



## After the Fact | [Event Rebroadcast: How Today's Generations Are Changing the World](#)

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### TRANSCRIPT

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**Dan Leduc:** Two billion—that's a lot, and you only know the half of it.

Welcome to "After the Fact." For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc.

Every episode of this podcast has a data point, and this one is no different. By the middle of this century, there will be 2 billion elderly people in the world, but as we said, that's only half the story. There also will be 2 billion young people.

That there's as many of each group is a first for the globe. And together they'll represent more than 40 percent of the world's population. It presents profound implications for how we will work and live. There's lots to discuss on this subject, and not long ago, Pew held a forum in London called "How Today's Generations Are Changing the World."

Sarah Harper, a professor of gerontology and director of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing at Oxford University, and Michael Dimock, president of the Washington-based Pew Research Center, joined in a conversation with Pew's senior vice president for institutional partnerships, Sally O'Brien. And they all took part in a lively question-and-answer session with the audience.

Here's Sally to get us started.

**Sally O'Brien:** Good evening, everybody. My name is Sally O'Brien, and I'm absolutely delighted to welcome you all here on behalf of my colleagues from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Pew Research Center. And it's just great to have you here to join us for a conversation about how today's generations are changing the world.

We actually launched into this conversation downstairs already. I've already learned an enormous amount from our panelists. Sarah has informed me that I am the child of Victorians, which is really interesting to know, as is, I think, she as well. So hopefully we're going to learn a lot more about how we define generations and how we look at



data, but also how we think about attitudes and behaviors and the way we think of ourselves in a slightly less structured way and identify in our generational cohorts. But first of all, you might be thinking, “Well, what does any of this have to do with Pew?” And for those of you who know anything about Pew, you might think of us as primarily a policy organization. And we certainly are, and known for our research initiatives, where we engage in public policy and try to influence governments to improve policy for the public.

So, for example, in the environment, we have played a role in working with governments to protect more than 2 1/2 million acres of ocean around the world; on land, to protect great tracts of land in the Canadian boreal and in Australia; and in the U.S. in domestic policy areas, where our corrections reform efforts have resulted in a 30 percent reduction in crime rates and savings of more than \$17 billion.

But we are also committed to informing the public. And it does this in large part through the Pew Research Center, which last year released over 500 publications on a wide range of domestic and international research areas, from the global image of the United States to the growth of major religious groups around the world.

*Trend* magazine, which I see some of you holding, is another tangible way in which Pew seeks to inform the public by disseminating experts’ insights on topics of interest to our board audiences and convening discussions like this one we’re having this evening.

And the most recent issue brought together experts from both sides of the Atlantic to share their expertise and perspective with us today. And that’s why we’re here. So it’s a subject that’s naturally grounded in demographic data, but numbers alone don’t tell the whole story. And for that we turn to social and cultural norms and differences.

And to help navigate us through that discussion, I’m really delighted to welcome Sarah Harper and Mike Dimock, who are two leading thinkers on this topic. You have details about both of them in your programs. And I don’t think anybody wants to hear me talk this evening. They’re much more interested in listening to our guests. So I’m going to hand over, sit down, and let them take us on a little journey through this topic.

And I’ll begin with you, Sarah. Your *Trend* essay at the beginning of this publication includes the data point that by 2020—2030, excuse me—in Western Europe, nearly half the population will be over 50. Are we prepared for this demographic shift?

**Sarah Harper:** I think that’s very interesting. And I think that statistic alone is far more striking than many of the others where we talk about 20 percent of the population over 60, because to half your population aged over 50, we’ve never had a world where that’s happened before.



On the one hand, we can say that governments have been seeing this coming. And without any doubt at all, European governments are really working very hard at the moment to try and change structures. And here in the U.K., we've had a 2 1/2-year government review, which I chaired, which was the aging of the population, how we can prepare ourselves for that. And it wasn't about pensions and health care. It was about the world of work and the world of education and housing and transport and things like inheritance, family, the intergenerational contract. And that has now led into the U.K. Industrial Strategy. So there are four big challenges that the U.K. has identified, and one of those is the aging challenge.

