OECD member countries (adding South Korea and the eight post-communist members of Central Europe), there is no relationship between total fertilty and female LFPRs in the year 2000 ($p=0.50$, $R^2=0.02$). The change from **Panel B** to **Panel C** is caused by including countries with high female LFPRs and very low period fertility rates, precisely the opposite of what the gender egalitarian family model expects for this period. Arguments that such states have a different gender history since 1945 and thus should not be included in the analysis either undermine the signal importance of a high female LFPR in gender egalitarianism or implicitly endorse the statistical criticisms reviewed above.

[Figure 2 here]

Contemporary data further undermine the gender egalitarian family model argument. **Figure 2** plots the same variables and countries as Figure 1 but with data averaged over the years

2017-19, the three most recent consecutive non-covid years for which we have comparative data. This period offers no empirical support for a positive relationship between female employment and fertility. In both **Panel A** and **Panel B** there is no statistically significant relationship between female labor force participation and the total fertility rate (A: p=0.51, R^2=0.04; B: p=0.45, R^2=0.03). What little positive slope the regression lines do have is driven by the outlier Italy. Although a statistically significant relationship does exist in the 32-country **Panel C** (p=0.02, R^2=0.18), this is driven by a single outlier: South Korea. Because of the country's extreme distance from all other data points (Cook's d=1.23), there is a reasonable case for removing it from the analysis. When one does so, the statistical significance in **Panel D** disappears (p=0.37, R^2=0.03).

3.2 The Nordic countries

While cross-national comparisons have always played a significant role in supporting the case for the gender egalitarian family model, so, too, has country-specific data from the Nordic region. In fact, the model itself rose out of the Nordic experience. Esping-Andersen (1999) first suggested the existence of a distinct Nordic family welfare regime defined by high state spending on family services, daycare, and elder home care enabling high female labor force participation rates, (relatively) low household labor hours, and high levels of household autonomy for young adults and the elderly. This model's viability rests on relatively robust total fertility rates "around replacement level," generally meaning 1.8 or above (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015, 4-6; Sobotka 2017 S23-24). While this claim was somewhat of an exaggeration,[2] Nordic period fertility in the 1990s and 2000s never fell below 1.5, the "very low" fertility line characteristic of

[2] Chesnais (1996: 732; 1998: 85) drew the Swedish total fertility rate floor at 1.6 but was quickly contradicted by the country's sub-1.6 TFRs over the years 1997-2001.

countries in Central and Southern Europe as well as East Asia (Chesnais 1996, 1998; McDonald 2000: 3, 6). Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) saw in the Nordic countries (as well as the Netherlands) "a new and dominant family equilibrium" rooted in "hegemonic gender egalitarianism". Goldscheider et al. (2015, 212) did "not predict fertility oscillations" in Nordic countries completing the gender revolution; instead near-replacement fertility was secured. Sobotka (2017) emphasized the solid foundation of stable Nordic cohort fertility rates beneath the tumult of period fertility rates. Being "post-transitional societies," they had reached a new equilibrium of postponed but not diminished fertility that "had stabilized close to the replacement level threshold" (S37).

Nordic fertility declines since c2010 cast such confidence of only a decade ago into doubt. **Figure 3** shows that as of 2023, every Nordic country except Iceland has a period fertility rate under 1.5, demography's traditional threshold for "low fertility". In every Nordic country except Denmark, 2023 TFRs were all-time recorded national lows. Not only the level but the pace of Nordic fertility decline is significant. Since the most recent peaks (Denmark: 2008; Iceland and Norway: 2009; Finland and Sweden: 2010), the TFR in Norway and Sweden has fallen more than 0.5 children per woman; in Finland and Iceland, more than 0.6. In relative terms, period fertility has fallen 20% in Denmark and around 30% in every other Nordic country. Excepting Sweden in the 1990s, these are extended rates of decline last experienced in the mid-1960s to early 1980s, the classic period of strong work-family conflicts that were supposedly resolved by the gender egalitarian family model.

[Figure 3 here]

The Swedish exception is an important one for the Nordic fertility story. From 1990 to 1999 Sweden's TFR declined by more than 0.6 children per woman in absolute terms and nearly 30% in relative terms. Yet it is not the fertility decline but its recuperation afterwards that is most noted. From 1999 to 2006 Sweden's fertility recovered rapidly and then stabilized above 1.8 for a decade. The immediate cause of this roller coaster ride was fertility postponement. Over the longer period 1990-2016 there was no quantum effect on Swedish fertility, only a tempo effect. Swedish women delayed childbirth until later maternal ages but did not decrease the total number of births over a lifetime. Completed cohort fertility of women born in 1940 (age 50 in 1990) down to women born in 1970 (age 20 in 1990) did not change at all, remaining within a remarkably narrow band of 1.97-2.06 for thirty years. Sobotka (2017) concluded that excessive attention was being paid to gyrating period fertility rates, distracting from the underlying fact of stable long-term cohort fertility rates. Thanks to the Swedish experience, Goldscheider et al. (2015, 215) confidently asserted that "young adults can wait until their early or even mid-30s to begin families" and still bear their desired two children over a lifetime.

Contemporary declines in Nordic cohort fertility are particularly damaging to such optimism. **Figure 4** shows completed fertility rates for annual cohorts of Nordic women born in 1940 down to 1972/3. Since the cohorts born in the early 1950s, lifetime fertility in Sweden and Norway has been generally stable while actually rising in Denmark and Finland. That being said, these are women who largely completed their fertility before the recent declines since c2010. The dashed lines in **Figure 4** show realized fertility rates for annual cohorts of Nordic women at age 40 born since 1972/3 down to 1982/3. Especially in light of fertility postponement in the Nordic countries, these are cohorts with a significant post-2010 fertility window. The dashed lines have lower values than the solid lines simply because some women bear children after age

40, although the gap between a cohort's true completed fertility rate and its rate at age 40 will be small.[3] With this caveat in mind, one can see a rather different pattern emerge in the more recent data. Since c2016 cohort fertility at age 40 has declined in all five Nordic countries. In Sweden, age 40 lifetime fertility of the 1983 cohort was the lowest since the cohort born in 1911. For Denmark, Norway, and Finland, their latest age 40 cohort data is the lowest on record while Iceland's is the second lowest on record surpassed only by the previous year.[4] Finland has even fallen below 1.75, the demographic literature's "very low" cohort fertility threshold.

