Title
The Demographic Effects of Dodging the Vietnam Draft.

Authors
Bailey, Martha J
Chyn, Eric

Publication Date
2020-05-01

DOI
10.1257/pandp.20201106

Peer reviewed

HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

AEA Pap Proc. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2021 May 04.

Published in final edited form as:

AEA Pap Proc. 2020 May ; 110: 220–225. doi:10.1257/pandp.20201106.

The Demographic Effects of Dodging the Vietnam Draft

Martha J. Bailey,

Department of Economics, University of Michigan, 611 Tappan Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

Eric Chyn

Department of Economics, Dartmouth College

In the late 1960s, dodging the Vietnam draft was a preoccupation for many young men—driving some to desperate measures to avoid serving in an unpopular war. Men enrolled in college to obtain student deferments (Card and Lemieux 2001) and committed felonies (Kuziemko 2010). Less well studied is President Kennedy's 1963 Executive Order (EO) 11098 that allowed fathers to qualify for a "hardship deferment." In 1969, over 4 million U.S. men held hardship deferments—more than twice the number with student deferments.

This paper provides time series evidence that the availability of hardship deferments led to large increases in U.S. fertility rates in the late 1960s, producing a fertility notch driven by elevated numbers of first births (hardship deferments required one child) among women in their early twenties (likely to be partnered with draft-eligible men). Following President Nixon's Executive Order eliminating paternity as grounds for hardship in April 1970, fertility rates plummeted—especially for women who were likely to be partnered with draft-age men. We conclude by quantifying counterfactual fertility rates and a discussion of how these findings impact interpretations of the sharp decline in U.S. fertility rates after 1970.

I. A Brief History of the Vietnam Draft

In the early 1960s, nearly all 18 to 26-year-old male U.S. citizens and most noncitizens living were required to register for the draft. Following registration, the U.S. Selective Service (SS) classified registrants as available for service, deferred, or ineligible for service. Men who enrolled in college could apply for a II-S deferment, and men who could prove a "bona fide" relationship with their children could apply for a III-A, or "hardship" deferment. Between 1965 and 1968, the rapid escalation in the Vietnam War significantly increased the likelihood that I-As would be called for service, and many men applied for deferments, especially for education and paternity. As shown in Figure 1, over 4 million men held III-A paternity deferments in 1969 – more than twice the number for II-S education deferments.

As opposition the Vietnam War grew, newly elected President Richard Nixon followed through on his campaign promises to increase the transparency of the draft, equalize the risk of induction, and limit the duration of eligibility. On May 13, 1969, Nixon asked Congress to change the order of calls from youngest to oldest, limit eligibility for draft to one year, and implement a lottery to equalize the risk of induction. The first draft lottery was held in

eric.t.chyn@dartmouth.edu.

December 1969. In addition, Nixon announced Executive Order (EO) 11527 on April 23, 1970 in his Special Message to Congress (Anderson and Tollison 1991, Nixon 1970). He directed that no future deferments would be granted on the basis of employment (occupation, agriculture) or paternity, except in extreme cases. However, all those holding those deferments, as well as any who would have been granted deferments from pending applications, were grandfathered in. Subsequent draft lotteries were conducted on July 1, 1970, for those born in 1951 and on August 5, 1971 for those born in 1952. Lotteries were also conducted after 1971 but never used to call anyone to service.

II. Time Series Evidence

Time series evidence strongly suggests that men responded to the availability of the III-A deferment by fathering children. Figure 2 shows that the Vietnam-era mobilization corresponds to the sizable notch in the general fertility rate (GFR) of the late 1960s.

After 1965, the rapid post-baby boom decline in the *GFR* slowed and even *increased* briefly between 1968 and 1970—a period that corresponds to the escalation of the Vietnam War. Consistent with III-A, or paternity deferments causing these changes, much of the increase in fertility rates was driven by rising first birth rates—an important pre-condition for receiving a III-A. Figure 3 shows that first birth rates were also slightly elevated among 18-19 and 25-29 year olds. However, first births were especially elevated for 20-24 year olds —a group very likely to be partnered with draft-eligible men. After Nixon's elimination of paternity as grounds for III-A deferments in 1970, the *GFR,* first births, and first births for women 20-24 years old dropped sharply.

A comparison of the U.S. and Canadian fertility time series provides additional evidence on the link between draft avoidance and childbearing. Figure 4 shows that from 1925 to 2011 U.S. and Canadian total fertility rates were different in levels but similar in trends—including before 1940, during World War II, and during the baby boom and early 1960s. Because Canada did not participate in the Vietnam War, a departure from U.S.-Canadian similitude would be expected from 1965 to 1970 if U.S. draft avoidance increased fertility rates in the U.S. Figure 4 shows exactly this: the Vietnam era corresponds to a divergence of the U.S. from Canadian trends. As the decline in the U.S. total fertility rate slowed and then reversed between 1965 and 1970, the Canadian total fertility rate continued to fall between 1965 and 1970.