And the other thing, of course, we have to say is, what's special about being 50? We just plucked 50 because it was a good statistic. And that is the other really important thing. We mustn't think that our parents' generation or our grandparents' generation is actually what it's going to be like for anybody coming on.

And just to end with another statistic, that the health status of a 70-year-old man in the U.K. is the same that his father's was in his late 50s. So things are changing.

**Sally O'Brien:** So picking up a little bit on that, there is this growing gap between the younger and the older generation that naturally exposes these tensions. We were talking just downstairs before we started about the idea that's being floated that, because of this growing gap, that perhaps the government should provide £10,000 to every millennial. And I think we've probably got a few millennials in the room, and I'm not sure what you all think about this. But I'd be very interested in asking you, Sarah, to talk a little bit about how societies address those disparities and what kinds of programs—you mentioned health, public-welfare systems. What are those key issues and how do we attempt to resolve those?

**Sarah Harper:** So what was very interesting was you said this growing gap. I don't think there is a growing gap. I think the media wants us to think there is a growing gap, but actually I think there's a lot of hype about this gap. And if anything, I thought—we were both talking, so we both have children of roughly the same age. I live the kind of lifestyle that my children live far more than my parents did when I lived in, and I think that's what we've seen with the baby boom generation coming through. Those cohorts that were born postwar in this country have been much more fluid.

And their ways of thinking and dressing and working—I mean, I share my 27-year-old's clothes. She shares mine, which is even more shocking. But it's all sort of merging, really. And I am very, very concerned—well, I'll just give you an example.



So I, a couple of years ago, had a 27-year-old European girl who had been flown by an organization in St. Gallen to come and see me to persuade me to come and talk at a youth conference. And she sat there and went, "I'm the unluckiest, most unfortunate generation in the 20th century or whatever." And I went, "Look at you. You're female. You're educated. You've got the vote. You are very articulate. You're being flown all around the world." And therefore if we tell young people you are the worst generation, then that's what they're going to think.

And I think particularly when you look at the lives of women. So my grandmother didn't have the vote for a lot of her life, and many of her friends died in childbirth. My mother never got the option to go to university. When I went to Cambridge, there was only one girl let in for every eight men. In the 1970s in this country, women couldn't own their own houses. They couldn't have bank accounts. Until 1992, we could all be raped in marriage. So actually to be a millennial nowadays, you're in a much, much better state.

Having said that, there obviously is something around the intergenerational contract that we have to rethink. But it's also very, very clear that people that are coming up to retirement and people in early retirement are taking far more responsibility for their old age. And I think we are seeing a huge amount of internal transfers down through generations. So people who can be paying for their children's education. Grandparents are paying for grandchildren's education. We've got this wonderful transfer.

We also know that in this country in the housing market, many older people and parents are helping children and grandchildren onto the housing market. What we're not addressing is the inequalities within generations and the fact that the inequalities in our generation between the high income and the low income is being mirrored in the millennials' generation. That's what the millennials, I think, should be focusing on. Let's stop inequality in our generation and don't let it perpetuate in the way that we allowed it to perpetuate.

**Sally O'Brien** And I mean, we could drift off into another whole conversation here talking about social-economic mobility. But it seems as if you're honing in on that.

Let's just shift it slightly and talk about how that plays out globally. So you've talked a lot about Britain. And we're going to hear, I think, a little bit about the United States from Mike in a minute. But you've spent most of your work focusing on demographic shifts in Asia and Africa. So how does this story play out in those societies?

**Sarah Harper:** Yes, I mean, in a way, so it was—the question you started with about, in lots of ways, it's almost a surprise that we have this aging population. But if we go back to basic demographics, we have something called the demographic transition. It started about 250 years in this part of the world. And that means that women started to reduce



their fertility. So we had a fall in infant mortality. Therefore many babies lived longer. In response to this we had a fall in fertility. Populations expanded dramatically. That's one reason why people in this country ended up going to the U.S., for example, or going to Australia, because we had huge population pressures that were occurring. And then we had low fertility, low mortality, and the aging population.

