# Young adults favour dog parenting over having children amid declining birth rates



The convergence of declining birth rates and rising pet ownership has established a significant cultural shift in several Western nations. A recent review conducted by researchers at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest reveals that many young adults are increasingly prioritising pet ownership over parenthood, particularly in Europe, where fertility rates have reached alarming lows. This trend is leading many to replace the traditional notion of family with that of pet ownership, viewing dogs as fulfilling and emotionally supportive companions.

The researchers examined multiple studies, concluding that young people perceive dog parenting as less burdensome than raising children. With financial stress and the craving for lifestyle freedom identified as critical factors in this societal evolution, individuals are making choices that reflect a fundamental re-evaluation of their roles and responsibilities. In wealthier countries, where sub-replacement fertility rates are becoming commonplace, the ownership of dogs has seen a parallel rise. For instance, in the United States, data suggests there are over 63 million households with dogs, compared to just over 32 million with children under the age of 18.

Cultural commentary on this trend has highlighted a growing phenomenon wherein pets are increasingly seen as family members. For example, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where pet ownership has skyrocketed, the city now boasts a higher number of dogs than children under 14. This phenomenon is particularly relevant amid Argentina’s economic challenges; dog ownership has surged while the birth rate has experienced a sharp decline of 41% in the past decade. Pet owners in this context often embrace the identity of ‘perrhijos’—a blend of pet and child—indicating the depth of attachment many feel toward their dogs.

Meanwhile, in China, projections by Goldman Sachs indicate that urban pets are anticipated to outnumber toddlers within a few years, illustrating that this trend is not confined to Western cultures. An estimated $12 billion market for pet food is expected to emerge by the end of the decade, driven largely by young adults’ preference for pets over starting families. This shift is indicative of broader demographic challenges, including an aging population and declining birth rates.

Among commentators on this evolving dynamic, Elon Musk has emerged as a vocal advocate for increased birth rates, warning that low fertility poses a severe threat to societal structures. Musk, a figure often surrounded by controversy, has fathered 14 children and has expressed openly his commitment to combating the so-called "baby bust". He argues that falling birth rates will lead to a workforce shortage, increased debt, and eventual social unrest. Despite the societal shift towards valuing pets over children, Musk continues to push for initiatives that encourage parenthood, through both traditional and non-traditional means, including surrogacy and incentives for larger families.

Yet, researchers caution against equating pet ownership with parenthood. While the emotional bonds between humans and dogs have strengthened, they assert that dogs, despite their high dependency on humans, offer fewer long-term commitments and responsibilities than children. For many, the choice to adopt a dog serves as a compromise, satisfying an innate desire for companionship and nurturing without the extensive resources required for raising children.

This evolving attitude towards pets reflects a wider societal transition marked by increasing loneliness and a disconnect from traditional family structures. In various households, dogs now serve not just as companions but as substitutes for childless couples, or as siblings for older adults, redefining the essence of family in modern life. The implications of this shift could have lasting effects on societal norms and values, as the notion of family continues to be reshaped by economic realities and personal preferences.

Ultimately, as societal dynamics evolve, the question remains: will the embrace of pet ownership as a familial alternative fulfil the emotional and social needs of individuals, or will it highlight the growing disconnect between human relationships and traditional family structures?