[Figure 4 here]

More sobering still are Nordic cohort fertility projections. Hellstrand et al. (2021) take fertility data through 2018 for the five Nordic countries and project lifetime fertility for Nordic women born over the years 1975-88 (this includes women age 30-43 at the end of the dataset). Using four different forecasting models, they find that cohort fertility is likely to continue to decline slowly and then possibly stabilize in Sweden and Denmark, but decline sharply and continue to do so in Iceland, Finland and Norway. The forecasts are most stark for Finland. For Finnish cohorts born in the late 1980s, lifetime fertility is nearly certain to be below the 1.75 "very low" fertility threshold. Using a projection method they find produces "more reasonable" results, Hellstrand et al. find fertility for the late 1980s Finnish cohorts is likely to fall to 1.6, a level typical of contemporary Portugal rather than any Nordic country in recorded history.

[3] For example, in 2022 women age 40 and over in Sweden, Denmark and Norway added only 0.04-0.05 to the overall total fertility rate (Human Fertility Database).
[4] Age 40 cohort fertility by country, year of latest data = year of record low, and year range of available dataset: Denmark, 1983 (1901-83); Norway, 1982 (1952-82); Finland, 1983 (1924-83); Iceland, 1981 (1945-82).

According to this same projection method, they observe “the Nordic average completed fertility will decrease from 2.0 to an all-time low of 1.8”. Note that these projections do not incorporate the very steep fertility declines since 2018 and thus should be considered optimistic projections.

Depending on the country, it is the structure of Nordic fertility decline that makes a Swedish-style recuperation unlikely to impossible. Women in their 30s are the most resistant to period fertility decline, being more socially secure (in both relationships and employment) and having a greater fertility incentive (due to nearing the close of their fertility window) than women in their 20s, and having a significantly higher biologically-determined fertility possibility compared to women in their 40s. In short, they are precisely the demographic from which one expects to find fertility recuperation should it exist. Instead Nordic period fertility rates continued to decline through 2022 for women in their early 30s (age 30-34) in all five countries, while women in their late 30s (age 35-39) had rates that were either flat or declining depending on the country. Moreover, unlike the fertility decline of the 1990s that was strongly influenced by reduction in higher parity births (second or higher numbered children), since 2010 the vast majority of the fertility decline in the Nordic countries is in first births: from 57% of the total in Iceland to 91% in Denmark (Hellstrand et al. 2021). As a result, women’s mean age at first birth shows no sign of plateauing. In 2022/3 it was age 30 or above in each Nordic country except Iceland (Human Fertility Database). Hellstrand et al. thus expect the percentage of Nordic women remaining childless at the end of their fertility to rise, in turn driving future cohort fertility declines as the desire for children at the society level erodes.

Nordic political and cultural commitments to gender equality have not slackened since 2010, and thus the sharp fertility decline in the Nordic countries remains inexplicable from the gender egalitarian position. The empirical case for the gender egalitarian family model now

hangs on either a future fertility recovery as dramatic as that of the mid-20th century baby boom – evidence for which remains non-existent as of this writing – or a more modest claim that gender egalitarianism in both state policies and household gender relations are sustaining Nordic fertility above even lower levels to which they would otherwise fall. As Nordic fertility begins to look like the fertility of familialist continental Europe, however, the case for even this modest claim is weak. A more reasonable conclusion is that Nordic gender egalitarianism has proven no barrier to a global fertility trend undermining future births at their source.

4 UNION FORMATION AND STABILITY

The case for the gender egalitarian family model rests not only on fertility. A second, although less emphasized, empirical claim is that the model enjoys superior outcomes on union formation and stability. That is, not only are near-replacement numbers of children born to dual earner/dual carer couples, but those children are raised by two parents in stable long-lasting unions.

This would, of course, be a significant reversal from the 1970s-80s. Like low fertility, high levels of divorce and singleness are understood by family scholars as temporary manifestations of the contradictions in the male breadwinner/female housewife family model under conditions of female empowerment. Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) are most explicit in their presentation of a multiple-equilibrium model of family formation. “High fertility and stable marriages” exist both before and after the “female revolution” because these equilibria reflect people’s underlying desire for family and children. It is only during the revolution itself, when norms are disrupted and confused, that family formation fails. The Nordics are presented

as exemplars. In the late 1980s these countries had both the highest levels of gender equality and the highest levels of non-partnered women. In the late 2000s, however, the Nordics combined the highest levels of gender equality with moderate levels of non-partnered women. The return to union formation in the Nordic countries is offered as evidence that a new "gender egalitarian equilibrium" has emerged. Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015: 2-3) conclude that "the 'less family' trend was transitory rather than a harbinger of a new era".

Goldscheider et al. (2015) present a similar argument. The "weakening of the family" in the 1970s-80s was the product of an incomplete gender revolution. With that revolution's near-completion in countries like Sweden, a "strengthening of the family" including "greater family stability" is apparent. While the authors admit that marriage has diminished, stable cohabitation without marriage now exists as a substitute form of coupling. Goldscheier et al. (2015) support their claims by citing an array of micro-level studies showing greater union formation and stability among highly educated women and gender egalitarian men in Western countries. Sweden is again cited as the ideal setting in which "the spread of more egalitarian values on the national level and more progressive and family-supportive policies will reinforce the sharing of home tasks, which in turn will have a positive effect on fertility and family stability" (Goldscheier et al. 2015, 228).

Ohlsson-Wijk et al. (2020) supply supportive data for the case of Sweden. The country's negative trend in first-marriage formation from the mid-1960s to 1998 reversed in the 2000s and, after 2008, plateaued at levels similar to the late 1960s-early 1970s. While the fraction of ever-married women decreased for every Swedish cohort born from 1935 to the late 1960s, marriage levels have increased since the 1970 cohort. Ohlsson-Wijk et al. also "observe a tentative recent trend break in divorce risks … [and] a stabilization or even decline in levels of dissolved

marriages". Incorporating cohabitation as a form of union, the authors likewise find that "the overall level of union instability has also leveled off". They conclude that "the most recent trends in Swedish family dynamics may rather point towards more family stability than more family volatility" in line with the gender egalitarian family model projections.

Like the Nordic fertility story, optimism around family formation and stability is rooted in old data and trends that have reversed. The datasets used by Ohlsson-Wijk et al. (2020) extend only to 2016 at the latest. Using more recent data, Cantalini et al. (2024) show that the risk of first marriage in Sweden began declining in 2009 and steeply so after 2016. The likelihood of marrying in Sweden in 2021 was half of what it was in 2008 and some 25% less than the prior low in 1998. The country has also witnessed a continuous and marked decline in cohabitation since the state began recording such unions in 2011, with a particular decline in persons 29 years of age and older. Most notable are the steep declines in the likelihood of Swedish parents to form either first marriages or consensual unions; by 2021 they were doing so around half the rate or less of a decade earlier. Sweden witnessed a notable post-covid marriage recovery in 2022, yet total marriages that year were still lower than in 2019 and continued to fall in 2023 and again in 2024 (Statistics Sweden 2025).

