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# The Carrel Foundation's 1942 Survey on Declining Birth Rates: A Biopolitical Snapshot of France at a Demographic Turning Point

Fabrice Cahen\* and Paul-André Rosental\*\*

## Abstract

This article examines the creation of a 1942 survey designed to explore the causes of the declining birth rate in France and offer solutions, and revisits the data it produced. Led by the sociologist Jean Stoetzel, a pioneer of survey-based research, it consisted of a questionnaire developed with the interviewers themselves—mainly teachers and priests. The questions took up the themes of the pronatalist movement in all their diversity, from repressive proposals (including anti-abortion policies) to social measures for supporting households. The survey concluded that the French public supported natalism but believed that the causes of the low birth rate were primarily economic, rather than moral or religious. Financial incentives were deemed useful but insufficient. While Stoetzel recommended a propaganda campaign based on patriotism and moral reform, re-examination of the survey data shows that respondents were primarily concerned by the practicalities of the living conditions associated with large families. Within the range of moral attitudes expressed, repressive leanings were mainly concentrated in rural areas. Overall, survey respondents were sensitive to the plight of vulnerable populations, including single mothers.

## Keywords

natism, abortion, surveys, single mothers, living conditions, ethical pluralism, social psychology, France

Between the Armistice of 1918 and the middle of the Second World War, when the baby boom began, the birth rate in France fell to its lowest level in history (Toulemon, 2001; Daguet, 2002; Brée, 2017). The propaganda campaign orchestrated by the pronatalist movement and pro-family associations was in full swing, with political authorities increasingly relaying the discourse emanating from these organizations (see, in this same issue, De Luca Barrusse, 2023). Adopted on 29 July 1939, on the eve of the war, the Code de la famille et de la natalité françaises (French Family Code) enshrined the effort, initiated half a century earlier, to recognize the birth rate—considered too low—as a

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key parameter of French depopulation, which manifested in a negative natural increase in the mid-1930s. However, of the many possible interpretations of the low birth rate, there was no precise analysis on which contemporary researchers agreed. Numerous causes were put forward, difficult to rank in significance: methods of contraception and abortion, the general state of public morality, the influence of particular elements of society (neo-Malthusians, abortionists, ‘women of ill repute’), excessive financial burdens for households with children, etc. Consequently, there was some hesitation about the types of political solutions to prioritize: microeconomic incentives or legal coercion, moral control or control of bodies, the teaching of fear or the encouragement of aspirations, appeals to the national interest, whether in terms of military force or the viability of the fledgling social insurance systems. This diversity reflects changes in biopolitical governmentality (in terms of the quantity and ‘quality’ of the population), which, in the 1920s and 1930s, was further psychologized by targeting individual aspirations more strongly (Cahen, 2016; Rosental, 2016).

At the heart of these debates, statistics played a cardinal role. Since the late 19th century, statistics had been drawn from population censuses, from more patchy data—obtained in particular by doctors, better placed than demographers to gain an insight into people’s intimate lives—and from studies produced by the pronatalist and pro-family movement. How did the introduction of the survey method in the final months of the Third Republic in 1939 and then under the Vichy regime, change the situation, providing a more scientific illumination of the causes of the low birth rate in France? The 1942 survey on declining birth rates (*Enquête Natalité*) offers answers to these questions.<sup>(1)</sup> Conducted by the Fondation française pour l’étude des problèmes humains (French Foundation for the Study of Human Problems [FFEPH]), known as the Carrel Foundation after the man officially appointed as its ‘regent’, it formed part of a series of opinion polls on fertility and childbearing that, for stakeholders at the time, and, to a different degree, current historians of demography and population, raised three types of issues:

- Were these new survey techniques capable of dissipating the fog surrounding the mechanisms of the birth rate decline?
- How did they express, and potentially reinforce, the idea that psychological factors (known then as ‘conscience’ or ‘will’, since the more contemporary notion of ‘choice’ was not yet current) were pre-eminent in determining fertility?
- To what extent could they aid governmental strategy and decision-making regarding the various public policy options available?

This article has two core objectives. The first is to examine how the 1942 survey was situated within these questions and the extent to which it provided

(1) The documentation on the 1942 survey is available in Fonds 19760138/5 of the Archives nationales, Paris. Some of this documentation is available in the INED surveys catalogue ([data.ined.fr](http://data.ined.fr)).

answers. The second is, by exploring the nature and quality of the data obtained by the survey's designer, Jean Stoetzel, to start to revisit the survey using more up-to-date approaches and techniques (Bourdelaïs, 1993; Szreter, 1996; Brian, 2001; Perrot, 1975/2001). By examining the extent to which this source provides information on the attitudes of the French population towards fertility and family in the middle third of the 20th century, we will explore the more general issue of reusing old surveys, based on outdated methodologies and issues, to address contemporary historiographical questions. This issue is all the more sensitive given that we are dealing with a particularly distinctive context, that of an authoritarian regime—one partly under the yoke of Nazi occupation, moreover—whose ideology dictated that the low birth rate was one of its top priorities. Can the suspected biases underlying the survey design be adequately overcome to allow not only a historical analysis of the survey's criteria but also the reuse of its results?