Moreover, Figure 5 shows that Canadian birth rates fail to exhibit the fertility notch seen in the U.S. among women ages 20 to 24 around 1970.

III. Fertility Rates in the Absence of Vietnam?

How much did draft avoidance and the availability of hardship deferments affect aggregate fertility rates? We estimate this counterfactual using a simple regression fit to the years when the availability of the hardship deferment could not have affected fertility rates: 1960 to 1965 which was before the escalation of the war could have impacted fertility rates and 1971 to 1980 after Nixon's elimination of paternity as grounds for a III-A deferment. Using

information on the birth rate in year t for state s, we estimate the following linear regression model,

$$Y_{st} = f_s + \beta_1 t + \beta_2 t^2 + \boldsymbol{X}_{st}{}' \boldsymbol{\beta}_3 + \varepsilon_{st}, \quad (1)$$

where the covariates include a full set of state fixed effects, f_s, a quadratic in year, t, and state-year covariates, $\boldsymbol{X}$, including state per-capita income, the insured unemployment rate, and the share nonwhite.[1] The dependent variable, Y_{st}, is either the *GFR*, the birth rate for 20-24 year old women, or the first birth rate.

The regression-based counterfactuals are based on data before the Vietnam War escalated and after Nixon eliminated paternity as a grounds for deferment in 1970. For the *GFR*, Figure 6 shows that the actual fertility rate exceeded the counterfactual (dashed line) by 13 percent in 1970, or 10 births per 1,000 women. For 20 to 24 year olds, the women likely to be partnered with draft eligible men, and first births, an important pre-condition for receiving a III-A deferment, the deviations from counterfactual fertility rates were much larger. Figure 7 shows that birth rates for 20 to 24 year old women were 17 percent higher than the counterfactual (25 births per 1,000 women in this age group), and that first birth rates were 18 percent higher (5 births per 1,000 women).

These results underscore the *large* positive potential impact of paternity deferments on U.S. birth rates from 1965-1970. In addition, they suggest that the elimination of paternity as grounds for deferment in 1970 may be a large contributor to the sharp decline in birth rates after 1970. The exact magnitude of these effects, however, is difficult to disentangle from contemporaneous social and demographic changes. The diffusion of the birth control pill between 1960 and 1970 and the legalization of abortion (Bailey 2006, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, Guldi 2008, Levine et al. 1996, Levine, Trainor, and Zimmerman 1996, Ananat, Gruber, and Levine 2007, Joyce, Tan, and Zhang 2013, Rotz 2012, Myers 2017) may be important confounders in standard differences-in differences or time series analyses—especially because abortion was legalized in New York on April 11, 1970, less than two weeks before Nixon's elimination of paternity as grounds for deferment on April 23, 1970.[2]

Conversely, these findings also challenge the standard attribution of the differential decline in birth rates after 1970 in states like Alaska, California, Hawaii, New York, and Washington to the causal effect of abortion legalization. Because much of the literature quantifying the effect of abortion legalization exploits cross-state variation timing in abortion legalization, this causal claim implicitly assumes that the pre-1970 childbearing response to the Vietnam War was also similar. To the extent that birth rates were differentially elevated in states that legalized abortion in 1970—which is consistent with these states being more opposed to the Vietnam War than others—the differential decline in birth rates after 1970 may reflect the elimination of the paternity deferment *as well as* abortion legalization.

[1]The first two covariates follow Levine et al. (1996).
[2]See Bailey et al. (2011) and Guldi (2011) for a summary of state-level legal changes related to contraception and abortion access

IV. The Intergenerational Effects of the Vietnam War

This paper examines the importance of paternity deferments, one important and understudied form of dodging the draft during the Vietnam War. In 1969, the number of paternity deferments issued was more than double the number of education deferments, and these deferments provided strong incentives to become a father for those wishing to avoid service. Novel time series evidence suggests that that the Vietnam draft and the availability of the paternity deferment dramatically increased U.S. birth rates—especially among women likely partnered with draft-eligible men.

Previous research has examined the Vietnam War's impact on veterans as well as those who avoided service (Angrist 1990, Card and Lemieux 2001, Angrist and Chen 2008, Angrist, Chen, and Frandsen 2009, Eisenberg and Rowe 2009, Kuziemko 2010, Conley and Heerwig 2011, Lindo and Stoecker 2012). By altering the timing of childbirth and childhood living circumstances, this paper suggests that the Vietnam War may have also had intergenerational effects.

Acknowledgments

During work on this project, Chyn was supported as a UM Population Studies Center (PSC) Trainee (T32 HD0007339) We gratefully acknowledge the services and facilities of the PSC (P2C HD041028) and helpful comments from Emily Beam and John DiNardo. Exceptional research assistance was provided by Anna Erickson, Mari Hashimoto, and Annie Wentz.