Union formation is also weakening in Finland. Working from Finnish register data, Jalovaara and Andersson (2023) find that rates of union formation (including both marriage and cohabitation) among 18-49-year-olds have been in decline since the late 2000s and, much as in Sweden, sharply so after 2016. Rate declines have been steepest for men and women age 18-34, down 10-20% depending on age group and sex. Rates of separation have increased, nearly doubling from around 35 dissolutions per 1000 individuals in a union in 1989 to around 60 in 2019. Much of this is caused by high levels of instability among those under 30, whose rates of

breakup have risen from 70 to 140 per 1000 (ages 18-24) and 60 to 100 per 1000 (ages 25-29) since 2019. Even the oldest groups in the dataset have experienced a near-doubling of their rates of separation over the past 30 years. Hellstrand et al. (2022) reinforce these results, finding in Finland since the early 2000s "a long-term decline in marriage rates and increasing dissolution rates among cohabiting couples".

[Figure 5 here]

Cross-national data on union formation and dissolution are rare in comparison to fertility data. Nevertheless some comparisons can be made. Data on total first marriage rates (TFMRs) show that Nordic declines in marriage are not peculiar to Sweden and Finland. After increasing during the late 1990s and 2000s, **Panel A** of **Figure 5** shows that the TFMRs of all four large Nordic countries declined after 2008. In Finland, Norway and Sweden, rates have continued to fall since 2016, with Finnish and Norwegian TFMRs now well below their levels in the 1990s. This is not the case for all of Europe, however. **Panel B** shows rates for the six historically Catholic post-communist countries of Central Europe (CCE): Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. While the trend in both Croatia and Slovenia has been largely flat, Hungary and Slovakia have increased since c2010 while Lithuania and Poland had significant growth rates in the 2000s although with more recent reversals. Rates for Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain), held up regularly in the literature as the high income world's principal instances of family failure, are shown in **Panel C**. From the mid-1990s through the early 2010s, the Nordic and CCE countries had relatively similar and high TFMRs. Since the early 2010s these two blocs have diverged, so much so that the CCE countries (excepting

Slovenia) now have high TFMRs that most Western European countries have not experienced since the 1980s. At the same time the Nordic countries (excepting perhaps Denmark) have TFMRs most similar to those of Southern Europe.

Comparing the Nordic countries to the United States, generally considered an exemplar of family instability (Musick and Michelmore 2018), is also instructive. Relative to the four large Nordic countries, **Table 1** shows the United States has the lowest percentage of children age 0-17 living with two parents (not necessarily their biological parents) and the highest percentage of children age 0-17 living with one parent (Norway's figures are especially low most likely due to data collection differences). However if Black non-Hispanic children – a marked outlier group with an unusually low percentage of children living with two parents (43.9) and an unusually high percentage of children living with a single parent (50.3) – are removed from the figures, the US is essentially equivalent to Sweden. For the vast majority of Americans, family stability is quite similar to that in the Nordic countries.

[Table 1 here]

5 RETHEORIZING FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS

Relative to patriarchy, gender egalitarianism is a low fertility proposal (Folbre 1983, 1997; Keyfitz 1986; McDonald 2000; Campbell et al. 2013; Phan 2013). The important is 'how low?'. While fertility levels slightly below replacement pose few social or economic problems, significant challenges arise from TFRs below 1.5 (Striessnig and Lutz 2014). Prior to 2010, the

Population Division of the United Nations simply assumed an optimistic long-run "fertility floor" of 1.85 in its national and global population projections (UN Population Division 2011, 28). Such an assumption is no longer plausible. Currently every OECD and EU member country except Israel has a TFR below this level. Scholars with the 2021 Global Burden of Disease Study forecast such low fertility levels to persist indefinitely, declining in the high-income countries to a group average of just 1.37 by 2100. If the "contraceptive met need" associated with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals is reached, the figure drops to 1.34 (GBD 2100 Fertility and Forecasting Collaborators 2024). Yet proponents of the gender egalitarian family model presume that it will support population level fertility rates near replacement as the second half of the gender revolution takes hold. Such optimism rests on assumptions regarding human nature and gender relations that appear increasingly implausible, casting the theoretical foundations of the gender egalitarian model into doubt.

Three basic assumptions sustain belief in near-replacement fertility levels under conditions of gender egalitarianism. The first is a conviction that human beings are biologically and psychologically determined to seek out sexual coupling and reproduce. Goldscheider (2014, 1042; see also Goldscheider et al. 2015, 230-231) relies on this claim explicitly, convinced that "the strength of the passion between adults … is going to be with us. Thus, Malthus was right. … we will still have couples, and those couples will still have children."

A second assumption presumes women in particular want to bear and raise children at levels adequate for population near-replacement. Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015, 2) reject 'family decline' arguments in part because "studies of family values and attitudes show a surprising degree of preference stability regarding marriage, motherhood, and the desired number of children … the mean ideal family size has [not] declined much below replacement".

A third assumption claims men in Western countries will not only acquiesce to but embrace gender egalitarianism as the necessarily price of their desire for a family. Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015, 15, 21) observe socially successful women exhibit a "preference for men with egalitarian norms" and achieve gender egalitarian relationships by "persuad[ing] their male partners to adopt a more gender egalitarian behavior" (see also Goldscheider et al. 2015, 217). Such an outcome "will undoubtedly require a feminization of men's domestic role" but this is already occurring among high status couples and is likely to diffuse broadly over time (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015, 24).

These three assumptions serve an important theoretical role. They instruct researchers to search for socio-economic impediments to family formation and to the realization of desired fertility. Shortcomings in state-provided child care, education, job flexibility, the tax code, full-time female employment and the like thus emerge as signal barriers to the realization of a gender egalitarian equilibrium. The state is then tasked with manipulating labor market and educational institutions so as to allow this equilibrium to emerge. In cases of "cultural lag" in which behavioral change has yet to take advantage of new gender egalitarian material conditions (Anderson and Kohler 2015), states can promote gender norm change and the second half of the gender revolution through policy (Lammi-Taskula 2006; Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011; Unterhofer and Wrohlich 2017; Patnaik 2019).

But what if these assumptions underlying the gender egalitarian family model are unwarranted or dubious? If so, we have substantial reason to believe that the post-2010 declines in family formation and fertility are not simply temporary interruptions in the West's march toward a new family equilibrium, but instead indicators of deeper maladies.

