



# *Rodney's Take*

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## **The Baby Slump and the Southern Border**

Years ago, I wrote an article titled, “We Need More Sex.” I’ve since followed it up with several articles about how we could be at the beginning of a baby boomlet as the Millennials bump up against their biological clocks. The latest positive sign was rebounding births in late 2020 and early 2021, but it wasn’t to be. While births rose 1% from 2020 to 2021, the first increase since 2014, births were flat in 2022. This doesn’t bode well.

The total fertility rate (TFR), or the number of children that each woman of child-bearing age is expected to have over her lifetime, needs to stay at or above 2.1 to keep a population from shrinking. A TFR of 2.1 allows for replacement of both parents, plus a little bit for mortality. Other than in an odd year here or there, the TFR for the U.S. hasn’t been at or above 2.1 since the early 1970s. In 2020, our TFR dropped to an all-time low of 1.637. We’ve recovered a bit, but not much. The TFR was 1.664 in 2021 and 1.665 in 2022.

Some of this is good news. Teen pregnancies have dropped dramatically since the 1980s, presumably resulting in fewer unwanted pregnancies. But a falling birth rate for women ages 20 to 29 isn’t a good thing, because we’re not replacing those “lost kids” with children born to mothers in their 30s or even 40s. Births in those older age groups have risen over the past 20 years, but not nearly enough to make up for falling births among younger moms.

Falling birth rates mean smaller age cohorts in the years to come. This will put pressure on schools as enrollments drop, employers as fewer people

apply for jobs, and governments as fewer people pay taxes. None of this is news. We've been researching and writing on demographic changes for decades. The change is that the expected rising wave of Millennial moms has failed to materialize. To keep the nation's economic engine moving, we need more people. This is where immigration can be a boon to our economy, if only we can figure out a rational system.

China has 1.4 million foreign-born people living within its borders. The U.S. has 48 million. We have a history of accepting immigrants in fits and starts, mostly from countries and cultures that closely hew to our own. This makes assimilation easier, which speeds immigrant progress from arrival to positive productivity. The same can't be said of most migrants arriving at the borders of the E.U.

As we confront our falling birth rates, we'd be wise to revamp our immigration policies to match our economic needs and the goals of those who knock on our doors. Unfortunately, that will take an actual act of Congress. As the self-inflicted debt ceiling crisis showed, there aren't many grown-ups in the Capitol, and certainly few have tried to tackle this subject over the last 20 years. We need to pay attention, because the U.S. might not be as big of a draw in the years ahead. If young immigrants hungry for work change their course and go to other destinations, we might find ourselves following in the footsteps of the aging nations in Europe, with low growth for a very, very long time.

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*Got a question or comment? You can contact us at [info@hsdent.com](mailto:info@hsdent.com).*