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14754965/Elon-Musks-worst-fear-comes-true-study-reveals-young-adults-choosing-babies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/c1fb28f904ee06d1d8752aee6116ff17)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14754965/Elon-Musks-worst-fear-comes-true-study-reveals-young-adults-choosing-babies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/2ce7213d-c9cd-44eb-b456-0600f9ce356c)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/c1fb28f904ee06d1d8752aee6116ff17), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/41109168-c3ee-45da-a514-eaee721fbb54)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/41109168-c3ee-45da-a514-eaee721fbb54), [[5]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/13/elon-musk-s-ambition-repopulating-the-planet-and-destroying-the-woke-virus_6714239_4.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/2ce7213d-c9cd-44eb-b456-0600f9ce356c), [[6]](https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-am-162d3810-1af4-11f0-a251-57a8a117adc0)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14754965/Elon-Musks-worst-fear-comes-true-study-reveals-young-adults-choosing-babies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/c1fb28f904ee06d1d8752aee6116ff17)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14754965/Elon-Musks-worst-fear-comes-true-study-reveals-young-adults-choosing-babies.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/c1fb28f904ee06d1d8752aee6116ff17> - In Buenos Aires, Argentina, a growing cultural shift sees dogs increasingly viewed and treated as family members, particularly as more Argentines choose to remain childless amid ongoing economic instability. The city now has more dogs than children under 14, with pets found in nearly 80% of households—a figure significantly higher than the U.S. average. This rise in pet ownership coincides with a sharp 41% drop in Argentina's birth rate over the last decade and a struggling economy under President Javier Milei. Pet owners refer to themselves as 'parents' of their 'perrhijos' (a blend of dog and child), and spending on dog care has skyrocketed. Luxury services such as cafes, spas, bakeries, and even cemeteries for dogs have emerged. President Milei himself exemplifies the trend, living with cloned mastiffs named after libertarian economists. While some view this phenomenon as symptomatic of deeper societal challenges, especially low fertility, others embrace the companionship and emotional support pets provide. Lawmakers are also proposing pet-friendly initiatives to make Buenos Aires Latin America's most pet-accessible city.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/2ce7213d-c9cd-44eb-b456-0600f9ce356c> - China's urban pets are expected to outnumber toddlers this year, according to Goldman Sachs, projecting a $12bn market for pet food by the end of the decade. As younger Chinese citizens prefer cats and dogs over starting families, the future ratio of pets to children under four is estimated to be two to one by 2030. This trend reflects broader demographic challenges, including an aging population and declining birth rates. In 2017, 90 million children aged zero to four compared with 40 million pets in urban areas; those figures are converging around 58 million this year. Valeria Zhou from Goldman Sachs anticipates continued growth in pet ownership amid weakening birth rates, predicting the pet food industry will grow from Rmb51bn in 2023 to Rmb63bn in 2030. This optimistic outlook contrasts with China's generally weak consumer demand since the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also compares China’s trajectory with Japan, where the pet population is four times larger than the number of children under four, and the pet food market is significantly larger than the infant milk formula market. Persistent pet ownership, even during lockdowns, underscores the sector's resilience.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/41109168-c3ee-45da-a514-eaee721fbb54> - This article discusses Elon Musk's personal efforts to address declining fertility rates in the Western world by fathering numerous children. Musk, a committed pronatalist, reportedly has at least 14 children and encourages parenthood through nontraditional arrangements, using social media and surrogacy. Some women have received significant financial incentives for bearing his children. His unconventional approach contrasts with more traditional pronatalist ideologies that emphasize stable families. The article also highlights how U.S. policymakers under President Donald Trump's administration are considering strategies to reverse declining birth rates, including financial incentives like baby bonuses, scholarships for parents, and motherhood awards. The article critiques the politicization of reproductive issues, especially when tied to controversial figures like Trump and ideologies reminiscent of historical pro-natalist propaganda from regimes like Stalin’s and Hitler’s. The author expresses concern over potential dystopian outcomes stemming from reproductive policy interventions and gender politics, while acknowledging the real challenges posed by aging populations and low birth rates in developed nations.
5. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/13/elon-musk-s-ambition-repopulating-the-planet-and-destroying-the-woke-virus_6714239_4.html> - Elon Musk, during an interview with Jordan Peterson, attributed his ideological shift to his child's gender transition, describing the influence of 'the woke mind virus.' Musk's narrative reflects his opposition to gender transitions for minors and his commitment to combating this perceived moral decline. His daughter, Vivian Wilson, has publicly refuted his claims, pointing to Musk's absence during her youth. Musk's radicalization is also tied to his libertarian and now far-right beliefs, emphasizing repopulation and the survival of humanity, evidenced by his prolific procreation and concerns over declining birth rates. Musk's professional and private lives interweave, he has faced public conflicts, contentious relationships within SpaceX, and has relocated key company operations to support his ideological views. His complex motivations stem from childhood experiences, including growing up in apartheid South Africa, and he now seeks to shape societal norms through his vast influence.
6. <https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-am-162d3810-1af4-11f0-a251-57a8a117adc0> - Axios AM's April 17, 2025 newsletter highlights Elon Musk’s controversial role in promoting natalism. A Wall Street Journal investigation revealed Musk has at least 14 children with four women as part of his mission to combat civilizational decline through elite reproduction. Musk’s tactics include using surrogates, promoting C-sections, and managing PR through associates, raising ethical concerns. Other key stories include global investors' pessimism about U.S. tariffs and economic outlook, legal battles challenging Trump's tariff policies, and the White House’s increasing reliance on MAGA-aligned media. Democrats are divided on how aggressively to oppose Trump-era deportations, particularly after high-profile erroneous deportations. The IRS may revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status following disputes with the Trump administration, and TIME released its 2025 list of most influential people, featuring Trump, Musk, and other global leaders. Finally, scientists may have found the strongest evidence yet of alien life on exoplanet K2-18b through chemical signs detected by the James Webb Space Telescope.