Now that has happened in Europe. We've aged. We're unlikely to age anymore, actually. But we're seeing that trend go across. So in Asia it's happening in about 30 years. So in many, many Asian populations, women are having very, very low fertility. Not just in China, but throughout Southeast Asia, in many parts of urban Asia, women are having one or no children. Two-thirds of the world's women are now at or near replacement level. And because we've, if you like, leapfrogged advanced economies' medical care into countries of the south or in the developing world, they're all living longer as well.

So in a way we have three bulges going through the global population. We still have huge fertility rates in sub-Saharan Africa, so huge numbers of very, very young children and babies. And that is a real problem in terms of population growth.

We have a massive youth bulge in some of the emerging economies, particularly the Middle East and North Africa. And this group, which is 15 to 24, is really dominating. And one of the problems is, can you turn that youth bulge into a demographic dividend to drive those economies, or are we going to have a very disenfranchised group of people? If you talk about disenfranchising the millennials, look at what's happening in those mid-income countries—no jobs, no housing, no prospects whatsoever. And of course, the strategic literature has very much linked that up into some of the civil distress. And then we have a bulge of older adults occurring in the high-income countries.

And by the end of this century, we think we will have come from that pyramid with all these bulges going through it to a sort of skyscraper. And that, we believe, is that by the end of this century we have a very successful population structure, which we hope will then continue, where most people born live long, healthy lives. And it is just generations simply replacing themselves and the population stopping to expand. But we have to go through that in the 21st century.

**Sally O'Brien:** So speaking of the traumas of being a millennial, I'm going to now turn to Mike. Mike, you at the Pew Research Center recently received quite a lot of press attention, which is sort of an indication, I think, of how the Pew Research Center's research is listened to. But you received attention for an announcement of the beginning and end dates for the millennial generation.



I know you've all been studying this for a long time, for more than a decade. And we had a little bit of a discussion downstairs with Sarah about this. But why did you think the time was finally now right to say when it's ending? And what are we going to do about the people who come along next? What are they going to be called?

**Michael Dimock:** Sure. Well, thanks. Yes, we use generational lenses to do a lot of analysis of demographics, family structures, attitudes, behaviors. And we've been studying this idea of a millennial generation for about a decade now. And really it all comes down to having an analytical unit that just has a certain amount of cohesiveness and makes sense in terms of some levels of commonality and not being so large as to just include everybody.

And so the decision that we made is that in our analysis in the U.S. at least—and we're still talking and listening about how this might or might not apply in other parts of the world, as well—is that we're looking at a millennial generation currently between the ages of 22 and 37. Those boundaries I'm not here to try to sell you as concrete. There's a lot of wiggle room around that. It's a concept that's not clearly defined by immediate events or demographic signals.

By comparison, the baby boom generation that we refer to a lot in the U.S.—I think is referred to in other countries—has very clear demographic markers around it where there was a surge in fertility and a drop-off after, a really clear sort of cohort that you can define in concrete terms. Since that time, the definitions are a bit more in the atmosphere, I'll admit, but I think there's still interesting analytical units.

And what we're seeing around the millennial generation, and I think in part why people are interested in it, is twofold. One, this is the generation that's rising into the marketplace. So there's a good deal of interest in the marketing community about what millennials are and what they want, right? And I think in some sense that's the dark side of these kind of labels. They really, in some respects, can be just used as marketing tools or labels to put on groups in order to try to sell or understand marketplaces.

I think the other fascination around millennials is they are largely the sons and daughters of baby boomers. And in the U.S., baby boomers are a large and sort of dominant generation growing into their senior years.

And one of the interesting signals we've seen around millennials is a fundamentally different relationship in some ways with their parents—a lot more commonality, a lot more contact, a lot more—you mentioned this, a continued close family connection. Again, none of these are universal. Not every family is the same. Not every parent-child relationship is the same, but a pattern of closer relationships.



