

# Book Review - No One Left: Why The World Needs More Children by Paul Morland

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Paul Morland's most recent monograph, *No One Left: Why the World Needs More Children*, was first published in the United Kingdom in 2024 by Forum. The book offers a sober and wide-ranging analysis of one of the most pressing challenges confronting contemporary societies: the global demographic crisis.

Public discourse on demographic change has long been dominated by concerns about overpopulation. Low fertility, when acknowledged, is often framed as a problem confined to developed Western societies. Morland challenges this assumption, demonstrating that fertility decline is now a global phenomenon. He shows that even populous countries such as China and India are experiencing sustained decreases in birth rates, while across much of Africa fertility is stagnating or falling, with high rates persisting only in limited regions. East Asian societies, most notably Japan and South Korea, exemplify the advanced stages of demographic ageing; in the latter case, Morland warns that, without reversal, population size could fall to just over ten per cent of its current level within three generations. These trends imply a rapidly increasing old-age dependency ratio, with profound economic consequences, including labour shortages, fiscal strain, and pressure on pension systems. In the long term, Morland argues, such dynamics risk economic stagnation, political instability, and the resurgence of extremist ideologies historically associated with periods of social and economic crisis.

Morland situates the demographic crisis as a

defining challenge of the twenty-first century and traces its origins to the sharp fertility decline observed in developed countries from the mid-twentieth century onward. While improvements in healthcare, education, and technology have increased life expectancy and living standards, they have coincided with fundamental shifts in family formation. Childbearing has increasingly been postponed or forgone in favour of individual educational attainment, career advancement, and financial security.

The first chapter examines how demographic decline, once characteristic of ageing rural regions, has become a feature of advanced economies. Morland links contemporary labour shortages to long-term fertility decline, arguing that insufficient births decades earlier now manifest as structural workforce deficits. Although the global population continues to grow, its growth rate has halved, with expansion increasingly driven by declining mortality rather than new births.

Morland outlines three stages of population decline: falling fertility, a sustained excess of deaths over births, and eventual absolute population contraction. Countries such as Japan, Russia, and China, he argues, have

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already entered the final phase, in which immigration is insufficient to offset natural decrease. As with the population explosion of the twentieth century, population decline is likely to reshape geopolitical power relations and everyday social life, largely in unfavourable ways.

The second and third chapters address the causes of declining fertility, distinguishing between biological fertility (the ability to conceive) and demographic fertility (actual childbearing). Morland contends that contemporary low birth rates are primarily social rather than biological in origin. Despite concerns over declining sperm counts, most couples remain biologically capable of conceiving. Instead, fertility decline correlates strongly with secularisation, higher levels of female education, delayed partnership formation, and changing gender relations. Religious affiliation, particularly within Abrahamic traditions, is shown to be positively associated with higher fertility, partly due to normative frameworks and supportive community structures. The author also highlights educational and assortative mating patterns, especially the mismatch between highly educated women and less educated men, as significant contributors to childlessness. Politically, fertility tends to be higher in conservative communities and markedly lower in liberal, urbanised contexts.

The fourth chapter challenges the assumption that socioeconomic development inevitably leads to sub-replacement fertility. Through comparative analysis, including case studies of Indonesia and Israel, Morland demonstrates that high living standards, education, and urbanisation do not necessarily preclude relatively high fertility. Israel, in particular, stands out as a fully developed society with birth rates well above replacement level.

In the second half of the book, Morland addresses common objections to pronatalist arguments,

most notably the claim that population growth threatens environmental sustainability. He rejects static conceptions of planetary limits, emphasising the role of technological innovation in expanding productive capacity and improving environmental outcomes. According to Morland, sustained innovation depends on large, healthy, and dynamic younger generations.

Chapter five addresses gender equality and fertility. Morland proposes differentiated taxation between parents and non-parents, while noting empirical evidence that women in developed societies typically have fewer children than they desire. He argues that both patriarchal constraints and inadequate work-family reconciliation depress fertility. Societies characterised by greater male participation in domestic labour tend to exhibit higher birth rates. Morland advocates a form of feminism that supports, rather than marginalises, parenthood.

Chapter six critiques anti-natalist perspectives within environmental movements. While acknowledging ecological challenges, Morland notes that historical indicators show substantial improvements in human wellbeing, including reductions in hunger, child mortality, and disaster-related deaths. He warns that demographic collapse poses risks comparable to environmental degradation, leading to ageing societies, economic contraction, and unsustainable public debt. Environmental protection and demographic sustainability, he argues, are not mutually exclusive.

In chapter seven, Morland addresses accusations that pronatalism is inherently racist, rejecting this claim on the grounds that fertility decline affects all ethnic groups. While acknowledging the existence of discriminatory pronatalist policies, he distinguishes these from pronatalism as a general framework. He further argues that immigration cannot provide a long-

term solution to labour shortages, as migrants also age and fertility declines in countries of origin. Moreover, large-scale labour extraction from developing regions raises ethical concerns.

Chapter eight examines the role of technology, drawing historical parallels with earlier waves of mechanisation. While robotics and artificial intelligence may reduce labour demand in certain sectors, Morland finds little evidence that they can fully replace human labour or eliminate the need for demographic renewal. Technological change continues to generate new forms of employment, often requiring higher levels of skill and specialisation.

The final chapters focus on government responsibility and societal agency. Morland reviews pronatalist policies across different national contexts, highlighting evidence that comprehensive childcare provision combined with gender equality yields the most effective outcomes. Ultimately, however, he argues that policy measures alone are insufficient without broader cultural change. Religion, social norms, positive role models, and family-friendly workplace practices all contribute to shaping reproductive decisions. Addressing demographic decline, Morland concludes, requires a collective effort that balances individual freedom with long-term social sustainability.

Overall, *No One Left* offers a comprehensive examination of demographic decline and its far-reaching social, economic, and cultural implications. Morland convincingly demonstrates that fertility is not merely a personal issue, but also a cultural and economic one with profound consequences for societal continuity. The book serves as both a warning and a call for thoughtful, interdisciplinary engagement with one of the defining challenges of our time.

### ***Who is Paul Morland?***

Paul Morland is a leading British expert on global demographic trends. He is a Fellow of the University of London and a Senior Fellow at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. His previous publications include *Population Strategies in Ethnic Conflict* (2014), *The Human Tide: How Population Shaped the Modern World* (2019), and *Tomorrow's People: The Future of Humanity in Ten Numbers* (2022).

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