## I. The origins of the survey

### 1. Context and motivations

In 1942, Jean Stoetzel was a young sociologist. Given his scientific style and his oscillation between the worlds of academia and economics, he was like a French equivalent of Paul Lazarsfeld, one of the founding fathers of survey research in American sociology (Blondiaux, 1998; Marcel, 1998; Rosental, 2006). A graduate of the École normale supérieure and with grand intellectual and professional ambitions but lacking any academic standing or family legacy, in 1938 he founded a private applied sciences institute destined for a great future, the French Institute of Public Opinion (Institut français d'opinion publique [IFOP]), which temporarily closed during the Vichy regime. In February 1942, while working part-time for the National Statistics Service, he went to negotiate with Félix-André Missenard (vice-regent of the FFEPPH and director of its population department) about the possibility of a survey on opinions towards childbearing. Like other alumni of the École normale supérieure, he was no doubt motivated by the desire to procure a position with the new specialist institutions created by Vichy that would enable him to escape the world of secondary school teaching (he was at that time teaching at Lycée Rollin, now Lycée Jacques Decour, in Paris). He was only officially assigned to the FFEPPH from 1 October 1943, as leader of the surveys and statistics team.<sup>(2)</sup>

(2) He does not appear to have been driven by ideology; none of the documents examined reveal any particularly strong pronatalist leanings in Stoetzel, even though some of the suggestions proposed in the survey report (*Rapport sur l'enquête Natalité*, p. 3) are not incompatible with the spirit of the *révolution nationale*. Furthermore, while the Carrel Foundation benefited from the personal support of Maréchal Pétain and was run by a team committed to the regime, the dozens of researchers employed by the foundation came from a variety of ideological backgrounds; their status even served to protect young researchers whose convictions would otherwise have made them enemies of the regime.

Besides this protected status, the FFEPP offered Stoetzel, in its effort to promulgate social psychology in both academic and commercial spheres, the opportunity to develop avant-garde methods (detailed in the first chapter of the survey report), which remained controversial.<sup>(3)</sup> It allowed him to show these methods' potential, while offering a bonus: access to substantial public resources at a time of funding shortages, including the use of interviewers whom he did not have to pay out of his own pocket, as he had done at his own institute. Stoetzel's aim was both to refine his methods and to produce results on an issue that the authorities considered a priority.

One of the first surveys ever carried out in France, by Stoetzel, concerned attitudes towards the falling birth rate: the IFOP survey of June 1939, conducted during preparation of the Family Code (Huss, 1990; De Luca Barrusse, 2008).<sup>(4)</sup> In late 1941 under the Vichy regime, which promoted a series of draconian legislative texts in the name of the *révolution nationale*,<sup>(5)</sup> the Secretary of State for Family and Health, the General Commissioner for Family, the Secours national, and the Centre national de coordination et d'action des mouvements familiaux (Capuano, 2009) organized a competition calling on newspaper readers to select and rank, from a list of 15 options, what they believed to be the three main causes of the low birth rate in France (Figure 1).

All the daily newspapers published a questionnaire that readers were asked to complete with their name and then mail back to the Centre national de coordination et d'action des mouvements familiaux, the pro-family organization that oversaw the counting of responses. Promising prizes to randomly selected respondents (hence the need for non-anonymous forms), this 'referendum-competition' had collected, by early 1942, around 500,000 responses, 175,000 of which came from the free zone (*zone libre*). The more ideological than scientific ambition of this so-called referendum is noticeable from the apparent absence of reflection on the self-censure and self-selection of participants, and from the degree of complexity of certain questions.<sup>(6)</sup>

This 1941 questionnaire juxtaposes answer options in registers as diverse as those contained in the 1942 survey and in a quite random order. Readers can attribute the falling birth rate to the frivolousness of young people who 'prefer going to the cinema or for a drive'; to 'women working outside the home';

(3) In the early days of the National Statistics Service, created by Vichy to reorganize French official statistics, there remained great scepticism regarding surveys, as evidenced by the indifference displayed by his manager, René Carmille, when Stoetzel attempted to create a specialist survey department there.

(4) A copy of this survey (Jean Stoetzel, *Étude sur l'attitude de l'opinion publique en face du problème de la dénatalité*, June 1939) is preserved in F60/605 (Archives nationales, Paris).

(5) The Law of 2 April 1941 restricted the right to divorce, the Law of 14 September 1941 deprived women who had an abortion of the benefit of a suspended sentence, and the Law of 15 February 1942 enabled 'professional' abortionists to be referred to the State tribunal (tribunal d'État), a special court with the power to impose the death penalty.

(6) The subsidiary question was the following: 'By how many votes (cast across the whole of metropolitan France, the forbidden zone (*zone interdite*), the occupied zone, and the non-occupied zone), will the greatest cause be identified?'

*In your opinion, which are THE THREE MAIN causes of the declining birth rate, of those listed below?*

1. Young households prefer to go to the cinema or for a drive.
2. Divorce is possible without children, difficult with children.
3. Absence of religion or not enough religion.
4. Worse lifestyle when you have children.
5. Young women fear losing their figure.
6. Women working outside the home: shops, factories, etc.
7. Rural abandonment.
8. Difficulty of housing a large family.
9. Children cost too much.
10. Fear of inheritance division and splitting up of land.
11. Fear of unemployment.
12. Poor health of married people.
13. The difficulties and hardships of raising children.
14. Fear of the pain of giving birth.
15. Fear of inability to raise several children well.

*Source: La Dépêche normande, 12 December 1941 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).*

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As in the IFOP survey of 1939, one of the premises was the following: having children has, over time, become a matter of ‘will’. This idea was formulated by leading authors of the time (including Arsène Dumont, Adolphe Landry, and Maurice Halbwachs), who, in their own way, examined the weight of collective awareness on individual decisions.<sup>(7)</sup> Approaching the intimate foundations of individual behaviours (rather than simply measuring these behaviours), considered on a theoretical spectrum ranging from psychosociology (dear to Stoetzel) to Durkheimian sociology, should therefore be considered the most appropriate way of identifying the relevant levers to action, without which the adopted measures, whether legal, economic, or more propaganda-like, would surely miss their target.