Goldscheider's confidence in the power of human nature to both produce male-female sexual congress and for that congress to produce near replacement numbers of children is perhaps the least persuasive of the three assumptions. Data from the United States over the period 2017-19 show that 51% of American women age 15-49 are using near-100% effective forms of contraception: abstinence; female or male surgical sterilization; or long-acting reversible contraceptives such as intrauterine devices or birth control implants (Daniels and Abma 2020). If the link between passion and reproduction first became optional through the birth control pill sixty years ago, today it is tenuous. Moreover, infertility is a growing problem across Western countries having both social and biological causes. Average maternal age continues to increase. In 2022 women's mean age at first birth was 30 years or over in fifteen OECD countries and 29 years in another eight (Eurostat 2024a; national statistical databases). Fertility delayed is to some degree fertility foregone, especially at increasingly higher maternal ages. Falling fertility in Western countries may also have biological contributors. A recent study of childlessness in Finland and Sweden shows increasingly common conditions including obesity, diabetes, substance abuse, and mood disorders have significant associations with infertility (Liu et al. 2024).

The desire for replacement-level (or higher) fertility also plays an important role in support of the gender egalitarian family model. However, the confidence researchers should place in the concept of desired fertility is far from clear. The two-child norm is indeed strongly entrenched throughout Western countries (Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014; Hartnett and Gemmill 2020). At the same time, research has shown a weak relationship between fertility ideals and achieved fertility. Casting doubt on the usefulness of data on desired fertility, Ní Bhrolcháin and Beaujouan (2019, 47) find that "people often do not have well-defined, stable and coherent

[fertility] preferences and intentions from early in life, and are not consistent in carrying through those they report in surveys." Fertility decision-making models differentiate between a desire ("a wish to achieve an actionable goal") and an intention ("a decision-based commitment to pursue an actionable goal with an implementation plan"), giving rise to the possibility that people who desire children may at the same time have no intention to realize that desire (Miller 2011). Using a pioneering Spanish dataset on obstacles to realizing fertility desires, Esteve et al. (2021) found that partnership and health reasons combined were more determinative than economic reasons. This was especially the case for having a first child in which material reasons for unrealized fertility played little role at all (among women). A Pew Research survey of childless American adults found similar results (Minkin et al. 2024). Among those age 50 and over, the top three "major reasons" they never had children were: failing to find a suitable partner (33%); not wanting children (31%); and the ineffable "it just never happened" (39%). While policy interventions to 'remove obstacles' to fertility due to coupling difficulties, health problems, and cultural disinterest are imaginable, they seem far less likely to bear fruit compared to marginally important material interventions in which states are well-practiced.

Finally, men's growing commitment to gender egalitarianism is a fundamental premise of the gender egalitarian family model. While advocates have been optimistic on this trend, recent data should give pause. South Korea's unprecedented fertility rate appears to be caused in part by a very large gender gap in feminist values (Kim and Lee 2022). Polls in the United States show the youngest cohort of men, 'Gen Z' born since the mid-1990s, is the least committed to self-identifying as feminist and the most likely to claim victimization by sex discrimination (Cox 2023). Across the European Union, young men are spearheading "a backlash against feminism and sexual freedom" (Off et al. 2022). In the US, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the general

political-ideological gap between men and women age 18-29 has swelled since 2010 (Burn-Murdoch 2024). Evans (2024) argues that gendered ideological polarization in Western countries is driven by a combination of an increasingly feminized public culture, young men's downward economic mobility, and the segmentation of social media bubbles, all trends that seem unlikely to reverse anytime soon.

6 CONCLUSION

The case for the gender egalitarian family model has been premature at best. Its empirical basis is in countries (the Nordics) and a time period (the 1990s and 2000s) that have proven to be exceptional and unsustainable rather than as harbingers of a new and stable family equilibrium. This is not to say that gender egalitarianism itself is ephemeral. It is to say instead that the conflicts and contradictions between the gender revolution and the family continue to await their resolution.

REFERENCES

Ahn, Namkee and Pedro Mira. 2002. "A Note on the Changing Relationship Between Fertility and Female Employment Rates in Developed Countries." *Journal of Population Economics* 15(4): 667-682. https://doi.org/10.1007/s001480100078

Anderson, Thomas and Hans-Peter Kohler. 2015. "Low Fertility, Socioeconomic Development, and Gender Equity." *Population and Development Review* 41(3): 381-407. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00065.x

Becker, Gary S. 1981. *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Boling, Patricia. 2015. *The Politics of Work-Family Policies: Comparing Japan, France, Germany and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brewster, Karin L. and Ronald R. Rindfuss. 2000. "Fertility and Women's Employment in Industrialized Nations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 271-296. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.271

Burn-Murdoch, John. 2024. "A new global gender divide is emerging." *Financial Times*, 26 January.

Campbell, Martha M., Ndola Prata and Malcolm Potts. 2013. "The Impact of Freedom on Fertility Decline." *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care* 39: 44-50. https://doi.org/10.1136/jfprhc-2012-100405

Campisi, Nicholas, Hill Kulu, Júlia Mikolai, Sebastian Klüsener and Mikko Myrskylä. 2023. "A Spatial Perspective on the Unexpected Nordic Fertility Decline: The Relevance of Economic and Social Contexts." *Applied Spatial Analysis and Policy* 16:1-31. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12061-022-09467-x

Cantalini, Stefano, Sofi Ohlsson-Wijk and Gunnar Andersson. 2024. "Cohabitation and Marriage Formation in Times of Fertility Decline: The Case of Sweden in the Twenty-First Century." *European Journal of Population* 40(15). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-024-09703-9

Carlson, Daniel L., Sarah Hanson, and Andrea Fitzroy. 2016. "The Division of Child Care, Sexual Intimacy, and Relationship Quality in Couples." *Gender & Society* 30(3): 442-466. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243215626709

Chesnais, Jean-Claude. 1996. "Fertility, Family, and Social Policy in Contemporary Western Europe." *Population and Development Review* 22(4): 729-739. https://doi.org/10.2307/2137807

Chesnais, Jean-Claude. 1998. "Below-replacement Fertility in the European Union (EU-15): Facts and Policies, 1960-1997." *Review of Population and Social Policy* 7(101): 83-101. https://www.ipss.go.jp/publication/e/R_s_p/No.7_P83.html

Cox, Daniel A. 2023. "Why Young Men are Turning Against Feminism." Survey Center on American Life, American Enterprise Institute (Accessed 12 June 2024). https://www.americansurveycenter.org/newsletter/why-young-men-are-turning-against-feminism/

de Laat, Joost and Almudena Sevilla-Sanz. 2011. "The Fertility and Women's Labor Force Participation Puzzle in OECD Countries: The Role of Men's Home Production." *Feminist Economics* 17(2): 87-119. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2011.573484

Doepke, Matthias, Anne Hannusch, Fabian Kindermann and Michèle Tertilt. 2022. "The New Economics of Fertility." *Finance & Development* (September): 58-60.