V. References

1973. Roe v. Wade

Ananat Elizabeth Oltmans, Gruber Jonathan, and Levine Phillip. 2007. "Abortion Legalization and Life-Cycle Fertility." Journal of Human Resources 42 (2):375–7.

Anderson Gary M., and Tollison Robert D.. 1991. "Congressional Influence and Patterns of New Deal Spending, 1933-1939." Journal of Law and Economics 34 (1):161–175.

Angrist Joshua D. 1990. "Lifetime Earnings and the Vietnam Era Draft Lottery: Evidence from Social Security Administrative Records." American Economic Review 80 (3):313–36.

Angrist Joshua D., and Chen Stacey. 2008. "Long-Term Economic Consequences of Vietnam-Era Conscription: Schooling, Experience and Earnings." IZA Discussion Papers 3628.

Angrist Joshua D., Chen Stacey H., and Frandsen Brigham R.. 2009. "Did Vietnam Veterans Get Sicker in the 1990s? The Complicated Effects of Military Service on Self-Reported Health." NBER Working Paper 14781.

Bailey Martha, Clay Karen, Fishback Price, Haines Michael, Kantor Shawn, Sevemini Edson, and Wentz Anna. 2016. U.S. County-Level Natality and Mortality Data, 1915-2007. Ann Arbot, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) [distributor].

Bailey Martha J. 2006. "More Power to the Pill: The Impact of Contraceptive Freedom on Women's Lifecycle Labor Supply." Quarterly Journal of Economics 121 (1):289–320.

Bailey Martha J. 2009. "Erratum and Addendum." University of Michigan Working Paper.

Bailey Martha J. 2010. "'Momma's Got the Pill': How Anthony Comstock and Griswold v. Connecticut Shaped U.S. Childbearing." American Economic Review 100 (1):98–129.

Bailey Martha J. 2012. "Reexamining the Impact of U.S. Family Planning Programs on Fertility: Evidence from the War on Poverty and the Early Years of Title X." American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 4 (2):62–97. [PubMed: 22582135]

Bailey Martha J. 2013. "Fifty Years of U.S. Family Planning: New Evidence on the Long-Run Effects of Increasing Access to Contraception." Brookings Papers on Economic Activity Spring:341–409.

Bailey Martha J., Guldi Melanie, Davido Allison, and Buzuvis Erin. 2011. "Title." University of Michigan Working Paper.

Card David, and Lemieux Thomas. 2001. "Going to College to Avoid the Draft: The Unintended Legacy of the Vietnam War." American Economic Review 91 (2):97–102.

Conley Dalton, and Heerwig Jennifer A.. 2011. "The War at Home: Effects of Vietnam-Era Military Service on Post-War Household Stability." NBER Working Paper 16671.

Eisenberg Daniel, and Rowe Brian. 2009. "The Effects of Smoking in Young Adulthood on Smoking and Health Later in Life: Evidence based on the Vietnam Era Draft Lottery." Forum for Health Economics and Policy 12 (2):4.

Guldi Melanie. 2008. "Fertility Effects of Abortion and Pill Access for Minors." Demography 45 (4):817–827. [PubMed: 19110899]

Guldi Melanie. 2011. "A Survey of the Literature on Early Legal Access to the Birth Control Pill and Its Influence on Young Women's Fertility, Education, Career, and Labor Supply." In Research Handbook on the Economics of Family Law, edited by Cohen Lloyd R. and Wright Joshua D., 271–291. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.

Joyce T, Tan R, and Zhang Y. 2013. "Abortion before & after Roe." Journal of Health Economics.

Kuziemko Ilyana. 2010. "Did the Vietnam Draft Increase Human Capital Dispersion? Draft-Avoidance Behavior by Race and Class." Princeton University Working Paper.

Levine Phillip B., Trainor Amy B., and Zimmerman David J.. 1996. "The Effect of Medicaid Abortion Funding Restrictions on Abortions, Pregnancies, and Births." Journal of Health Economics 15 (5):555–578. [PubMed: 10164043]

Levine Phillip, Staiger Douglas, Kane Thomas, and Zimmerman David. 1996. "Roe v. Wade and American Fertility." NBER Working Paper 5615.

Lindo Jason M., and Stoecker Charles F.. 2012. "Drawn into Violence: Evidence on 'What Makes a Criminal' from the Vietnam Draft Lotteries." NBER Working Paper 17818.

Myers Caitlin. 2017. "The Power of Abortion Policy: Re-Examining the Effects of Young Women's Access to Reproductive Control." Journal of Political Economy 125 (6):2178–2224.

Nixon Richard. 1970. Executive Order 11527—Amending the Selective Service Regulations. Santa Barbara, CA: The American Presidency Project.