In 1942, therefore, Stoetzel picked up a case that had already been opened. However, Missenard and Carrel did not seem fully convinced by either the aim or the approach, and Stoetzel was asked repeatedly to provide clarifications. He began by proposing two parallel lines of inquiry, one to determine ‘the values to which potential propaganda campaigns or educational programmes should appeal, based on the various categories of region and social class within the population’, and the other aiming to identify ‘the legislative measures relating to tax, economics, and labour, as well as repressive measures (abortion-related issues)’.<sup>(8)</sup> Missenard understood that Stoetzel’s priority was to ‘identify the public’s prejudices in order to combat them using all means at our disposal’.<sup>(9)</sup>

## 2. The making of a survey

The report of November 1942 and supplementary records provide us with useful information on how the survey was set up (FFEPH 01-02, fertility, ‘entire public’, north zone), although we have to rely on a survey conducted in 1943 (FFEPH 04, fertility, ‘girls and young women’, north zone), for which the available records are more extensive, to detect certain implicit elements. Stoetzel, the report indicates, assembled a team of around 100 interviewers—mostly teachers—whose social and professional profile was deemed appropriate for the task (Table 1). The recruitment of the team was a two-step process: first, Stoetzel raided IFOP’s address book, then asked the individuals he contacted to recommend others. He also obtained the support of bishoprics, enabling him to recruit around 15 priests. The interviewers had to collect responses as part of their usual professional interactions.<sup>(10)</sup>

(7) This shift towards a cultural and psychological approach was applied, after the war, to research on immigration and integration, in which Stoetzel played an important part (Escafré-Dublet and Kesztenbaum, 2011).

(8) Stoetzel to Missenard, 13 May 1942 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).

(9) Missenard to Stoetzel, 25 March 1942 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).

(10) Stoetzel would even have liked access to ‘the intimate reactions of the respondents’ when the questions were read (*Rapport sur l’enquête Natalité*, Chapter 6).

Table 1. Profile of interviewers

	Number of interviewers
<b>Sex</b>	
Men	90
Women	13
<b>Age group</b>	
20–29	7
30–39	27
40–49	29
50–59	24
60 and over	8
Unknown	8
<b>Occupation</b>	
Clergymen	14
Teachers	60
Postal and telecoms workers	9
Architects	2
Engineers	3
Bank employees	2
Social workers	1
Manual workers	1
Physicians	2
Public sector civil servants [sic]	2
No occupation	4
Miscellaneous	2
Unknown	1
<b>Location</b>	
City of 50,000 inhab. or more	22
Town of 15,000 to 50,000 inhab.	14
Town of 2,000 to 15,000 inhab.	18
Rural area	48
Unknown	1
Total	103
<i>Source:</i> Handwritten tables (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).	

The content of the questionnaire was developed in a collaborative, multi-stage manner, with interviewers closely involved in selecting and formulating questions.<sup>(11)</sup> First, a provisional list of 69 ‘affirmative statements’ was put together (presented in the report’s appendix and analysed in De Luca Barrusse [2023]), some of which were subsequently discarded (final questions are presented in Prost [2023]). Unlike the IFOP survey of 1939, which asked respondents for their opinion on the causes of the declining birth rate and on potential corrective measures, the principle here was to prompt respondents to react to a list of predefined statements. To form this mosaic of statements, Stoetzel drew on various bodies of work, starting with pronatalist literature (he refers to Fernand Boverat, the Secretary-General of the National Alliance Against Depopulation) and the IFOP survey of 1939. He also alluded to ‘consultations’

(11) The teaching profession was one of the prime targets of pronatalist propaganda and activism during the interwar period, and teachers were considered by Vichy to be social intermediaries par excellence. The creation of the survey placed Stoetzel’s recruits in the position of issuing recommendations. The involvement expected from them was therefore very different from the self-effacement now required of interviewers.



at the FFEPPH (a blank form was circulated, asking recipients to suggest their own questions), to 'personal experience' (without further explanation), and to interviewers' suggestions.

Stoetzel then asked half of the interviewers to classify the statements on a scale of 1 to 7, based on the strength or weakness of the pronatalist stance that public opinion might attribute to each of them.<sup>(12)</sup> The statements that received the most diverse scores, signifying that their interpretation was the most ambiguous, were, with a few exceptions, discarded. However, certain statements were discarded because they were probably considered subversive (and 'unnatural'<sup>(13)</sup>) or likely to propagate reprehensible ideas. These statements, reproduced in the Appendix 2 of the survey report (FFEPPH, 1942), included those with Malthusian connotations ('We should not force poor households to have lots of children'; 'There would be fewer wars if people were not trying to increase fertility at all costs') or too close an association with biological eugenics ('It is not a matter of encouraging births at all costs, just the reproduction of the healthiest individuals'; 'We should prevent sick people from having children by any means, including sterilization').<sup>(14)</sup> To a lesser extent, the statements implying or prompting any challenge of the French government regarding its actions ('To achieve an increase in the birth rate, economic living conditions need to be improved') or its values ('Single people have chosen the happiest way of life'; 'Women should be given the right to have an abortion when they want one') were also eliminated, as was the statement mentioning 'the abandonment of rural areas as a cause of the declining birth rate', a widely held pronatalist belief since the late 19th century but one that might have implied the new regime's failure to achieve the 'return to the land'. Certain topics were not even considered: while respondents were asked what they thought about a husband forcing his wife to have too many children, methods of contraception are absent from the questionnaire, and no space was given to the slightest hint of this topic—due both to legislation and the prevailing morality.

In the end, 24 statements were selected. These were divided into two separate questionnaires (A, with 13 items; and B, with 12) to be administered to two subsamples. Question 13 (A) / 12 (B) was common to both questionnaires and concerned the causes of the low birth rate; it contained six possible responses (modalities)—six possible 'causes' of the declining birth rate. These six statements were exact replicas of Questions 1, 3, 6, 9, 13, and 14 from the referendum-competition of 1941.<sup>(15)</sup> Does this indicate willingness to

(12) The cryptic passage that refers to psychosocial classification into five types of 'values' (or 'psychological frameworks') deserves investigation beyond the scope of this article.

(13) An expression used in the preparation of the 1943 survey (Stoetzel to Missenard, 16 December 1942 [19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris]).

(14) While it is irrefutable that Carrel preached a particularly virulent kind of eugenics, the FFEPPH overall took a more classically Lamarckian approach to eugenics. Its management was aware that the most hereditarian research topics should be handled with discretion, or even be banned.