Doepke, Matthias, Anne Hannusch, Fabian Kindermann and Michèle Tertilt. 2023. "The Economics of Fertility: A New Era." *Handbook of the Economics of the Family* 1(1): 151-254.

Engelhardt, Henriette, Tomas Kögel and Alexia Prskawetz. 2004. “Fertility and Women’s Employment Reconsidered: A Macro-Level Time-Series Analysis for Developed Countries, 1960-2000.” *Population Studies* 58(1): 109-120. https://doi.org/10.1080/0032472032000167715

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 1999. *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 2014. “Gender Egalitarianism and the Resurgent Family.” *Stato e Mercato* 100 (April): 127-144. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24650931

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta and Francesco C. Billari. 2015. “Re-theorizing Family Demographics.” *Population and Development Review* 41(1): 1-31. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00024.x

Esteve, Albert, Mariona Lozano, Diederik Boertien, Ryohei Mogi and Qi Chu. 2021. “Three Decades of Lowest-Low Fertility in Spain, 1991-2018.” https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/45j23

Eurostat. 2024a. “Fertility indicators.” (Last updated 3 September 2024; accessed 29 January 2025). https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_FIND

Eurostat 2024b. “First marriage rates by age and sex.” (Last updated 11 November 2024; accessed 30 January 2025). https://doi.org/10.2908/DEMO_NSINRT

Eurostat. 2024c. “Share of children (aged less than 18) living with their parents by type of household - EU-SILC survey.” (Last updated 12 June 2024). https://doi.org/10.2908/ILC_LVPS20

Evans, Alice. 2024. “What Prevents & What Drives Gendered Ideological Polarisation?” *The Great Gender Divergence* [Substack], 27 January. https://www.ggd.world/p/what-prevents-and-what-drives-gendered

Folbre, Nancy. 1983. “Of Patriarchy Born: The Political Economy of Fertility Decisions.” *Feminist Studies* 9(2): 261-284. https://doi.org/10.2307/3177490

Folbre, Nancy. 1997. “The Future of the Elephant-Bird.” *Population and Development Review* 23(3): 647-654. https://doi.org/10.2307/2137581

GBD 2021 Fertility and Forecasting Collaborators. 2024. “Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950-2021, With Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021.” *The Lancet* 403(10440): P2057-2099. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)00550-6

Goldscheider, Frances. 2014. “Rescuing the Family from the Homophobes and Antifeminists: Analyzing the Recently Developed and Already Eroding ‘Traditional’ Notions of Family and Gender.” *Case Western Law Review* 64(3): 1029-1044. https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/cwrlrv64&i=1074

Goldscheider, Frances, Eva Bernhardt and Trude Lappegård. 2015. “The Gender Revolution: A Framework for Understanding Changing Family and Demographic Behavior.” *Population and Development Review* 41(2): 207-239. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00045.x

Hartnett, Caroline Sten and Alison Gemmill. 2020. “Recent Trends in US Childbearing Intentions.” *Demography* 57(6): 2035-2045. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-020-00929-w

Hellstrand, Julia, Jessica Nisén, Victor Miranda, Peter Fallesen, Lars Dommermuth and Mikko Myrskylä. 2021. “Not Just Later, but Fewer: Novel Trends in Cohort Fertility in the Nordic Countries.” *Demography* 58(4): 1373-1399. https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-9373618

Hellstrand, Julia, Jessica Nisén and Mikko Myrskylä. 2022. “Less Partnering, Less Children, or Both? Analysis of the Drivers of First Birth Decline in Finland Since 2010.” *European Journal of Population* 38: 191-221. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-022-09605-8

Human Fertility Database. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany) and Vienna Institute of Demography (Austria). Available at www.humanfertility.org (data downloaded on 12 June 2024).

Jalovaara, Marika and Linus Andersson. 2023. "A Register-Based Account of Period Trends in Union Prevalence, Entries, and Exits by Educational Level for Men and Women in Finland." *Demographic Research* 48(14): 373-386. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48728209

Kearney, Melissa S., Phillip B. Levine and Luke Pardue. 2022. "The Puzzle of Falling US Birth Rates Since the Great Recession." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 36(1): 151-176. DOI: 10.1257/jep.36.1.151

Keyfitz, Nathan. 1986. "The Family That Does Not Reproduce Itself." *Population and Development Review* 12S: 139-154. https://doi.org/10.2307/2807898

Kim, Hannah June and Chungjae Lee. 2022. "The 2022 South Korean Presidential Election and the Gender Divide Among the Youth." *Pacific Affairs* 95(2): 285-308. https://doi.org/10.5509/2022952285

Kögel, Tomas. 2004. "Did the Association Between Fertility and Female Employment within OECD Countries Really Change Its Sign?" *Journal of Population Economics* 17: 45-65. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-003-0180-z

Kotsadam, Andreas and Henning Finseraas. 2011. "The State Intervenes in the Battle of the Sexes: Causal Effects of Paternity Leave." *Social Science Research* 40(6): 1611-1622. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.06.011

Lammi-Taskula, Johanna. 2006. "Nordic Men on Parental Leave: Can the Welfare State Change Gender Relations?" In Anne Lise Ellingsæter and Arnlaug Leira, eds. *Polticising Parenthood in Scandinavia*. Bristol: Policy Press, 79-100. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781847421593.ch004

Lesthaeghe, Ron. 2020. "The Second Demographic Transition, 1986-2020: Sub-Replacement Fertility and Rising Cohabitation – A Global Update." *Genus* 76(10). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-020-00077-4

Liu, Aoxing, Evelina T. Akimova, Xuejie Ding, Sakari Jukarainen, Pekka Vartiainen, Tuomo Kiiskinen, Sara Koskelainen, Aki S. Havulinna, Mika Gissler, Stefano Lombardi, Tove Fall, Melinda C. Mills and Andrea Ganna. 2024. "Evidence from Finland and Sweden on the Relationship Between Early-Life Diseases and Lifetime Childlessness in Men and Women." *Nature Human Behaviour* 8: 276-287. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01763-x

McDonald, Peter. 2000. "Gender Equity in Theories of Fertility Transition." *Population and Development Review* 26(3): 427-439. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2000.00427.x

Miller, Warren B. 2011. "Differences Between Fertility Desires and Intentions: Implications for Theory, Research and Policy." *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 9: 75-98. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41342806

Mincer, Jacob. 1985. "Intercountry Comparisons of Labor Force Trends and of Related Developments: An Overview." *Journal of Labor Economics* 3(1): S1-S32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2534996

Minkin, Rachel, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Carolina Aragão. 2024. "The Experiences of U.S. Adults Who Don't Have Children." Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/07/25/the-experiences-of-u-s-adults-who-dont-have-children/

Musick, Kelly and Katherine Michelmore. 2018. "Cross-National Comparisons of Union Stability in Cohabiting and Married Families with Children." *Demography* 55(4): 1389-1421. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0683-6

Ní Bhrolcháin, Máire and Éva Beaujouan. 2019. "Do People Have Reproductive Goals? Constructive Preferences and the Discovery of Desired Family Size." In Robert Schoen, ed. *Analytical Family Demography*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 27-56.