One element of that that people talk about are children going off to university and coming back and living at home. Again, that is a real phenomenon demographically. It's a minority, but it is a real difference from previous generations. But I think that's part of a larger signal of less of a generational divide in the way people stay connected and tied together.

One factor that we see in millennials is reflective of longevity, that the life stages are changing. And again, none of this is a concrete drop-off that happened in a certain year. There are sort of long trends and tides. But it's a signal that's interesting to study from a generational perspective of people who are launching into phases of life at later points than previous generations typically did, whether it's when you're getting married, when you're having children, when you're really settling into long-term career development, and even how you're thinking about that, investing in your retirement and so forth and so on. So those are some of the factors that we look at.

Why use these labels? I would just make the case that it's less about the hard dates that you define and saying somebody born this year is this, somebody born that year is that, but just being conscious about understanding generations over time, that there are experiences that people have in their early years—some of them social, some of them political, some of them technological, which we could talk more about, some of them are defined by economics.

In the U.S. and in many developed worlds, part of this conversation is the millennial generation largely came of age in a period of economic stress. And that has been a part of those delayed-entry arguments about their life cycles and continued education. Positive sides: higher educational attainment. Downsides: delayed entrance into the workforce. But then a lot of it's attitudinal as well.

**Sally O'Brien:** Well, so let's just talk about technology for a minute. And we all think about the millennials who have sort of come of age in the era of Facebook. And we were talking about this downstairs, too, where even younger children—I mean, you see 2-year-olds now who know how to play with an iPhone—but talking about Facebook and technology and how that has affected sort of social interaction. And we tend to think of that as being something that the millennial generation are all over.

But I was struck by a little data point that I think was provided by you to me, which is the fact that baby boomers are also right in the thick of us. Their use of, for example, mobile dating apps and online dating sites doubled from 2013 to 2016. So talk a bit about that.

**Michael Dimock:** Well, it's absolutely true. Most of the growth in social media use, especially Facebook and even dating services and so forth over the last six to eight



years, most of that growth has been in older generations, not the millennial generation or younger groups. Partly because those groups were early adopters in most of those technologies and so they had already been utilizing them for a long time. And it's later generations that are sort of catching up in many ways and in some cases replacing as younger generations can move on from one technology to another while older generations are adopting some of the platforms that are more ubiquitous, like Facebook, at this point.

But I think the technological story, to me, is a really interesting one, because I do believe that one of the signals that can shape the psychology even of people in a generation that can have a lasting impact is their perspective on the world and your place in it. And technology plays an enormous role in that. And I would even go back to one of the things about the baby boom generation—again an overgeneralization, but I think a meaningful element of it—is this is a generation that came of age with television, really, right? Came of age with it. It was growing up. It was expanding.

And this is a world that saw the world in motion in a way that previous generations did perhaps with newsreels or things in the movie theater but now was in your house on a daily basis and growing up with that evolution. Whereas the generations that came after that had that experience of access to the world in that way from their youngest years. As a Gen Xer, I always assumed there was television. It was not a question. And it was a part of the background for me in a way that many baby boomers grew up with.

By contrast for the Gen Xers—again, a generalization—but this is a generation that grew up as computers were arriving on the scene, right? So in my experience, as someone born in 1968, I played with computers in high school. I really began using them in college. But I didn't even own one until the very end of my college experience. That seems like eons ago, but that was a part of the experience I was engaging in as I was coming of age.

Whereas to a millennial, the concept that you wouldn't have computers in your home is almost inconceivable for most millennials. By contrast, millennials are coming of age in this internet era. Many of them are in their early 30s now. On the front edge of it, they were at the early stages of the internet really becoming a big issue in most of the developed world and adapting to social media as they were growing and aging up.

Whereas most of what we're just calling post-millennials for now, kind of a placeholder name, this is, again, in the background for them. If you are in your teens today, the idea, in the U.S. at least, and I think in many other countries, that you wouldn't have always-on access to the world, that you wouldn't have a device nearby that could connect you with any piece of information you wanted at any given time is almost inconceivable.