(15) *La Dépêche normande*, 12 December 1941 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).

compromise with the pro-family camp that had instigated the competition? An alternative hypothesis seems more likely. During the summer, Vichy disclosed the results of the competition:<sup>(16)</sup> while it was not denied that the cost of raising children ranked 2nd among the responses received, religious decline and the 'selfishness' of youth were the causes highlighted in the press with, in 3rd place, working women, at a time when the regime wanted to banish female public sector employees from the workplace (Baruch, 1997). Did Stoetzel, who must have been sceptical about this result, want to conduct a critical replica of the referendum? His choice, at the very least, is reminiscent of the 'founding' act of survey science, the famous victory, in 1936, of the Gallup Institute over the magazine *Literary Digest*: Gallup used a sampling technique to predict the re-election of President Roosevelt, whereas *Literary Digest* was misled by a straw vote method, even though it had received more than 1.5 million ballot papers from its readers (Blondiaux, 2004).

Information concerning the operational phase (survey plan, assignment of tasks, etc.) allows us to hypothesize about the survey conditions and whether these were likely to have limited the effects of self-censure and under-reporting. Various factors suggest that responses were generally frank and sincere.<sup>(17)</sup> Unlike the referendum, the survey questionnaires were anonymous. The report indicates that the interviewers, who were highly controlled in their professional integrity and moral rectitude, received 'psychological preparation' to neutralize their own value judgements and appear as impartial as possible. The general instructions drew interviewers' attention to the risk of unintentionally guiding responses. The 'interviewer effect' may have played a part, particularly in religious individuals questioned by priests and Catholic activists.<sup>(18)</sup> But a number of responses, particularly in the individual survey forms from the 1943 survey (FFEPH 04), demonstrate that minority, or even dissident, opinions were expressed, even under the Vichy regime. It is therefore not unreasonable to start from the hypothesis that the high response rate for most questions and the net dominance of positive responses (which mostly collected between 50% and 80% assent), are not artefacts. On the other hand, this high degree of consensus complicates, in many respects, the possible interpretation of the survey insofar as contrasts only appear at the statistical margins—requiring, as we discuss later, the use of appropriate tools to interpret these nuances.

(16) Communications concerning the results were minimal compared with the heavy publicity that had accompanied the launch of the referendum: the press focused mainly on the results of the prize draw. The first prize was won, by chance, by a family with five children who had selected 'religious decline' as a primary cause of the falling birth rate.

(17) When preparing the 1943 survey (FFEPH 04) on 'girls and young women', several prospective interviewers expressed their concern about the sincerity expected from the responses, not because of the political context but due to the modesty characterizing the surveyed subpopulation.

(18) This interviewer effect can be seen in the 1943 survey, from which we have the paper questionnaires, by examining those completed by the priests. But it is likely that Stoetzel was aware of these biases and that he knew how to account for them.

The counting took place during the summer of 1942. Setting aside here the technical details (electromechanical sorting and tabulation, significance tests, etc.), we will focus on a more decisive factor for the interpretation and re-examination of the data: the occupational coding and social stratification system used. Stoetzel’s four categories are listed in Box 1.

How were the occupations in this nomenclature—surprising, even for the time—split into these four categories, the first three of which combine major industry sectors and social groups, with a fourth, catch-all category of ‘no occupation’, to which half of all the women surveyed belonged, according to the interviewer instructions? We know that, before the formalization and adoption of socio-occupational categories (*catégories socioprofessionnelles*) by the French Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies for the 1954 census, such tables were inconsistent, even in censuses (Lhuissier, 2020). A previous nomenclature, comprising various hierarchical levels, was apparently used as a reference from which a simplified version was created, primarily to develop the sample (Table 2).

While the classification needed to be sufficiently crude for the interviewers to put together their portfolios of respondents easily, we cannot handle the results produced in the same way that we would sort data by socio-occupational category. Moreover, it is difficult to see why Stoetzel talked about the influence

Table 2. Nomenclature used to describe the composition of the population by occupation in Paris and the *département* of La Seine (not dated)

Code	Description
<b>Agriculture</b>	
Operators	Heads of establishments, sole traders in fishing, forestry, and agriculture
Manual workers	Employees, manual workers, unemployed workers in fishing, forestry, and agriculture
<b>Industry</b>	
Operators	Heads of establishments in extractive industries, processing industries, warehousing, and transport
Manual workers	Manual workers, unemployed, sole traders in extractive industries, processing industries, warehousing, and transport
<b>Commerce</b>	
Operators	Heads of establishments, sole traders in commerce, entertainment, and banking
<b>Liberal professions</b>	Heads of establishments in the liberal professions
<b>Domestic workers</b>	Manual workers, unemployed, and sole traders
<b>Employees</b>	
Industry	Employees and manual workers in industrial public services
Commerce	Employees and manual workers in commerce, entertainment, and banking
Administrative public services	Employees in administrative public services
Source: 19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris.	

### Box 1. Social nomenclature used in the survey

Codification of occupation:

1. Operators and manual workers in the agriculture, fishing, or forestry sectors
2. Manual workers in industry or commerce, employees in industry or commerce or of private individuals, and public sector employees
3. Operators, directors, engineers, traders, members of the liberal professions
4. Individuals with no occupation (housewives, retirees, persons of independent means, etc.)

(minimal in this case) of occupations or suggested that social classes were distinguishable.<sup>(19)</sup> That we cannot separate ‘retirees’ and ‘housewives’, for example, requires a cautious approach. Rather than take the table headings for occupations at face value, therefore, we have to consider them as socio-occupational clusters, or groups, partly combined with an urban–rural divide and, to a lesser extent, a division between primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. We refer to the survey’s social categories as follows: (a) agricultural group; (b) manual worker/employee group; (c) operator group; and (d) no-occupation group.