Off, Gefjon, Nicholas Charron and Amy Alexander. 2022. "Who Perceives Women's Rights as Threatening to Men and Boys? Explaining Modern Sexism among Young Men in Europe." *Frontiers in Political Science* 4. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.909811

OECD. 2024a. "Employment and unemployment by five-year age group and sex – indicators." (Last updated 12 June 2024).

OECD. 2024b. "Fertility rates (indicator)." (Accessed on 6 June 2024). https://doi.org/10.1787/8272fb01-en

Ohlsson-Wijk, Sofi, Jani Turunen and Gunnar Andersson. 2020. "Family Forerunners? An Overview of Family Demographic Change in Sweden." In D. Nicole Farris and A.J.J. Bourque, eds. *International Handbook on the Demography of Marriage and the Family*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 65-77.

Patnaik, Ankita. 2019. "Reserving Time for Daddy: The Consequences of Fathers' Quotas." *Journal of Labor Economics* 37(4): 1009-1059. https://doi.org/10.1086/703115

Phan, Ly. 2013. "Women's Empowerment and Fertility Changes." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 39(1/2): 49-75. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43488406

Schwartz, Christine R. and Hongyun Han. 2014. "The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and Trends in Marital Dissolution." *American Sociological Review* 79(4): 605-629. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414539682

Sevilla-Sanz, Almudena. 2009. “Household Division of Labor and Cross-Country Differences in Household Formation Rates.” *Journal of Population Economics* 23(1): 225-249. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-009-0254-7

Sobotka, Tomáš. 2017. “Post-transitional Fertility: The Role of Childbearing Postponement in Fuelling the Shift to Low and Unstable Fertility Levels.” *Journal of Biosocial Science* 29(S1): S20-S45. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932017000323

Sobotka, Tomáš and Éva Beaujouan. 2014. “Two is Best? The Persistence of a Two-Child Family Ideal in Europe.” *Population and Development Review* 40(3): 391-419. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2014.00691.x

Statistics Sweden. 2024. “Total Fertility Rate by Region and Sex. Year 2000 – 2023.” (Last updated 14 May 2024). Matrix 000001J4. https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START__BE__BE0101__BE0101H/FruktsamhetSum/

Statistics Sweden. 2025. “Number of marriages and divorces per month by region. Year 2000 – 2024.” (Last updated 14 January 2025). Matrix 0000052L. https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/goto/en/ssd/ManadGiftSkilsm

Striessnig, Erich and Wolfgang Lutz. 2014. “How Does Education Change the Relationship Between Fertility and Age-Dependency Under Environmental Constraints? A Long-Term Simulation Exercise.” *Demographic Research* 30(16): 465-492. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26348207

Sundström, Marianne and Frank P. Stafford. 1992. “Female Labour Force Participation, Fertility and Public Policy in Sweden.” *European Journal of Population* 8(3): 199-215. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20164620

UN Population Division. 2011. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision – Volume I: Comprehensive Tables*. New York: United Nations.

US Census Bureau. 2023. *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) 2023*. Washington: US Census Bureau.

Unterhofer, Ulrike and Katharina Wrohlich. 2017. "Fathers, Parental Leave and Gender Norms." Discussion Paper 1657. German Institute for Economic Research. http://hdl.handle.net/10419/157350

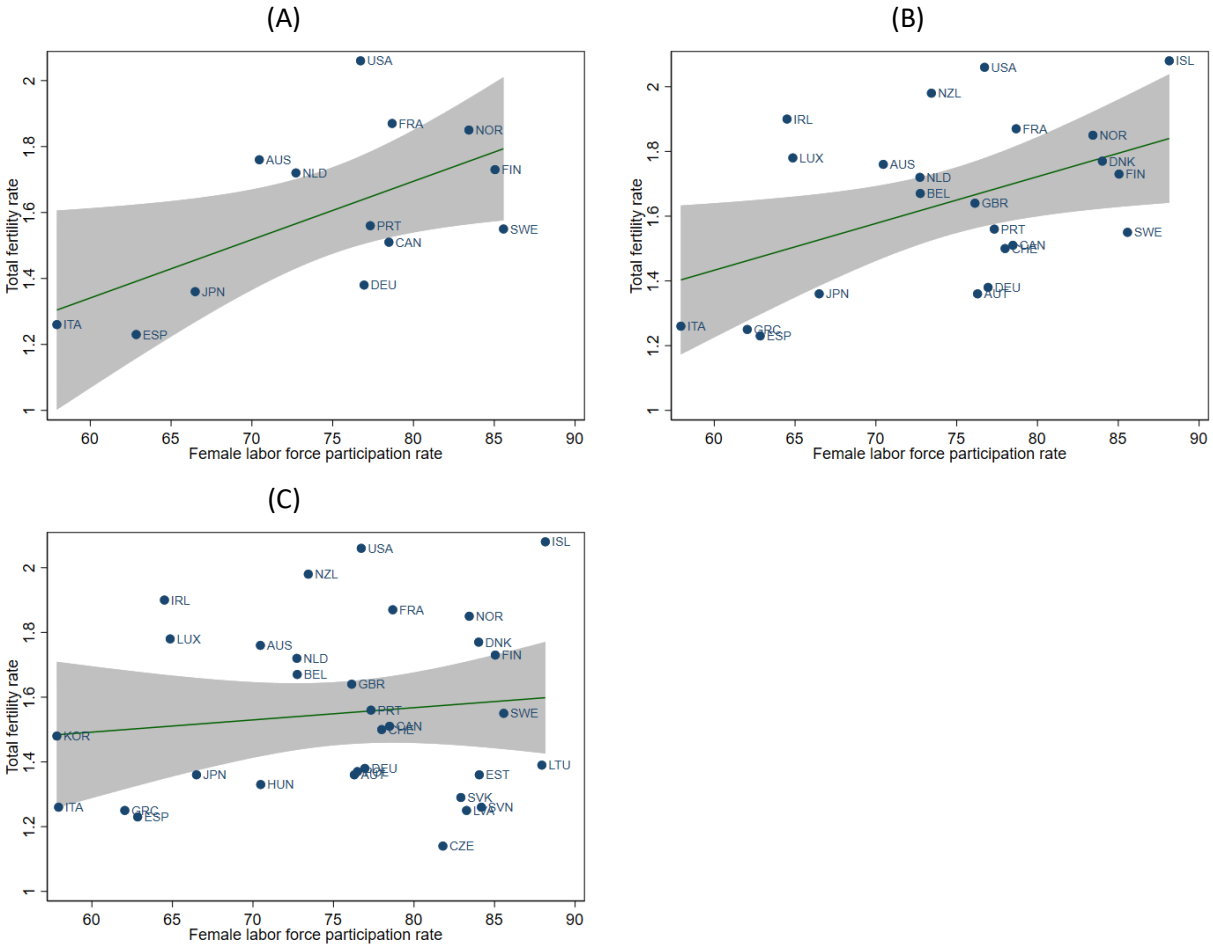
Vitali, Agnese and Bruno Arpino. 2016. "Who Brings Home the Bacon? The Influence of Context on Partners' Contributions to the Household Income." *Demographic Research* 35(41): 1213-1244. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26332109