Well, that's a life-changing, a real change in the way you think about your connection to the world. And there is some evidence that that has real implications for how people both build their communities, build their social identities, and think about their place in the world.

**Sally O'Brien:** So let me pick up on that, the sort of business of social identities and building connections. And I want to pivot now actually back to you, Sarah. In a sense, it is sort of a universal tool, the internet and Facebook and so forth. And lots of people spend time talking about the differences, even the differences between the United States and Britain—you know, the famous line, two countries separated by the same language. There's another description which I particularly enjoy, and actually maybe has some relevance to when we talk about aging and getting old, that the Americans believe that death is optional and the British know it's inevitable. And so we've got these sort of culturally ingrained attitudes that have all sorts of reasonings behind them.

But as, for example, millennials or any other cohort begin to engage in the world in this kind of completely available to everybody technology, how does that affect the sense of, for example, baby boomers—you were talking earlier, Sarah—baby boomers are something that are clearly understood and identified in America. Most people in Britain probably don't think of themselves in that way. And we were discussing that. But millennials, perhaps they do. What's your thought about that?

**Sarah Harper:** Well, I think that's very interesting. So this is sort of based on data. We did a survey of 24 countries. We had 44,000 people, and we asked them a variety of questions. And we specifically focused in on the postwar birth cohort. And we said a whole series of questions about being a baby boomer. And only one country did people naturally identify as baby boomers, and that was in the U.S. I mean, they knew about it, but they didn't really see that as affecting them. I mean, this is something to do with America. But without any doubt, demographically there were these postwar baby bulges.

What we have to remember in Britain—and we often forget this—is that there was a massive postwar birth cohort, which is the '46, '47 one. Then our population really shrunk back because the '50s were pretty awful here. And in 1957, we almost had a baby bust. And then we had another group coming out.

And that's really important for Britain, because it means that we have two sets. We're going to have the set that are going to come up and basically have gone through retirement. They're just about to go through into issues around disability and aging and social care. And then we're going to have about a 10-year gap. And then we will face the second group coming up. So demographically, it is a little bit different.



I was really struck, because, as I say, to me millennials are sort of an invented concept, because I can't see how they are demographically, though I do understand what you're saying. But when you're talking about the 1980s, so in other words, millennials at the moment were born from 1980 to 19—

**Michael Dimock:** '96.

**Sarah Harper:** '96. And I've got three millennial children, 1990, 1994, and 1996. And their relationship with technology is all very, very different. And when I think of people I know who are now in their 30s, the internet really didn't affect them that much. Technology didn't affect them that much, because it wasn't until much later that they hit it.

So my daughter that was born in 1990, she did not get a computer at school until she was 12. My son got it when he was 9. And my 6-year-old got a computer at school at 6. And their relationship with technology is just completely different. My 22-year-old has been all her life completely obsessed with technology. My 12-year-old is also a girl, and her friends are much more distant.

So I'm really surprised that people who are born in the '80s you feel are so affected by this relationship with technology. Maybe it's the difference between Britain and America. I don't know.

**Michael Dimock:** Right. And it is. I mean, one angle that when we can, we all look at, are sort of—so these age ranges are roughly 16 years or so. And you're right, being at the front edge and the late edge of that is very, very different. So I was at the front edge of a Gen X. And the later edge of that Gen X had a different experience.

So it is true that most of these patterns that you're talking about, whether it's technological attainment, attitudinal, life cycle issues, they're more long-term curves. And so the people at the front edge and the late edge of a generation are often going to feel mischaracterized by the generational caricatures that come out of it.

You felt that in the U.S., where the baby boom is a fairly uniformly defined generation and does have more of a consistency in that demographic bubble that was quite long-lasting in the U.S. Still, when you talk to people in the U.S. about their identity, the late boomers feel completely alienated by the caricature of early boomers and vice versa. So it is absolutely true that every label like that is going to be generalizing across trends that are usually a little bit more linear in their nature. So I do agree that it's not unusual that an early or late millennial would have a somewhat different experience. And you could argue that you could cut those things in different spaces.