Rotz Dana. 2012. "The Impact of Legal Abortion on the Wage Distribution: Evidence from the 1970 New York Abortion Reform." SSRN Working Paper.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and National Center for Health Statistics. 1968-1980. NATALITY DETAIL FILE, 1968-1980: [UNITED STATES]. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor].

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and National Center for Health Statistics. 2013. Table 1-1. Live Births, Birth Rates, and Fertility Rates, by Race: United States, 1909-2000.

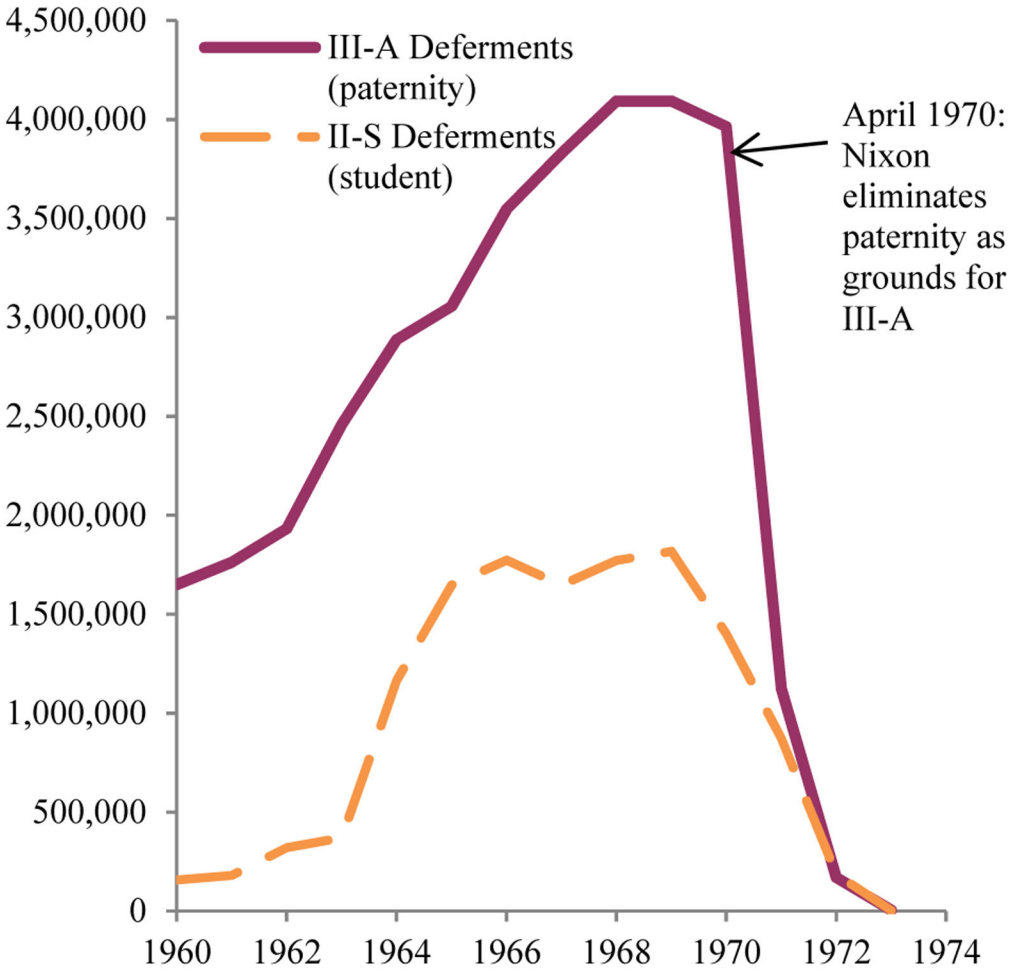

FIGURE 1. EDUCATION (II-S) AND HARDSHIP (III-A) DEFERMENTS, 1960 TO 1973

Notes: Total inductions by fiscal year exclude U.S. territories. Fiscal years run from July of the previous year to June of the current year. Dare are from Selective Service reports, 1960-1973.

