



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on July 27, 2011

## Defend It Like Beckham: Soccer Star Condemned for Having Too Many Children

In reality, though, the irresponsibility lies with McVeigh.

It's hard to write an 850-word piece in which virtually every sentence serves to deceive, but McVeigh might have birthed just such an illegitimate bit of childishness. She quotes "campaigners," environmentalists, a Green MP, and others who all bleat the same message: The sky is falling due to overpopulation. And we'll all end up languishing in a *Soylent Green* sewer of endless humanity unless, as zoologist David Attenborough says, we eliminate the "absurd taboo" against discussing family size.



Okay, let's discuss it.

Attenborough is right: There is a population problem in the world.

It is that birthrates have been collapsing for decades, a phenomenon that has grave implications for society.

Yes, you read that right. Sure, I know what you might have heard, and it's a result of misinformation like McVeigh's — and is also why she can get away with peddling such pap. But the truth is that birthrates are below replacement level in more than 70 nations worldwide; among these are not only every country you could call "Western" save New Zealand (where the figure is right at replacement level, 2.1 children per couple), but also all of Eastern Europe and much of Asia. In fact, this demographic demise affects even nations you wouldn't suspect; for example, while Mexico's birthrate is still above replacement level, it's falling at an unprecedented rate. And Uruguay, Kazakhstan, and Algeria have birthrates of, respectively, 1.94, 1.88, and 1.82.

Now, some may ask, "What's the problem? Maybe overpopulation is no longer a pressing issue, but isn't this a bit like anti-littering campaigns? Just because fewer people litter doesn't mean you stop emphasizing cleanliness. So why not continue encouraging 'family planning'?" Well, we're ignoring civilizational planning.

It isn't just that McVeigh is presenting a cure when there is no disease; it's that, as demographer Phillip Longman put it, "The ongoing global decline in human birthrates is the single most powerful force affecting the fate of nations and the future of society in the 21st century." And I'll illustrate what he's referring to with analogies involving the small nation called a family.

It is stating the obvious to say that if a family stops reproducing, it disappears. The same is true of national families — and the writing is on the wall. To provide just a few examples, Russia's population (birthrate 1.4) is declining by 700,000 people per year; other former Eastern Bloc nations, such as Lithuania (1.22), are experiencing similar declines; and in Spain and Italy there are regions in which the



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birthrate is below 1. In fact, some countries, such as Russia, Poland, and France, are so concerned about this demographic demise that they're offering citizens substantial monetary incentives to bear children. But it's not working. You can't solve a cultural problem with a political solution.

But you can deceptively politicize a cultural problem. Britain's native population is exhibiting the same demographic malaise as its continental neighbors, yet you wouldn't know it reading McVeigh's article. She quotes chief executive of the Optimum Population Trust Simon Ross, who also thinks the Beckhams are "bad role models" and says, "There's no point in people trying to reduce their carbon emissions and then increasing them 100% by having another child. England is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and the fastest-growing in population terms in Europe. In 15 years we'll have an extra 10 million people here."

This is strikingly dishonest. While it leads the reader to believe that Englishmen are breeding like rabbits, the truth is that the nation — whose birthrate of 1.9 is below replacement level — is only gaining population because of *immigration*. Moreover, the 1.9 figure reflects an increase over the recent past that is largely attributable to births among the foreign-born population. To compare fecundity, the birthrate among Britain's native population is less than 1.7; among those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent it is approximately 3. And, writes Express.co.uk, "Only one baby in 10 born in some parts of the country has a mother of white British origin."

So, if Mr. Ross is so concerned about Britain's burgeoning population, did he protest when his fellow statisticians decided to flood his nation with foreigners? Or is the "absurd taboo" against honestly discussing immigration one that he wants to preserve?

But now let's get back to the woes experienced by a graying national family. In ages past, it was problematic if a couple was childless or had few children because it made it unlikely that there would be anyone to perform necessary labor, and care for them, in their old age. Who would till the fields or go hunting? Who would tend to hearth and home? Today, of course, the wider national family can step into that breach (although it may not be ideal care), but what happens when that wider family also fails to be fruitful?

The reality is no different. Young people are society's worker bees; they inherit the workaday world that their elders exit upon retirement. When there are too few of them, it's harder to keep the machinery of civilization running, create wealth, and fund social programs. *Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby addressed this recently, writing:

Yes, more babies mean more mouths and therefore more consumption. But more babies also mean more minds and arms and spines — and therefore more new ideas, more effort, more creativity, more initiative, more enterprise. "Human beings do not just consume, they also produce," writes George Mason University economist Bryan Caplan. "The world economy is not like a party where everyone splits a birthday cake; it is more like a potluck where everyone brings a dish."

And when too many birthday cakes have too many candles, you have fewer dishes. To use a common analogy, a society enjoying demographic health is like a pyramid in which its youngest members occupy the wide base and the age increases as you move toward the top. In a graying civilization, however, that pyramid can be turned on its head and become top-heavy with the aged. And such a structure can easily topple over.

So the irony here is that the low birthrates statisticians encourage threaten the welfare state they hold just as dear. Unfortunately, this Demographic Winter also threatens Western civilization, as the people who



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created it are failing to recreate themselves. And these are the matters we need to discuss — but we don't. Because when leftists call for honest debate about population, it's much like Attorney General Eric Holder's complaint that Americans are "cowards" when discussing race: They don't want to hear the truth, just mantra-like repetition of leftist talking points.



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