I think the argument we make for why we go ahead and use these labels is, again, just they've become—again, at least in the U.S. in this case—generally used terms. They're something that people are familiar with. And to us, it's a way of just reminding us as analysts to think about cohorts as they move through time and age and that that's a lens that we often forget. We often think about age differences. How do young people and older people differ?

And I think it's important to think about the characteristics of youth, the experiences that you have, and how those can shape views, experiences, trajectories over the long course of a generation. And you could cut that here. You could cut it here. You could cut it in decade groups. You could cut it in other groups. We've used these labels as a kind of common nomenclature to help focus on those changes over time as generations age.

**Sally O'Brien:** So did you want to respond to that?

**Sarah Harper:** Well I was just going to pick up on something, because I think—so one of the things that we're seeing that I think is really interesting is that I absolutely agree, we have these different cohorts going through. And there's a big argument about, should you belong to a big cohort, because then you attract society's resources? But there's huge competition for jobs and marital partners and houses, etc. Whereas if you belong to a small cohort, you don't get the resources, but there's far less competition.

But we also have other demographic trends happening. So one of the things that is happening in both our countries is that because of increases in life expectancy, there is a cohort of people who are based in their 50s and 60s, in both countries, who have very, very long-lived parents en masse. And so both my parents have died within the last couple of years. And all my friends, all we talk about is caring for our long-lived parents.

So even though we were a part of a sort of reasonable cohort and our parents were of a smaller cohort because they were born in the 1920s and '30s, still, the fact that suddenly they all started living much longer and did it—you know, we've pushed back death for entire populations. Another striking statistic is that if you look the middle of the 19th century, half the population in Europe was dead by their mid-40s. Now half the population in this country survives to its mid-80s. So that's how far we've pushed it back.

And I think that's an interesting—so it's really, in a way, it's not a cohort effect, but it's a sort of a change in our mortality regime imposed on different cohorts. And I think that's a very interesting dynamic that I'm sure we can see played out in different ways as well.

**Sally O'Brien:** Well, the question I was going to ask you actually you sort of almost answered, but it is that the social contract that we have with generations has not really



happened in step with what has actually happened when you just look at the numbers. And we're sort of beginning to wake up to that. I think people like you are actually saying to people, really look at it and look at what this means. But even intuitively, I think we're all beginning to realize that with some of the examples that you have just given us.

So I suppose that the question is, first of all, how old are we really going to get? And then, are we actually going to really change the way we engage with these different generations—for example, the £10,000 handout to millennials. I mean, it may be folly and it may not be very well thought out, but it's indicating to me at least that now society is beginning to think about this.

**Sarah Harper:** I've been very impressed, at the moment, surprisingly, with what the U.K. government is doing, because if what we want to get into the Industrial Strategy happens—at the moment we're talking about a life course approach. So when we look at aging, we don't just look at old people. We look at the entire life course and the way that this demographic shift is going to affect people across their life courses—in other words, preparing young people now for a hundred-year life, for long, long periods maybe of work. How are we going to change work across the life course so that we probably, across a life course, won't work anymore? It's just we'll spread it until we're in our mid-70s instead of ditching out at 55 when we're still fit and healthy.

So that's sort of one thing. I think the other thing that is really interesting and is happening at the moment is that current generations that are approaching later life—and definitely we have very good survey evidence now on this from many different countries—are taking far more responsibility for their old age. And I think particularly people in their 50s and 60s who have been caring for older parents are really beginning to think about how they want to live their own lives. And they don't want to burden their children, not just with looking after but just ensuring that they take financial and social and psychological responsibility for their own old age. And we're seeing that trend appearing in many different high-income countries. We're seeing it in the States. We're seeing it across Europe.

That means we've got to enable these populations to keep fit and healthy and to be able to work as long as they want, mechanisms that they can save properly for decent pensions. But we're also seeing very much in this country is that bequests are changing. And this idea that you are going to keep all your money and then leave it in a bequest is beginning to change.

