

*Annual Review of Sociology***Families in Southeast and  
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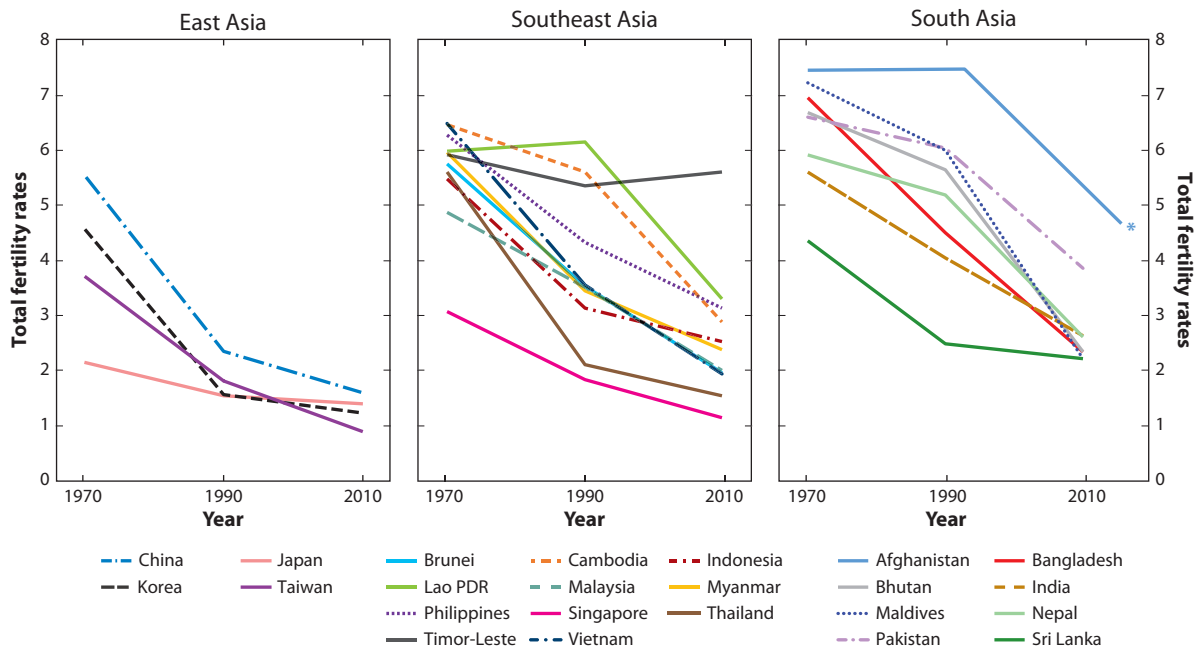
**Abstract**

Southeast and South Asia are home to one-third of the world's population. Their great economic and cultural diversity makes generalization about family patterns and trends hazardous. We review literature on trends in fertility, marriage, divorce, and living arrangements in the past half century. The explanations for these trends focus on structural and ideological changes related to socioeconomic development; cultural factors including kinship system, religion, and ethnicity; and public policies. While the impact of rapid modernization and related ideational changes are evident, there are also changes—or a lack thereof—that cannot be explained by development and may be attributable to historical and cultural factors that have shaped family norms in the region. The following trends are evident: (a) fertility is declining and age at marriage is rising, although teenage and arranged marriages remain common in South Asia, (b) a majority of the elderly continue to live with or are supported by their children, and (c) divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing remain relatively rare.