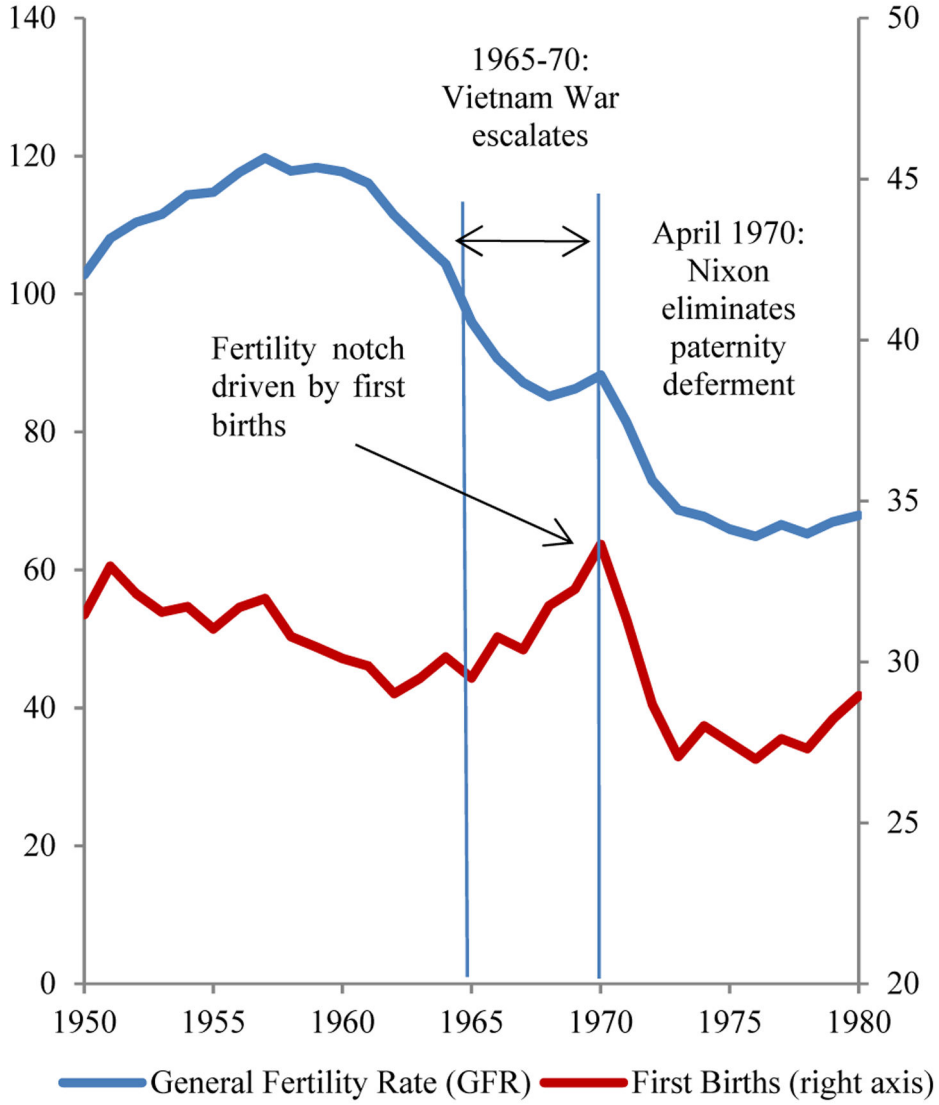

FIGURE 2. U.S. FERTILITY RATES, 1950 TO 1980

Notes: Data from 1950 to 1967 Vital Statistic s Volumes (Bailey 2010) and 1968 to 1980 Natality Files (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and National Center for Health Statistics 1968-1980).