Part of that is because I think people are very worried it's going to be sucked into long-term care costs and they want to be able to give something to their children. And also because if they can, they are giving money to support children through university



education in a way that they never did before. They're helping them with housing. We know that a lot of grandparents are actually passing their bequests down to grandchildren. So I think individuals and families are beginning to respond and take responsibility.

And just to answer that question, how long are we going to live—well, all the indications are that the current children that are being born now in this country, half of them will live to 104. In the States, it's 103. In Japan, it's 107. And there seems no reason why that is not going to be right.

Whether we're going to then be living to 120, 130, and 140, the longevity question I think is a completely different question. But there is no reason at the moment why we shouldn't continue to push back life expectancy. That's the average age of the population. But that's a good thing. I mean rather than striving to get odd numbers of people in their 150s, we should surely, I think—I mean, if everyone could live a hundred-year life, I think that's a fantastic thing to aim for. And the really big question is, will it be healthy?

**Sally O'Brien:** And also, can we afford it? And I know that in your previous—you've had an extraordinary, interesting career with the BBC and in government and so forth. And you do have a little bit of expertise on pensions, which is something actually that Pew has spent a lot of time trying to look at in the United States, particularly with the gap between what's available in the state pension system and the demand on it. And even people who are working and who are contributing to pension plans are skeptical, I think, about whether in reality they really can save for this apparently very long old age. So how are we going to fix that?

**Sarah Harper:** But if it's going to be healthy, there's no reason why we shouldn't. I mean, our older people are contributing huge amounts. I mean, people in their 70s do massive amounts—some of them are still working—volunteering massive amounts of actually older care and definitely child and grandchild care. And if you look at the health status of many particularly educated people—because there is this huge inequality in health and life expectancy—then they are able to contribute. So long as we're fit and healthy and we are able to contribute and work, even if it's part time or it's flexible, well into our 60s and even into our 70s, then the amount of money we need at the end is going to be reduced.

And I think the really big wake-up call is us lot, you and I. Sorry. There was this very, very lucky cohort that went through. So in both our countries, men and women who were born in the 20s and 30s were a lucky cohort, actually. In many, many ways they escaped the First World War. Many of them were too young to fight in the Second World War. The huge boom of the '60s and '70s, and they all retired in their 50s. They all lived well



into their 80s on very, very good defined-benefit schemes. And they made, in this country, masses of wealth.

And we all sit there thinking—I mean my father, he worked for IBM. And he was an IBM pensioner for longer than he was an IBM employee, which was part of his aim in life. He died at nearly 87 having been an IBM full pensioner for 34 years. And he'd worked for IBM for 33, because he took early retirement when IBM introduced early retirement in the '80s.

And so we all sit there thinking, “Oh, I'm going live my father's kind of life.” And the wake-up call is actually the standard of living we have now and the standard of living we saw our parents have in retirement, particularly if we were middle-class professional people, that's going to be very difficult to maintain.

**Sally O'Brien:** I'm going to pivot back to you, Mike. So we've been talking a lot with Sarah about birthrate, lifespan changes, and how old we're going to be and all the rest of it and how there aren't so many babies coming along. But what about the rest of the world? You're spending a lot of time—you do a lot of global polling and look at global attitudes. Is the rest of the world aware of this? What do they think?

**Michael Dimock:** No. I think to say that there's a global millennial generation or anything of the sort would be erroneous. The experiences and generational cycles and economic and social factors as well as demographic and birthrate factors are completely different in different parts of the world. So we wouldn't want to overgeneralize in that respect.

And to pick up on what you said earlier, the birthrates are now so different across different regions of the world that you're getting a real pivot in the dynamic of where population expansion is happening in the world. That has a lot of implications for the future growth and migration issues and where pressures are going to be, whether they're driven by economic or environmental or other factors. So that's an entirely other element to this that's very important.