### 3. Findings and extensions

The final results of the survey were published in the report of November 1942, for internal distribution only. The report (see Appendix B in Prost [2023]) drew the following conclusions:

1. The ‘vast majority’ of the public ‘support a pronatalist approach’ (noting that significance tests indicate opinion was highly consistent: only a few differences are ‘unlikely’, i.e. attributable to chance). Remembering that absence of (statistical) proof does not constitute proof of absence (of relationship), Stoetzel identified as the main variable contributing to these (slight) differences ‘the number of children per household’, associated with a greater or less propensity to support the pronatalist and pro-family statements.<sup>(20)</sup> He noted, on a secondary basis, that more women than men consider it ‘irresponsible for a man to get an unmarried woman pregnant’, that young people are more indulgent than their elders with respect to ‘young married couples who don’t want children’, and that people living in rural areas are more afraid than city-dwellers of ‘finding it impossible to provide all the food their family needs’.
2. The public believes that the causes of and solutions for the declining birth rate ‘are economic’, rather than moral or religious. The economic

(19) Stoetzel to Missenard, 13 May 1942 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).

(20) In Chapter 9 of the report, Stoetzel differentiates respondents with few children, who agree with the statement (Question 3) that ‘a man who forces his wife to have too many children is behaving badly towards her’ and reject the idea (Question 22) of taxing single and child-free couples more heavily, from those who believe that parents of large families congratulate themselves, in old age, for having had many children (Question 12).

factor was considered much more decisive, particularly in the manual worker/employee group and to an even greater extent in the agricultural group. Even health and well-being issues were considered secondary, and few respondents (including women) believed that ‘the suffering associated with childbearing’ was a key explanation.

3. From a prescriptive point of view, Stoetzel deduced from this study that it would be pointless to publish further warnings on the ‘population crisis’ and that it would be difficult to assess the benefits of any financial incentive policy, as useful as it might be, with a survey of this type. The slightest expression of sensitivity to coercive or punitive measures (especially those against abortion or targeting single or childless public sector employees<sup>(21)</sup>) confirmed, in his eyes, the need to prioritize propaganda that one might qualify as ‘positive’, based on ‘devotion to the State’, a ‘change in customs’, and ‘ideological reform’. Stoetzel advocated in favour of a psychological, cultural, and, to a degree, ‘anthropological’ approach to biopolitics, which, he agreed, promised less short-term success than material measures would, but which had the advantage of being measurable using further opinion surveys.

‘Your survey’, wrote Missenard to Stoetzel, after reviewing the summary report in September, ‘provides us with information that is only really useful for propaganda purposes, by shedding light on public attitudes to certain aspects of the issue. You now need to extract quantitative results from your surveys that can clarify *what we can expect, numerically, from reform*, and the benefit of implementing such reform despite the relatively significant expense.’<sup>(22)</sup> Missenard’s reaction confirms the gap between his expectations and Stoetzel’s approach. Missenard was a graduate of the École polytechnique and a novice in the field of population, an area he was supposed to be supervising. An industrial heating specialist and former member of the National Centre for Scientific Research-Applied, Missenard supported Carrel’s vision in two ways: first, by advocating the improvement of the human species through actions impacting both its biological constitution and its living and working conditions; and, secondly, by wanting to turn the FFEPPH into a centre for applied research in support of public policy.<sup>(23)</sup> Stoetzel, on the other hand, tried to import from the United States both a scholarly discipline (psychosociology) and a method (survey research), as well as a scientific and commercial technique (surveys). While, for Stoetzel, opinion polls could be used to construct government ‘propaganda’ and assess its impact, Missenard

(21) We are talking here in relative terms. While majority support remains (70% in the case of repression of abortion), it is much lower than for questions that elicited a near-consensus response (agreement rate of over 80%). On the attribution of depopulation to ‘public-sectorism’ (*fonctionnarisme*), see Ruiz (2021).

(22) Missenard to Stoetzel, 16 September 1942 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris); emphasis added.

(23) This was a lifelong conviction for Missenard and one shared by many engineers and occupational physicians of the 1930s (Rosental, 2003).

wanted them to provide broader support for the design and configuration of public policies across the board.

Believing that the survey in progress was insufficient on its own, Missenard encouraged Stoetzel, in his note, to conduct a further survey, this time targeting the most relevant individuals—‘girls and young women’—and pushing them to express the causes of ‘voluntary sterility’ and to identify ‘the conditions in which they would plan to have a larger number of children’.<sup>(24)</sup> the results of this survey would need, he writes, ‘to be able to determine the mathematical expectation of a solution’.<sup>(25)</sup> This resulted, in 1943, in the FFEPP Survey 04 (fertility—girls and young women—north zone, described in its preparation as the ‘seconde enquête natalité’), which afforded Stoetzel the opportunity to test another approach: to identify the individual reasons for the discrepancy observed between values and behaviours in order to better target the ‘solutions’ implemented.<sup>(26)</sup>

## II. Reinterpreting a survey 80 years on

By looking at the construction and creation of the 1942 survey, we can now put forward a reasoned reinterpretation of the survey, aware of the biases and limitations inherent in the very conditions in which the source was produced. Our aim is neither merely to deconstruct the categories and methods nor to ‘correct’ the results by applying more sophisticated statistical tools to data taken uncritically. It is rather to combine approaches, demonstrating how the history of social sciences forms an integral part of the retrospective production of knowledge.

As we have seen, the key lesson from the survey, to Stoetzel’s mind, was that the low birth rate should not be attributed to a lack of morality in the French, and particularly in French women, and that it was, instead, caused by economic factors. Do the results of the 1942 survey actually allow this interpretation? This question becomes more complex as the survey report clearly specified that the French public was sensitive to the birth rate issue: the French saw children as a source of family fulfilment and were keen to see fertility rates increase in the interests of the nation.

(24) ‘Rapport à M. Missenard sur l’Étude Préparatoire à une enquête prévue concernant les causes de la stérilité volontaire’, 16 December 1942 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).

(25) A. Missenard, *Projet de sondages*, 11 September 1942 (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris).