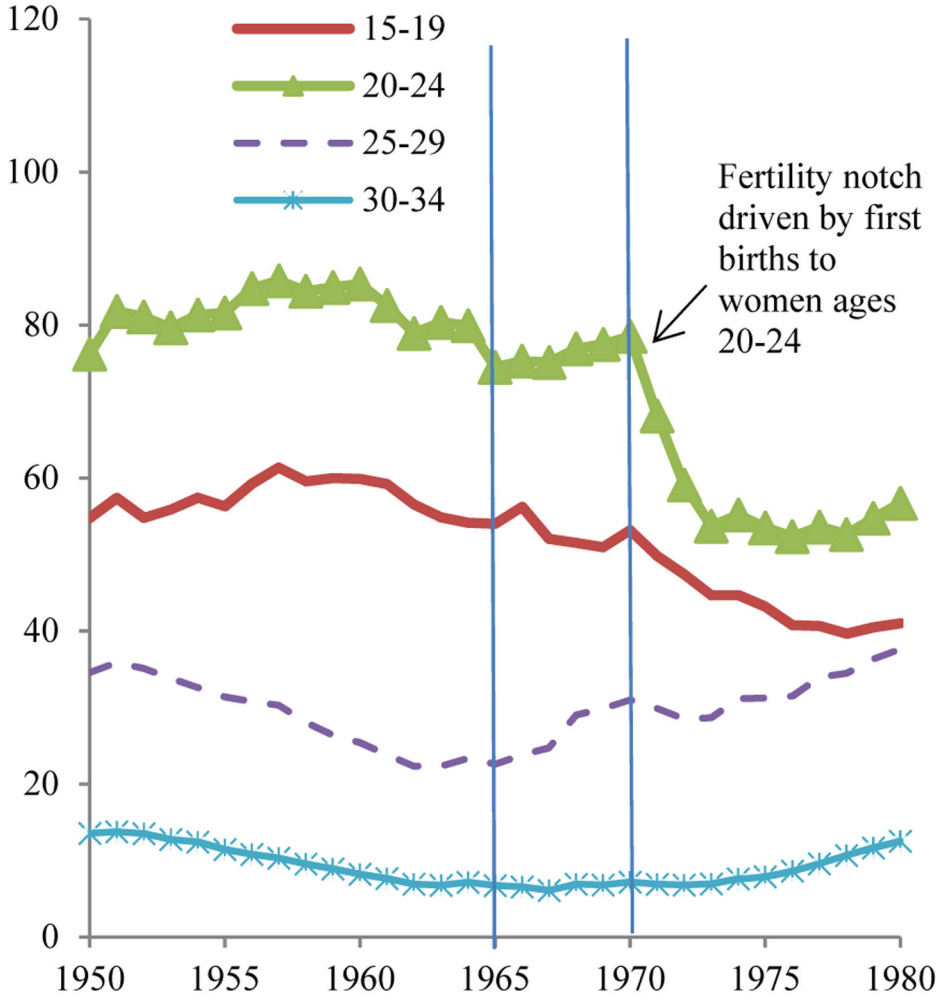

FIGURE 3. FIRST BIRTH RATES BY AGE GROUP

Notes: See Figure 2 notes for sources.

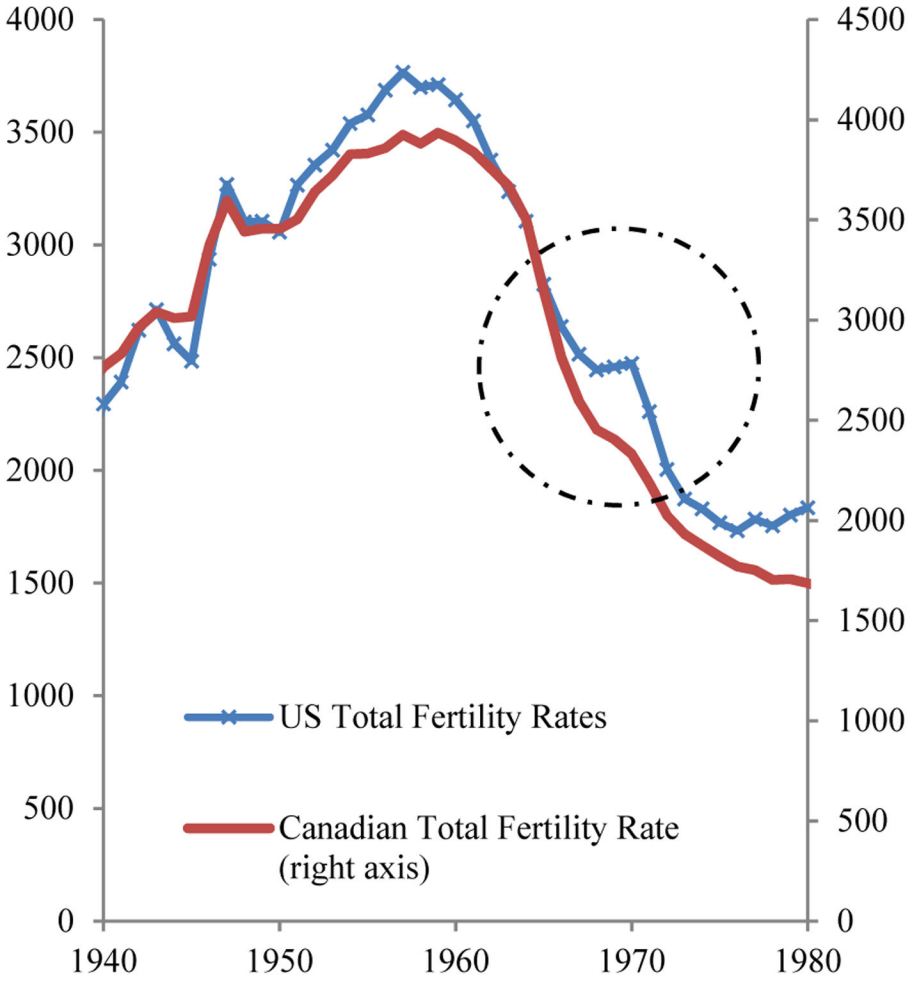

FIGURE 4. U.S. AND CANADIAN TOTAL FERTILITY RATES, 1940-1980

Notes: The total fertility rate is the sum of age-specific birth rates multiplied by 1,000. Source: Canadian fertility rates Milan (2013); U.S. fertility rates: Bailey et al. (2016) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and National Center for Health Statistics (2013).

