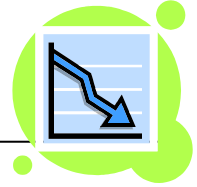


Birth Rate in Quebec Lowest Since 1908



by INGRID PERITZ
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Quebec is experiencing a baby bust this year and if trends continue the province will post the lowest number of births since the dawn of the century.

New figures by the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* show that total births this year have plunged 25 per cent since 1990. Researchers forecast that only 73,200 babies will be born in Quebec this year, a figure not seen since 1908.

“On a decade-by-decade basis, the drop in births is impressive,” said Normand Thibault of the statistics institute.

The findings are sure to add to the growing alarm over Quebec’s shrinking slice of the Canadian population. For most of the century after Confederation, Quebec weighed in at a third of the nation, a figure that helped assure its political clout.

But its population has already dropped below the psychological benchmark of 25 per cent.

Quebec has tried to aggressively reverse its plunging birth rate through baby bonuses, and, more recently, family-friendly policies such as universal \$5-a-day daycare.

Despite the initiatives, Quebec women are choosing to have their children later, and many women in their 20s are shunning motherhood altogether, according to the new report. “The drop in the birth rate is particularly abrupt among women aged [20 to 29],” it says.

Quebeckers aren’t alone in shying away from having large families, since declining birth rates have become the norm in the Western world. However, there are fewer mitigating factors in Quebec: The province doesn’t attract its proportionate share of immigrants, and Quebeckers leave the province for other destinations in Canada.

Social upheaval since the collapse of the influence of the Catholic Church has played a role, some experts believe. Jacques Henripin, a leading demographer in Quebec, said Quebeckers’ tendency to shun marriage is less conducive to having children.

“Conjugal instability is particularly strong in Quebec, and that doesn’t encourage people to have a lot of children,” he said in an interview yesterday. He cited studies showing that the children of parents who live together without getting married are three to four times more likely to see their parents split up than the children of married parents.

Demography remains a sensitive issue that colours the language debate in Quebec. The Parti Québécois has used its waning share of the Canadian population – which affects the amount of funds it gets in federal transfer payments – as an argument for sovereignty.

The article outlines concerns about the declining birth rate in Quebec. Describe the demographic trend outlined in the article. What are some factors that have led to this trend? Why study birth rates in Quebec and anywhere at all?