(26) ‘Rapport à M. Missenard sur l’Étude Préparatoire...’ (19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris). The response reveals a more enthusiastic Missenard than previously (Missenard to Stoetzel, 17 December). The preparatory study (*Seconde Enquête Natalité : Étude préparatoire. Le bulletin de réponse à l’attention des enquêteurs* [November 1942, 19760138/5, Archives nationales, Paris]) reveals that the challenge was to go beyond the usual threshold of discretion (talking about fertility involves talking about the body and potentially birth control), hence great attention to wordings and extensive reflection on the tact required. The freedom of tone that emerges in the annotations on the questionnaires collected confirms the impression that the 1942 and 1943 surveys managed, at least partly, to overcome self-censure. The significant advantage of this second survey is that it provides information on respondents’ ‘social and religious background’.

## 1. Morals, economics, and situations

Starting with Stoetzel's results, but distancing ourselves from the dissociation he applied between opinions about the birth rate and those on the causes of the low birth rate and potential solutions, we can provide some nuance to the hierarchy between 'economic' and 'moral' motives, which Stoetzel probably highlighted in his desire to differentiate his work from the referendum-competition of 1941. The apparent primacy of economic factors is partly derived from the way he categorized the arguments of the surveyed individuals. For example, he classified the equation of abortion with murder as a 'legislative' matter, rather than a 'moral' one.

In the summary of his report, moreover, Stoetzel included within the economic category factors that are not strictly pecuniary, relating to living and housing conditions often interpreted in a very qualitative manner (we would now use the term *well-being* to describe them). The 'difficulties and hardships' associated with parenthood prevail, in public opinion, over the 'cost of the child', understood in a more overall, abstract way. Stoetzel certainly passed too quickly over what the survey respondents found difficult: 'raising a child', with all that implies for the daily lives of households.

To clarify or add nuance to his findings, we need to think in relative terms, focusing on the disparities between statistical groups (the agricultural group, the over-60s, village-dwellers, and others). The reason is this: most of the questions met with broad agreement in the population, whether positive (89% of respondents thought the government should protect 'teenage mothers' and 'illegitimate children') or negative (86% did not believe that 'motherhood makes a woman unattractive'). If we focus on the 22 (out of 24) simple binary questions and cross them with the 23 statistical groups established in the survey (including the total population), by age, sex, marital status, place of residence, and socio-occupational cluster, we obtain 506 combinations (Table 3).

The various statistical groups agreed at rates of over 60% in 79% of cases<sup>(27)</sup> and at rates of higher than 80% in 29% of cases.<sup>(28)</sup> The first finding of the 1942 survey is, therefore, that expressed opinions on having children were based on a broadly shared sensibility, which coincided with the near-consensus of political parties at the time in favour of natalism.

It is not straightforward to estimate the extent of self-censure in responses, especially in the context of an authoritarian regime. To move beyond the observation of this overall convergence of responses, we can analyse the discrepancies. For each statistical group, we can start by looking at the positive responses that achieved the greatest consensus (those with an agreement rate of at least 80%

(27) Of the 506 combinations, 54.2% (the sum of 43.1 % and 11.1 %) collected an agreement rate of higher than 60%, with 25.1% (the sum of 17.8% and 7.3%) of combinations sharing a disagreement rate of higher than or equal to 60%.

(28) The sum of 11.1% agreement (and of 17.8% disagreement) higher than or equal to 80%.

Table 3. Overall convergence of responses to the 1942 survey

Rate of agreement (%)	No. of combinations (N = 506)	% of combinations
Less than 20[	90	17.8
[20-40[	37	7.3
[40-60[	105	20.8
[60-80[	218	43.1
80 and more	56	11.1

**Interpretation:** Of the 506 possible combinations in the survey (cross-referencing of questions and population groups), 56 (or 11.1%) had an agreement rate of equal to or higher than 80%. This agreement rate is the sum of ‘very positive’ and ‘positive’ responses, combined here and in the rest of the analysis.

**Note:** The percentages of ‘not sure’ responses are not taken into consideration. Of the 506 modalities, the proportion of respondents who did not give a response was less than 10% in 76 cases, 10%–20% in 318 cases, 20%–30% in 87 cases, and over 30% in 25 cases.

**Source:** *Enquête Natalité*, 1942 (authors’ calculations).

‘yes’). The list of statement (item)/statistical group combinations thus obtained shows the marked dominance of the most unifying statements:

- ‘The State should protect “teenage mothers” and “illegitimate children”’ (Item 1);
- ‘It is irresponsible for a man to get an unmarried woman pregnant’ (Item 2).

This two-sided opinion cuts across social boundaries. Its polysemous nature is certainly a contributing factor: it can reflect a form of paternalism or compassion that is compatible with religious conservatism as well as social concern towards vulnerable populations. In any event, it is two ‘moral considerations’ that cement French opinion the most clearly, through the expression of sensitivity and sympathy towards the most vulnerable and commonly stigmatized mothers.

A more dogmatic and stricter side of public opinion—reflecting religious, sexual, or reproductive morality—is also strongly expressed, but less consistently. The equation of abortion with murder is an eloquent example, which gained the approval of 70% of respondents (with no gender disparity) but with a clear distinction between the agricultural group (83% ‘yes’) and the manual workers and employees group (64%), just as those living in rural areas (with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants) were much more severe (82%) than city-dwellers (65%).

In contrast, the economic issues suggested by Stoetzel did not achieve the greatest levels of consensus. Only certain statistical groups (those with no occupation, young people, households with two or three children, and inhabitants of small towns) supported benefits for non-working mothers, and the no-occupation category was largely composed of women with this status. Likewise, at this high level of agreement, only the manual worker/employee and operator groups, households with one or two children, and the youngest survey respondents believed that large families experience discomfort.



Compared with the more ‘moral’ questions previously mentioned, financial considerations are only starkly dominant in certain segments of the sample. Even financial aid for families does not obtain entirely unanimous support. Unlike a contemporary reading based on a long institutional history of family allowances and other household benefits, the prospect of obtaining more financial aid probably still seemed abstract in relation to the day-to-day challenges of all kinds faced by large families.