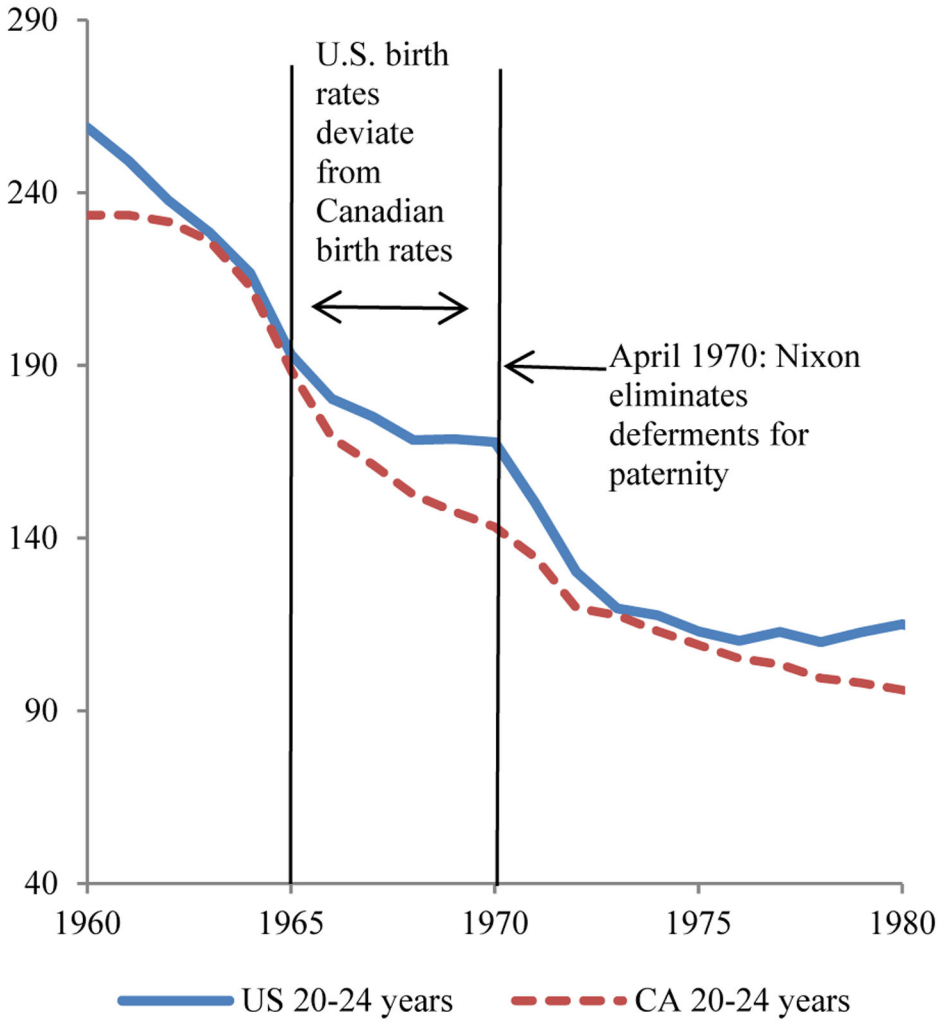

FIGURE 5. U.S. AND CANADIAN BIRTH RATES FOR WOMEN AGES 20 TO 24, 1960-1980
Notes: See Figure 4 notes for sources.