## OBJECTIVES

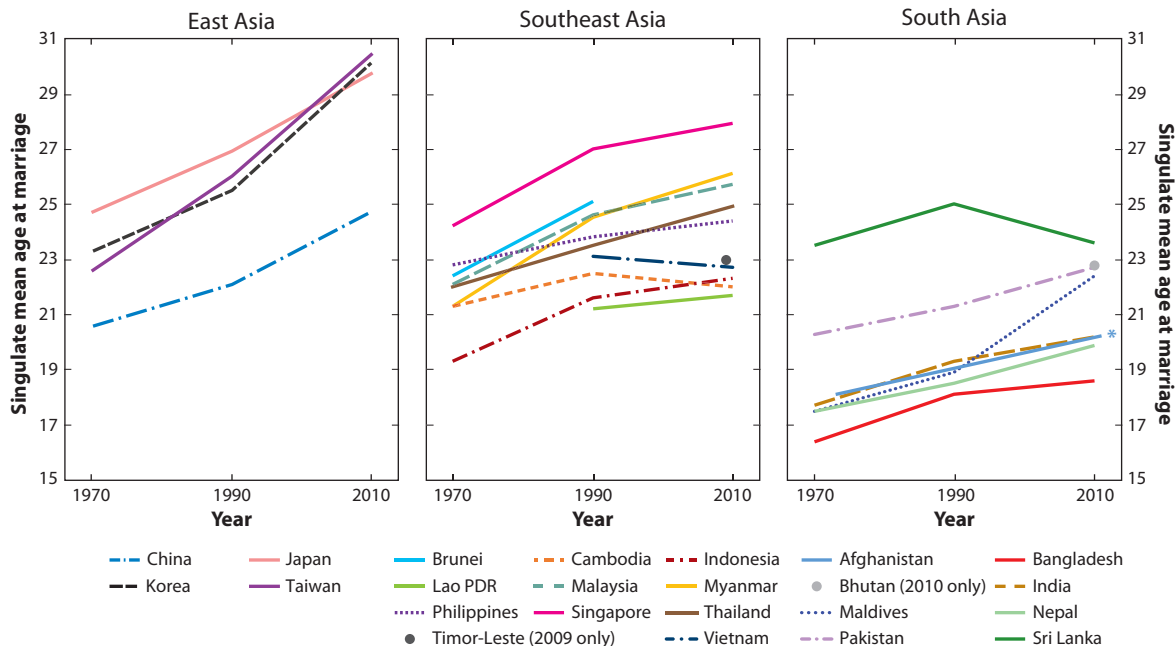
Southeast and South Asia are home to one-third of the world's population, including the world's fourth and second most populous countries—Indonesia and India, respectively. Countries in this region have undergone uneven development in the past half a century, providing a unique perspective on the intersection of culture, industrialization, public policies, and globalization in shaping the meaning and functioning of the family system around the world.

Evolution of families in Southeast and South Asia is quite distinct from that in the neighboring region of East Asia, where many of the family changes have overshot those in Europe and North America in terms of the low fertility and marriage rate (Jones 2017, Jones & Yeung 2014, Raymo et al. 2015). As **Figure 1** shows, while fertility in East Asia was already below or near replacement level in 1990 and is now at ultralow levels, it remains above replacement level in most countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia, with total fertility rates (TFRs) above 2 in most countries and above 3 in several. Moreover, while mean age at marriage has risen in East Asia, with more than one-third of adults remaining single at age 40, the age at marriage in Southeast and South Asia has changed more modestly—marriage remains nearly universal, and child marriage and consanguineous marriage are common, though receding. As **Figure 2** shows, while age at first marriage for females in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan is now close to 30, in Southeast and South Asia it is substantially younger, remaining close to 20 in a few countries [Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), India, and Nepal]. In contrast to East Asia, there is greater heterogeneity among countries in Southeast and South Asia. In this article we argue that, apart from the obvious effect of differing levels of socioeconomic development, several distinctive features



**Figure 1**

Total fertility rates in East, Southeast, and South Asia, 1970–2010. Data are from the World Bank database on Health Nutrition and Population Statistics, accessed on October 25, 2016. Data for Singapore were sourced from United Nations Population Division World Fertility Data 2015. The asterisk indicates that 2010 data from Afghanistan are missing, so 2015 data are used. Abbreviation: PDR, People's Democratic Republic.