TABLE 1: CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS BY COUNTRY, 2023

Variable	US	US2	DEN	FIN	NOR	SWE
Percent of children 0-17 living with two parents	71.1	75.6	81.9	79.6	72.0	76.9
Percent of children 0-17 living with a single parent	25.1	21.0	17.6	19.5	23.4	21.9

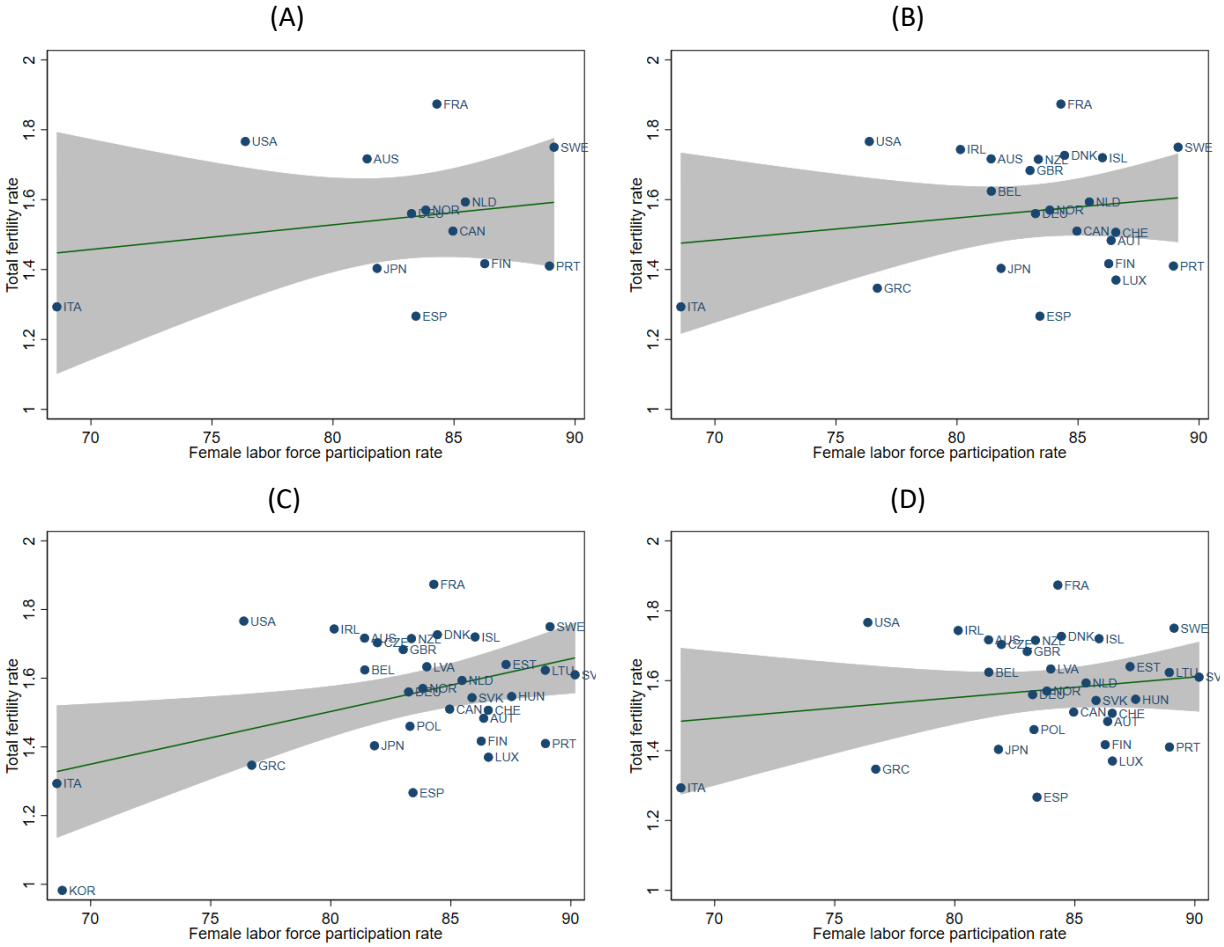
Note: US2 = United States except Black only non-Hispanic. Data for Norway has a break in the time series beginning in 2021 due to a changed weighting routine. This methodological change resulted in a dramatic decline in the share of children living with two married parents.
Sources: US Census Bureau (2023); Eurostat (2024c).

FIGURE 1: Fertility and women's labor force participation across OECD countries, 2000