I think there are some things that you see similar across many of the developed world—Western Europe, Australia, Japan, United States, Canada, kind of cohorts here where you see some of these signals having some parallels, all of the stuff that we're talking about here in terms of longevity and kind of expanded time frames of life stages. I don't know how much that's people consciously saying, “Oh, I think I'm going to live to a hundred so why not stay in college longer” or something. I think it probably has more to do with immediate factors, the fact that opportunities exist now, the fact that economics were down for people, so staying in universities made sense for a lot of people, and so forth. You've seen that happen in many countries, not just in the U.S. and the U.K.



Attitudinally some of what's been interesting about this is that this general group—whether you cut it at specific dates or not, but say people in their mid-20s to mid-30s or even a little bit younger than that—tend to have some attitudes in common. There is a much stronger sense of internationalism for one, an embrace of the value of cross-national relationships. You saw in the U.K. certainly in the Brexit vote, a big generational signal there in terms of support and opposition. You've seen the same in the U.S. along many of these sorts of issues.

Much more of a signal around diversity and an embrace of concepts of diversity, whether it's around gender, sexual-identity issues, whether it's around race, ethnicity, whether it's around immigration, to be sure. One of the biggest generational divides in the U.S. are attitudes around immigration, fundamental questions about whether immigrants are a strengthening factor for our country or a weakening factor in terms of taking resources, a very big generational divide. Even when you control for the fact that this younger generation is a more diverse generation, even among the native or the white or however you want to define that population, you still see that generational signal as a fairly strong one. And again, you see that in many countries—not all, but many countries to some extent.

Another big one that you see is around religion in general, a secularizing trend across generations. Some of that—and again, this is where generational analysis is helpful—some of that is life cycle. Younger people tend to be less churchgoing once their parents are no longer forcing them along, right? But then as they age, you do see life-cycle patterns as people do often return to church as they have children of their own or get married or so forth.

But every generation in the U.S.—and you're seeing a similar signal across much of Europe—has been less and less and less inclined towards religion, both in their belief systems as well as their behaviors and patterns and their self-identity. That's a pretty significant pattern in the Western world that is driven very strongly by generational change, not by people who were religious becoming less religious, but by younger generations coming in with less religious attachment. Again, that's very much a story of Western Europe and the U.S. and Canada. That is not the narrative in the rest of the world, to be sure, in terms of some of those changes.

Another that I would just mention that I think is important is environmental. A very strong signal in a generation of a sense of global environmental concern, whether that's a consciousness of living in the world for longer and being more worried about these long-term impacts and effects, or another factor of the information and communication environment. Whether it's climate change in the U.S., which of course is a more divisive issue in the U.S. but has a very, very strong generational signal to it, very universally



embraced as an issue by younger generations and much more contested among older generations. But you see that same kind of divide across other countries as well on other types of environmental issues.

So the question that we want to study by thinking about generations is, are those signals associated with a generation going to persist? Meaning then as these generations become a larger and larger share of the electorates, larger and larger share of the workforce, are those going to be the signals of the future for these countries? Or are we going to see life-cycle effects or other effects in the world shift those attitudes, sort of break down those signals of the generation over time?

In the United States when they were young, baby boomers were seen as the more liberal generation. They were the free love and all the great antiwar protests and smoking marijuana and so forth and so on. As baby boomers aged up, they did get a bit more conservative. Their values about drug use, their values about sexuality changed.

So it's not like generations are never going to change. There really are factors that can shift attitudes over the course of life or as effects are happening in the world. But that's a part of what's interesting about thinking about generations and their impact in the future.

*[Music]*

**Dan LeDuc:** If you want to learn more about generations, you can read Pew's journal *Trend* online at [pewtrusts.org/trend](http://pewtrusts.org/trend). It includes an essay from Sarah Harper on the world's aging population, as well as other articles on millennials, Gen X, and more about the six generations now living side by side in the U.S.

And for more episodes of this podcast, check out [pewtrusts.org/after-the-fact](http://pewtrusts.org/after-the-fact) or find us where you stream your podcasts.

Thanks for listening. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc, and this is "After the Fact."