**Figure 2**

Singulate mean age at marriage in East, Southeast, and South Asia. Due to limited data availability, only 2009 data were plotted for Timor-Leste, only 2010 data were plotted for Bhutan, and 1973 and 2015 data were plotted instead of 1970 and 2010 for Afghanistan. The asterisk indicates that 1990 and 2010 data from Afghanistan are missing, and 2015 data are shown in place of 2010 data. Source: United Nations World Marriage Data 2012. Abbreviation: PDR, People’s Democratic Republic.

of the South and Southeast Asian context may be responsible for the difference between these countries and those in East Asia. These features are the colonial experience of Southeast and South Asian countries; the distinctive nature of kinship patterns and gender inequality in the region; and the religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity within and between countries in South and Southeast Asia.

Below, we review theoretical frameworks for global family change; describe trends and summarize literature on fertility, marriage, divorce, and living arrangements in Southeast and South Asia in the past few decades; and provide explanations for these changes. The explanations include both structural and ideological changes related to (a) economic development, (b) educational and human development including women’s education, labor force participation, and gender relations, (c) cultural factors including kinship system, religion, ethnicity, and caste system, and (d) public policies. Examining changes in these countries allows us to reflect on the relevance of several major theories about global family changes.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Global research on patterns of change and stability during an era of socioeconomic transformation often draws on two theoretical perspectives. The first emphasizes socioeconomic development that transforms the structural conditions under which families are formed. The second emphasizes ideology-driven changes that transform the notions of how individuals visualize themselves vis-à-vis parents, partners, and children.

## Modernization Theory—Structurally Driven Changes

The global development or modernization theory argues that structural forces such as industrialization, urbanization, and advancement in education will lead families to converge from more diverse forms of large extended rural-based families to smaller, more egalitarian, and far less stable conjugal families (Goode 1963, Parsons 1942). Goode also predicted that parental influence on children's marriage and the extended kinship would weaken, fertility rates would stabilize at around a TFR of 3, and most women would remain home, with few moving into prestigious occupations.

## Second Demographic Transition and Developmental Idealism—Ideology-Driven Changes

Other scholars have called for the inclusion of ideational factors to better explain family changes around the world. The developmental idealism paradigm posits that the modern form of family seen in Western Europe and the United States is considered desirable and attainable. As a result, a set of beliefs and values about modern western families, including attributes of individualism, marriage at a mature age, courtship as a part of the process leading to marriage, intergenerational independence, gender equality, and planned and low fertility, will spread and provide a model for people in other regions as societies develop (Thornton 2001, 2013).

Lesthaeghe and colleagues have argued that changes in religiosity and secularization in Western countries foster an orientation toward individual growth and gratification, which explains postmodern family behavior and the prevalence of patterns such as cohabitation, high divorce rates, below-replacement fertility, and nonmarital childbearing—what they have labeled the “second demographic transition” (Lesthaeghe 1983, Lesthaeghe & Neels 2002). This shift of mindset will bring about a stronger emphasis on individual freedom of choice and a greater tolerance of diversity. They later hypothesize that such ideational and behavioral changes will also spread to other parts of the world (Lesthaeghe 2010).

In this review, we first describe trends in factors hypothesized to influence family formation and then review the literature linking these factors to demographic behavior. However, emergence of ultralow fertility and increasing singlehood in East Asia has drawn our attention to social contexts within which marriage and family decisions are made, particularly the role of gender equity, or lack thereof, that increases the tensions between women's increasing economic opportunities and the demands of family and childrearing (Brinton & Lee 2016, Raymo et al. 2015). We argue that when examining these global theories in the context of Southeast and South Asia, it is also important to account for other moderating factors. These include the historical context in which family policies, kinship structures, and cultural and religious diversity are developed.

## SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

### Historical Context

Examination of family patterns in Southeast and South Asia must be rooted in the history of the region. All of the countries of Southeast and South Asia, with the exceptions of Thailand, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Bhutan, were under the control of European colonial powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some from even earlier. The imposition of foreign legal systems and the identification of certain modes of behavior as more modern undoubtedly influenced local customs and practices in relation to family matters, though it met with considerable resistance, along with more general nationalist resistance to the colonial imposition of modernity. In India, this resistance took the form of strident demands for respect for traditional culture and aggressive

resistance to abolishing child marriage (Chatterjee 1989). In Indonesia, it took the form of protests against regulating marriage registration and polygamy (Locher-Scholten 2000).

Defining family and its functions has been a significant part of the postcolonial nation-building effort in many countries in this region, with a focus on reforms in family law such as raising minimum age at marriage, regulating divorce and property settlement, and controlling polygamy. However, the politicization of family law that began during the colonial era still persists, making it difficult to implement these reforms, particularly in countries with religious and ethnic diversity. Tension between the Western and Asian cultures can be observed in family policies in countries in this region. In the Philippines, divorce has been made nearly impossible and access to contraception has been hindered because of the influence of Catholicism dating from the Spanish colonial period. In Singapore, the government proclaimed “family as the basic unit of society” as one element of the core national ideology (Singap. Parliam. 1991, pp. 1–2) and stressed the moral value of two-parent and extended families as the cultural ideals that have been embodied in the country’s public policies. In India, separate family laws covering different religious groups persist and have been resistant to change (Sarkar & Butalia 1995).

### **Kinship Patterns**

The contrasts between South Asian and Southeast Asian kinship systems are stark. The kinship system in Southeast Asia is predominantly bilateral, that is, more flexible in matters such as inheritance and postmarriage residential arrangement. Matrilocal, the preference for staying with the wife’s parents after the wedding, is clear in most Southeast Asian countries (Bryant 2002, Guilmoto 2012b, Heuveline et al. 2017, Hirschman & Loi 1996, Zimmer & Kim 2001). The only exceptions to the bilateral kinship system characterizing most of Southeast Asia are northern Vietnam and the Chinese populations of Singapore and Malaysia, which adhere to a Confucianist system. Werner (2009) suggests that young Vietnamese couples prefer neolocal residence, living only a short period of time with parents or in-laws before starting their independent household, especially in urban areas.

This bilateral family system may be related to greater gender symmetry (Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan 2003) in Southeast Asia and may also explain the lower preference for sons in Southeast Asia than in South Asia. Southeast Asia was characterized by a pattern of relatively high female autonomy and economic importance in precolonial times (Reid 1988), and this seems to have persisted in modern times (Booth 2016).

In contrast, the family system in South Asia is largely patrilocal and patriarchal, with tremendous gender asymmetry in household roles and authority (Jejeebhoy & Sathar 2001) and relatively low labor force participation rates for women (Dasgupta & Verick 2017). The only exceptions to the strongly patriarchal and patrilocal kinship and family system characterizing the Indian subcontinent, especially north India, are the Buddhist-dominated countries, Sri Lanka and Bhutan.

It is a key argument of this article that kinship systems are a basic underpinning of all aspects of family formation and functioning, and that the interplay between social and economic changes in the region and the underlying kinship system explains much of what has been happening. The contrasts between South Asian and Southeast Asian kinship systems are stark, with only northern Vietnam and the Chinese populations of Singapore and Malaysia adhering to a Confucianist system rather than the bilateral kinship system characterizing most of Southeast Asia, and only the Buddhist-dominated countries (Sri Lanka and Bhutan) differing sharply from the strongly patriarchal and patrilocal kinship and family system characterizing the Indian subcontinent, especially north India. Both the Confucianist system and the Hindu system in India emphasize the absorption of the bride into the husband’s family, whereas the bilateral kinship systems of Southeast Asia allow much closer association of the bride with her cognates.