This hypothesis is confirmed when we look at the statements that came closest to obtaining a consensus, namely those that relate to the concrete representation of difficult situations. Despite the survey’s rusticity compared with current criteria, the results suggest specific situations, familiar to most of the population: young women who have been seduced, children not recognized by their father, families encumbered with too many children to enjoy decent living conditions—an item to which individuals in the manual worker/employee group are particularly sensitive.<sup>(29)</sup> These situations are so widespread that they create apprehension even among households not primarily concerned by them.

Conversely, the idea of an ‘allowance for non-working mothers’, which would be a comparable sum to a salary, ranked 3rd among the most favourable reactions, was only attractive to the categories that would be directly affected by such a measure, whether immediately or in the short or medium term over their life cycle. First are couples with three or more children—the only ones on this list to support a tax system that penalizes single people and childless households. Households with two children, young households (aged 20–34), and those with no occupation (including non-working mothers) are the next most likely to support such a subsidy.

## 2. Exploring social variations in biopolitical sensibilities

To examine how different segments of public opinion are shaped by the perception of concrete situations, we can introduce an additional indicator, which would help us measure the diversity of opinion. We propose using a coefficient of variation to relate the standard deviation of responses (positive or negative) to the mean.<sup>(30)</sup> We are interested in cases where this indicator of differences in opinion exceeds 20%, i.e. a ratio far higher than the mean. We apply this measurement to two types of respondent groups: the socio-occupational groups on the one hand, and the number of children in the household on the other.

(29) The historian Simon Szreter (1996) demonstrated that reproductive choices should be treated not as the product of abstract calculative rationality but as the effect of the social perception of the cost associated with children and the concrete conditions of parenthood.

(30) Just one example of this is the case in Question 1 (‘Can it be said that children from large families often do not have enough to eat?’). The mean of the positive responses of the various age categories is 52.5%, the standard deviation is 3.4%, and the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean is therefore 6.4%.

This operation illuminates biopolitical sensibilities under the Occupation, with a particular spotlight on issues relating to the intimate perception of situations concerning procreation and on attitudes in the face of prevailing norms. In this area, certain items did achieve overall consensus across the entire population surveyed.

These included the fear of seeing fathers leave home due to 'mess and noise' or domestic quarrels 'related to the presence of children'. These two arguments were anecdotal for the agricultural group (7%) and operator group (11%) but were taken seriously by a significant portion of the manual worker/employee group (19%). Variations such as these reflect, in psychosociological terms, material determinations associated with housing and living conditions at a time when the living conditions of the working class varied greatly and, as the available data suggest, the salaries of between one-fifth and one-quarter of manual workers and employees were close to the poverty threshold.

The perception, including among women themselves, that childbearing does not compromise female health may indicate that even in the harsh context of the Occupation, fear of the risks associated with pregnancy and labour, including post-partum, had largely dissipated. Nevertheless, two types of households were sensitive to this risk: those with no children (and who express either fear in anticipation or distress at having had to give up on their reproductive plans due to an adverse pregnancy experience), and large families, among whom the probability of the mother having experienced health issues was higher.<sup>(31)</sup> Likewise, members of the agricultural group stand out in their fear that childbearing compromises women's health, which may reflect both the need for female work in the fields and reduced medical presence in rural areas.

Lastly, the ban on single or childless people taking up public sector positions was widely rejected, but here again, we can identify differences in response: the data reveal a positive correlation between support for the ban and fertility, with the highest level of support coming from large families. This directly embodies the theory of social justice promulgated by the natalist movement.<sup>(32)</sup>

Regarding the items that produced the most divergent responses, defined here as having attracted the support of only half of respondents (between 45% and 55%), these represent 62 out of the 506 modalities, or 12%. Fifty-five of these relate to just six questions. Two of these relate directly or indirectly to the optimal number of children; they asked the respondents, respectively, if

(31) The positive response rate was 17% among both childless households and larger families—twice as high as in parents of two children.

(32) Until the end of the Second World War, number of children was a criterion that strongly differentiated households in France, while financial and tax measures in favour of large families were still relatively modest. At comparable social and income levels, these discrepancies in the number of progeny strongly differentiated final incomes. As such, the revaluation of family allowances following the Liberation represented a highly redistributive measure (Paillat, 1971).

the children of large families were undernourished and if a husband could force a wife to have as many children as he wants. These hesitations partly echoed, at the household level, the desire of demographers, childcare professionals, and paediatricians of the time to identify the threshold between sufficiently high fertility to boost the country's birth rate and excessive fertility that disrupts the economic and psychological balance of families. But, above all, they provide objective evidence of a mother's need not to overload her own boat, a precaution often advocated most ardently by her own mother. The right of a husband to make his wife have children prompted differences of opinion correlated to number of children. Its acceptance is markedly reduced in childless individuals and is greatest among large families, where the patriarchal norm is potentially more embedded.

Another proposal reflects the intention to identify the right measure: the statement concerning the duty to procreate for the nation. While 70% of respondents supported this, the attitudes of those who did not are also very variable. Could young married couples without a child be accused of selfishness or even betrayal of their nation? Opinions were divided, including in childless and one-child households. This confirms that the internalization of a civic duty to procreate does not automatically translate into a stigmatizing and repressive impulse. It was opposed by a fairly large consensus.<sup>(33)</sup> As for abortion, we see greater severity among the agricultural cluster against young married couples without children.

A fifth question is, on the other hand, sociologically focused and reveals a sharp ideological division. It relates to the need for childbearing for a woman's beauty to flourish. While it divided the population (36% 'not sure', 41% 'yes', and 23% 'no'), it attracted close to 50% support in three strongly intersecting groups: those over 60, those with no occupation (including housewives and non-working older people), and members of large families (which may include a high proportion of women who withdrew, at least temporarily, from the labour market).