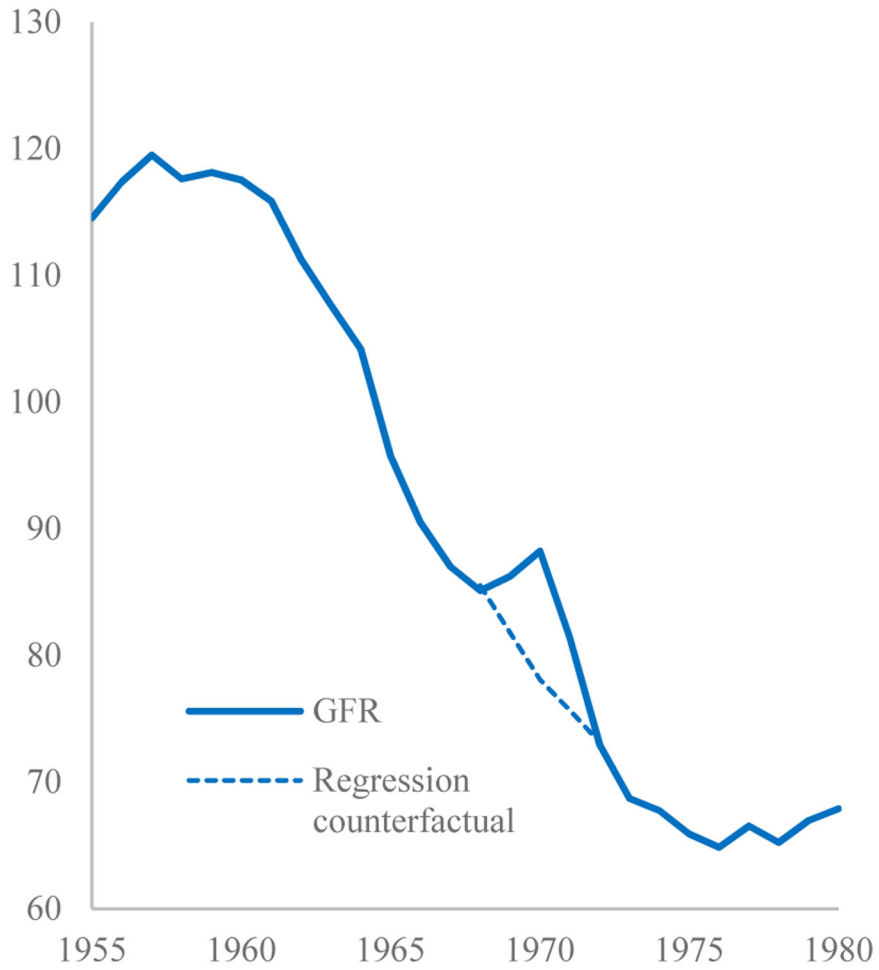

FIGURE 6. COUNTERFACTUAL FERTILITY RATES

Notes: Vertical axis is the number of births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44.

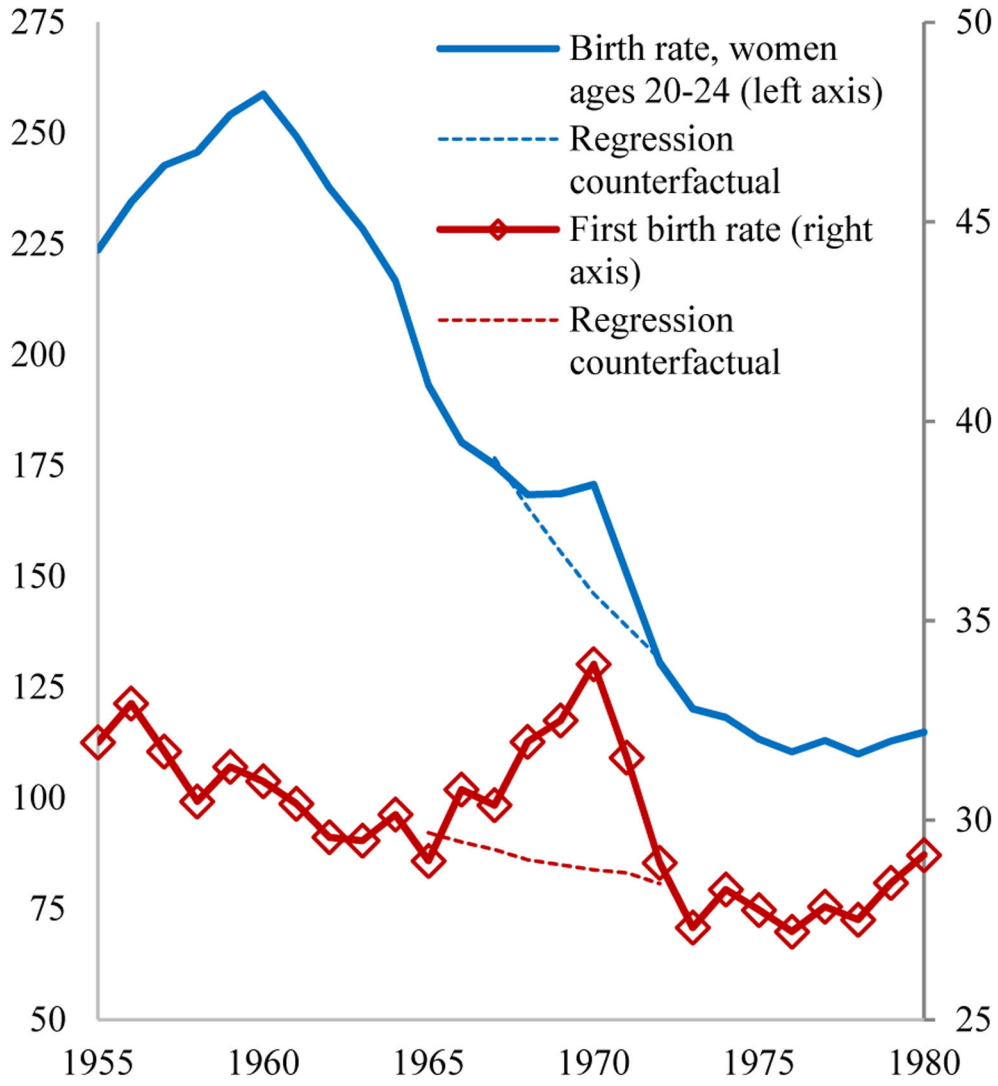

FIGURE 7. COUNTERFACTUAL FIRST BIRTH RATES

Notes: Vertical axis is the number of births per 1,000 women ages 20 to 24 (left) or the number of first births for women ages 15 to 44 (right).