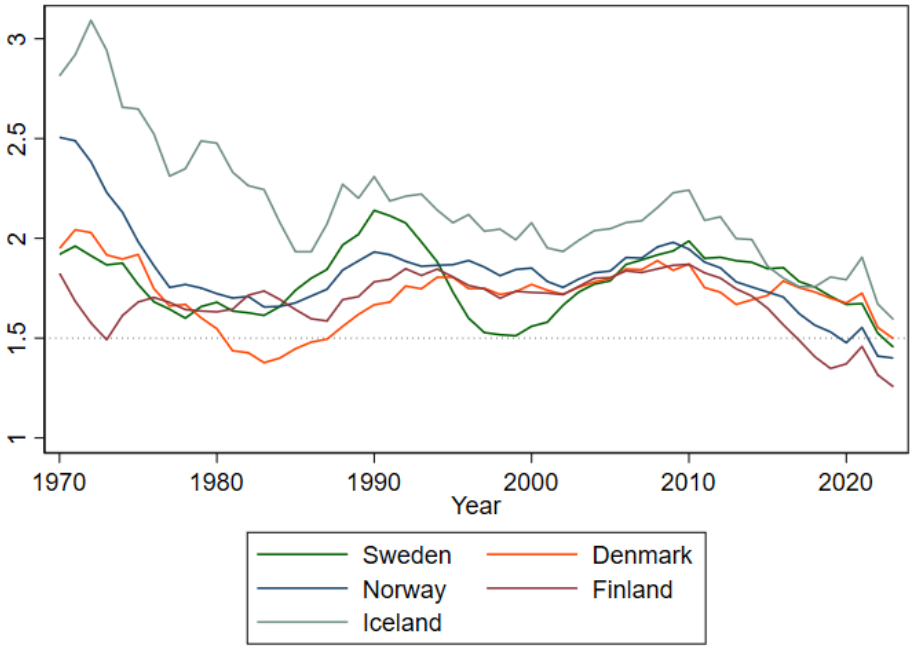
Note: Panel A is reproduced from Dopeke et al. (2023). Panel B expands the Doepke dataset from 13 to 23 countries by including all pre-1994 OECD member countries except Türkiye. Panel C expands to 32 OECD countries, adding to South Korea and the 8 post-communist OECD member countries of Central Europe. The female labor force participation rate is for women age 25-54. The gray space around the regression line is the 95% confidence interval.
Sources: OECD (2024a; 2024b).

FIGURE 2: Fertility and women's labor force participation across OECD countries, 2017-19



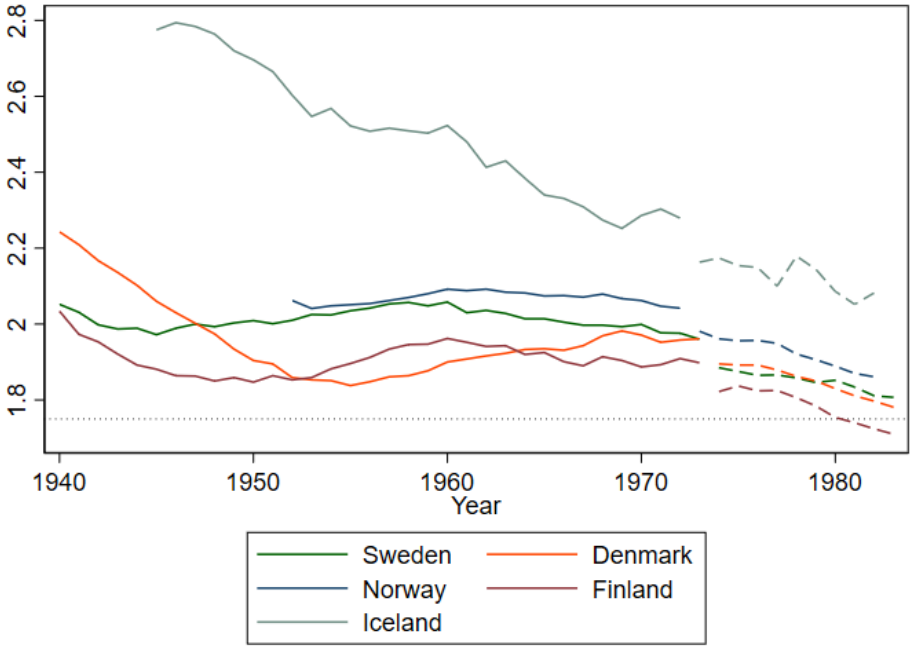
Note and sources same as Figure 1.

FIGURE 3: Total fertility rates for the Nordic countries, 1970-2023



Source: Human Fertility Database, 1970-2023, and national statistical agencies, 2023.

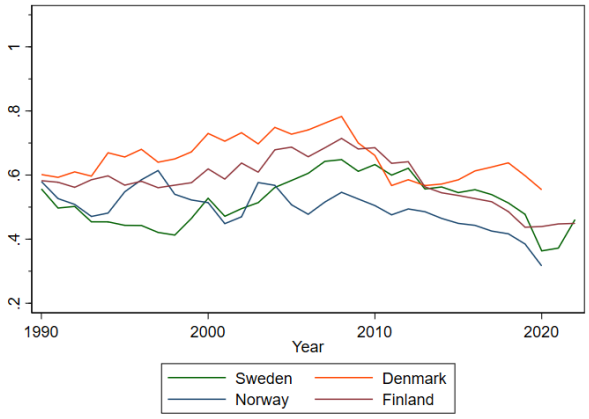
FIGURE 4: Completed cohort fertility rates for the Nordic countries, 1940-1982/3 cohorts



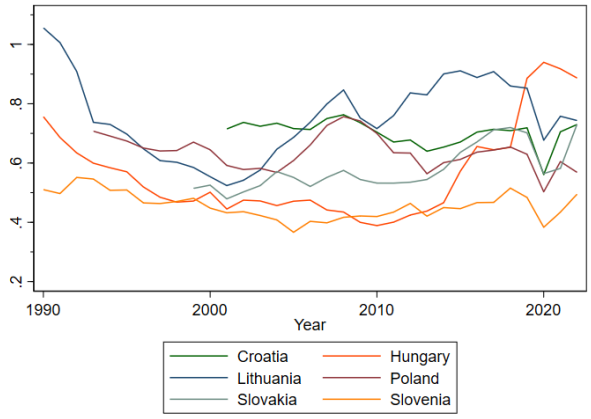
Note: Completed cohort data through 1973 for Sweden, Denmark, and Finland; 1972 for Norway and Iceland. Cohort fertility data at age 40 appears in dashed lines for cohorts 1974-83 for Sweden, Denmark, and Finland; 1973-82 for Norway and Iceland.
Source: Human Fertility Database.

FIGURE 5: Total first marriage rate, women ages 15-49, by country, 1990-2022 (or latest year)

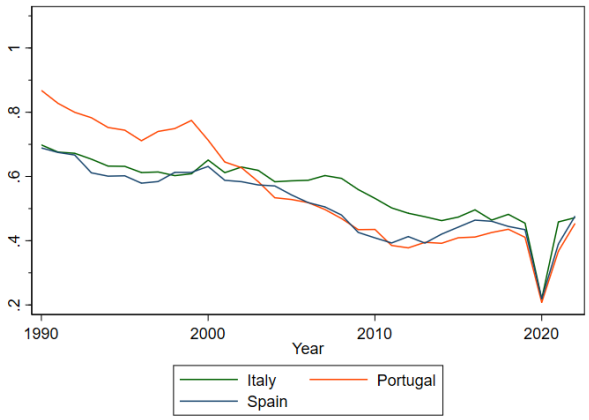
(A)



(B)



(C)



Note: Annual rates are the sum of five-year age groups for women age 15-49. Cubic spline interpolation was used to fill in a small number of missing values.
Source: Eurostat (2024b).