Lastly, a public policy dilemma is presented: does the aim of increasing the birth rate mean increasing family allowances before salaries? Supported by 56% of respondents overall, the measure was rejected, though by only a few points, by childless and one-child households. It split the manual worker/employee group exactly in half: this division may reflect the heterogeneity of the number of children in these environments but it highlights, above all, the tension between maintaining salaries, a priority for a large number of respondents, and the importance of family allowances within the largest working-class households. This choice was not without historical significance: family allowances would become a key element of the Liberation's revenue policy in the late 1950s and would constitute a vital portion of working-class income (Paillat, 1971).

(33) A calculation error was made in the 1942 survey: 59% rather than 67% of respondents supported the notion of 'betrayal of the nation' (Question 21).

## Conclusion

Despite its limitations, particularly regarding the nomenclature of socio-occupational categories, the FFEPPH's survey allows us to classify, clarify, and rank the representations associated with fertility in 1942. Its conclusions partly confirm the French public's sensibilities towards the low birth rate and even to the pronatalist cause, as demonstrated in the IFOP survey of 1939. In the latter, respondents attributed reduced fertility to living conditions (52%) rather than to selfishness (34%). Fertile age groups demanded material aid while disapproving of coercion and repression. Stoetzel concluded from this that the classic pronatalist discourse was not adapted (implicitly refuting the catastrophist and aggressive propaganda of the *Alliance nationale contre la dépopulation*) and identified the need to encourage less specific and more positive values.

The 1942 survey provided more detail to the general picture previously sketched out.<sup>(34)</sup> Countering more ideological undertakings by contributing to the implicit recognition of a sort of ethical pluralism,<sup>(35)</sup> it confirms that the perception of a national duty to procreate was not accompanied by a repressive consensus. It also invites us to historicize the notions of social justice and redistribution, recalling the burden of numerous children on standard of living at a time when the disparity in the number of children was decisive in living standards inequalities. Awareness of this is heightened as family size increases, but it also has a more general reach, with nearly a half of childless households considering it normal to be taxed more heavily. Sensibilities towards single mothers and children born outside marriage, and expectations of government protection, are some of the most significant findings of the survey. The reduction in the perceived health risks associated with childbearing also constitutes an important historical marker.

The responses clearly bear witness to situations experienced and daily realities in the opinions expressed. The survey appears to reveal less of a division (highlighted by Stoetzel) between 'moral' and 'economic' considerations and more of a sociological differentiation between general or abstract attitudes and points of view anchored in the concrete forms and conditions of existence, particularly of housing. In this respect, the 1942 survey exceeds its own objective by emerging as an instructive source for understanding the social history of biopolitical sensibilities in France under the Occupation.

(34) The 1943 survey is, clearly, the richest of all and, due to the (partial) conservation of the questionnaires, could form the subject of further research.

(35) In this respect, the survey prefigures an effort to take account of personal well-being, something implemented in INED's post-war surveys.

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## Résumé

### Fabrice Cahen, Paul-André Rosental • L'ENQUÊTE NATALITÉ DE 1942. PHOTOGRAPHIE BIOPOLITIQUE D'UNE FRANCE EN PLEIN TOURNANT DÉMOGRAPHIQUE

L'article étudie la genèse et réexploite les données de l'enquête Natalité de 1942, destinée à élucider les causes de la faible fécondité des Français et à y proposer des remèdes. Menée sous l'égide du sociologue Jean Stoetzel, pionnier de l'enquête par sondages, elle repose sur un questionnaire élaboré conjointement avec ses enquêteurs – principalement des instituteurs et des prêtres. Les questions reprennent les thématiques du mouvement nataliste dans toute leur diversité, des propositions répressives (contre l'avortement notamment) à l'évocation de mesures sociales en faveur des ménages. L'enquête conclut que le public français est favorable au natalisme mais considère que les causes de la faible fécondité sont principalement économiques, plutôt que morales ou religieuses. Les incitations financières sont jugées utiles mais insuffisantes. Si Stoetzel préconise une campagne de propagande fondée sur le dévouement à l'État et la réforme morale, la réexploitation des données montre que ce sont les conditions de vie concrètes liées à une forte fécondité qui préoccupent les sondés. Dans la gamme des attitudes morales qui s'expriment, les penchants répressifs sont essentiellement concentrés dans les campagnes. Dans l'ensemble, les sondés se montrent sensibles au sort des populations vulnérables, à commencer par les mères célibataires.

## Resumen

### Fabrice Cahen, Paul-André Rosental • LA ENCUESTA NATALITÉ DE 1942 DE LA FUNDACIÓN CARREL. INSTANTÁNEA BIOPOLÍTICA DE UNA FRANCIA EN PLENO CAMBIO DEMOGRÁFICO

Este artículo examina los orígenes y reexamina los datos de la encuesta Natalité [Natalidad] de 1942, cuyo objetivo era dilucidar las causas de la baja tasa de fecundidad en Francia y proponer soluciones. Realizada bajo los auspicios del sociólogo Jean Stoetzel, pionero de la investigación mediante encuestas, se basó en un cuestionario elaborado conjuntamente con sus entrevistadores, principalmente profesores y sacerdotes. Las preguntas recogen los temas del movimiento natalista en toda su diversidad, desde propuestas represivas (contra el aborto en particular) hasta medidas sociales de ayuda a los hogares. La encuesta concluye que el público francés es favorable al natalismo, pero considera que las causas de la baja fecundidad son principalmente económicas, más que morales o religiosas. Los incentivos financieros se consideran útiles pero insuficientes. Aunque Stoetzel abogaba por una campaña de propaganda basada en la devoción al Estado y la reforma moral, un nuevo examen de los datos muestra que lo que preocupa a los encuestados son las condiciones de vida concretas asociadas a la alta fecundidad. En el abanico de actitudes morales que se expresan, las tendencias represivas se concentran esencialmente en zonas rurales. En general, los encuestados se mostraron sensibles a la difícil situación de las poblaciones vulnerables, empezando por las madres solteras.