

C 3.205/8:91-6

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

APR 29 1992

# Statistical Brief

## The Shifting Fertility Patterns of American Women

In 1989, for the first time since the close of the "baby boom," the number of annual births surged over the 4 million mark. Does this signal the start of another baby boom? No, say recent statistics from the Current Population Survey. This Brief examines current fertility patterns and compares them to past patterns. It also takes a glimpse at what fertility patterns today might portend for the future.

### Compared to their mother's generation, more baby boom women will never give birth.

One reason for the last baby boom was that relatively few women were childless: only 8 percent of women born in 1935, for instance, never gave birth. In contrast, about 14 to 17 percent of women born during the baby boom (1946 - 1964) will be childless. This is much closer to the childless levels of around 20 percent for women born between the Civil War and World War I.

### More women are delaying childbirth.

Recently, many women have decided to postpone childbearing.

As the graph below shows, the proportion of women who have given birth by age 30 has reached near-record lows for those born in the last 100 years.

In contrast, fertility rates for women in their thirties rose dramatically during the 1980's, from 60 births per 1,000 women aged 30-34 in 1980 to 80 births per 1,000 in 1990. The comparable increase for women aged 35-39 years was from 27 to 37 births per 1,000. Births to women in their thirties comprised 19 percent of all births in 1976 to women aged 18 to 44 years; by 1990, they comprised 33 percent.

Why did fertility increase in the 1980's? Three factors caused the annual numbers of births to rise from 3.6 million in 1980 to almost 4.2 million in 1990. First, by 1990,

more women were in their thirties: 40 percent of women aged 18 to 44 years in 1990 versus 32 percent in 1976. Second, more of these women are having children. Having delayed childbearing in their twenties, fertility rates rose for older women in the 1980's, increasing overall fertility levels. A third factor is immigration, addressed later in this Brief.

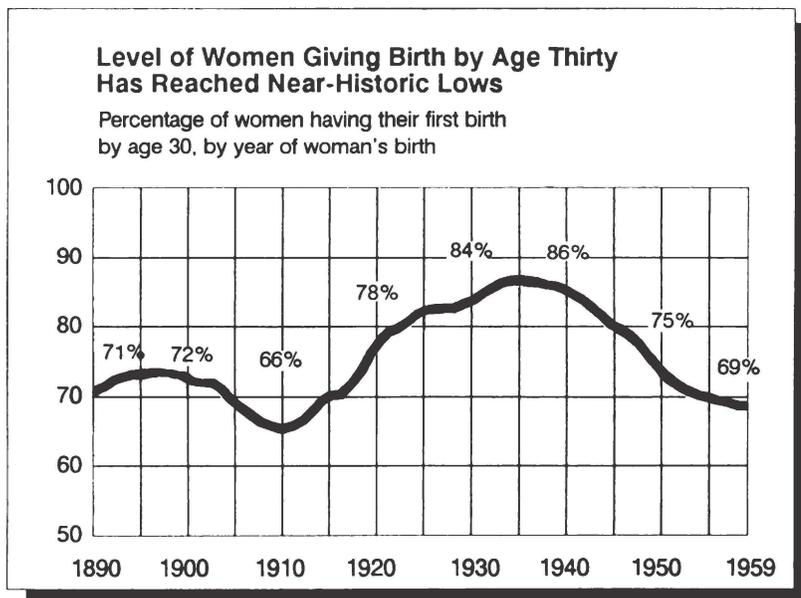
### Many childless women in their thirties do expect to give birth someday.

These days, more women who are childless at age 30 say they expect to have a future birth. Even if women who are uncertain about having future births remain childless, nonetheless, 41 percent of childless women 30 to 34 years old in 1990 expect to give birth, up from 30 percent in 1980.



SB/91-6  
Issued January 1992

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economics and Statistics Administration  
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS



**Immigrants contribute to fertility rise.**

Large increases in the immigrant population during the 1980's also contributed to the overall rise in fertility. Between 1983 and 1988, the foreign-born population rose from 12.4 million to 15.1 million. About 390,000 babies were born to foreign-born women in 1988 (11 percent of all U.S. births), up from 271,000 in 1983.

In 1988, foreign-born women aged 18-44 years had fertility rates of 96 births per 1,000 women, compared with 67 per 1,000 for native-born women. Unless current immigration levels drop drastically, particularly from Mexico, one should expect the immigrants' share of all births to rise.

**No new boom expected soon.**

The Census Bureau projects that women born during the 1950's will end their childbearing years

with two children each, compared with the better than three children each born to women who were born in the 1930's. The Census Bureau doesn't foresee a baby boom in the near future, given the tendency of women today to have fewer children, the shift to fertility at older ages, and the projected decline in the number of women in their thirties. But an increase in immigration levels could play an important role in determining overall levels of fertility.

**More information:**

*Studies in American Fertility*, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 176. For sale by U.S. Government Printing Office. Stock No. 803-005-10029-4. \$4.

*Fertility of American Women: June 1990*, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 454. For sale by U.S. Government Printing Office. Stock No. 803-005-00054-1. \$4.

**Contacts:**

Fertility —  
Martin O'Connell or  
Amara Bachu  
301-763-5303

Statistical Briefs —  
Robert Bernstein  
301-763-1584

*This Brief is one of a series that presents information of current interest. It may include data from businesses, households, or other sources. All statistics are subject to sampling variability, as well as survey design flaws, respondent classification and reporting errors, and data processing mistakes. We have taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources.*