## Cultural Diversity

Another characteristic pertinent to family changes is the vast cultural diversity in terms of religion and ethnicity, which results in a variety of ideals for gender and kinship relations (Jejeebhoy & Sathar 2001, Morgan et al. 2002). Several countries in South and Southeast Asia are predominantly Muslim—Brunei, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Maldives. Buddhism is the main religion in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. India and Nepal are predominantly Hindu, while the Philippines is mainly Roman Catholic. A majority of the Vietnamese have no religion. Most countries contain more than one religious group, with religious composition particularly mixed in Malaysia and Singapore. Although Muslims form only 14% of India's population, India is home to the third largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. Religion has a strong influence on gender and intergenerational relations, with Islam and Hinduism more patriarchal than Buddhism.

Many countries in this region have multiple ethnic groups. For example, half of Malaysians are Malay and 20% are Chinese; three-quarters of Sri Lankans are Sinhalese, while 12% are Tamil. In Singapore, approximately three-quarters of the population is Chinese, 13% are Malay, and 9% are Indian. Large differences frequently exist in family formation behavior across racial groups. In Indonesia, no single ethnic group accounts for more than half the population; the Javanese constitute 40% of the population and the Sudanese are 16%. In recent years, the incidence of cross-religion/ethnic and transnational marriages has increased in Southeast Asia, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia, in spite of the fact that in countries where religion plays an important role in public life, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, interfaith marriages are not undertaken lightly (Connolly 2009, Jones et al. 2009). In South Asia, such marriages tend to be rare and often subject to tremendous social pressure (Andrist et al. 2013).

## SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXTS AND TRANSFORMATION

To contextualize changes in South and Southeast Asia, we first provide some key developmental indicators from the past few decades for this region in **Table 1**. First, it is important to understand the change in the demographic landscape of this region. Massive population growth has occurred since 1970, from just over 1 billion to almost 2.5 billion in 2015. South Asia hosts approximately a quarter of the world population and is its most densely populated region. With a population of 1.3 billion, India is the world's second most populous country. Two other countries in South Asia also have large populations: Pakistan (189 million) and Bangladesh (161 million). Southeast Asia currently has approximately 640 million people, accounting for 8.5% of the world population (World Bank 2015a) spread across 11 countries lying east of the Indian subcontinent and south of China. While the countries of Southeast Asia share some common historical and cultural features, diversity has always been a feature of the region (Hirschman 2001). Indonesia has the largest population in Southeast Asia, with 258 million people in 2015, or 41% of the region's total population. The Philippines and Vietnam follow at around 100 million people each, and Thailand and Myanmar both have over 50 million people each.

## Economic Growth and Rise in Education

Countries in Southeast Asia have undergone rapid economic growth over the past few decades, although the growth rates have been variable (see **Table 1**). Singapore and Brunei are outliers, and they are now among the world's wealthiest countries. Singapore's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (purchasing power parity adjusted, in 2011 international dollars) was approximately \$80,000 in 2015, significantly higher than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

**Table 1** Socioeconomic indicators for Southeast and South Asian Countries

Country	Total population (in thousands) <sup>a</sup>		GDP per capita <sup>a</sup>		Female labor force participation <sup>a</sup>		Percent female gross tertiary enrollment ratio <sup>b</sup>		Gender Inequality Index <sup>c</sup>		Dominant religion (percentage) (year of latest data if not 2017) <sup>d</sup>	Dominant ethnic group (percentage) (year of latest data if not 2017) <sup>e</sup>
	1970	2015	1990	2015	1990	2015	1970 (alternate year)	2015 (alternate year)	1995 (alternate year)	2015		
<b>Southeast Asia</b>												
Brunei	130	418	84,672	74,600	45.2	51.0	2.2 (1977)	38.6	ND	ND	Islam (78.8%) (2011)	Malay (65.7%) (2011)
Cambodia	6,995	15,518	ND	3,291	77.1	75.5	0.6 (1972)	11.8	0.66	0.48	Buddhism (96.9%) (2008)	Khmer (97.6%) (2013)
Indonesia	114,835	258,162	4,625	10,368	50.2	50.9	1.4	25.7	0.578	0.47	Islam (87.2%)	Javanese (40.2%) (2010)
Lao PDR	2,688	6,664	1,613	5,434	79.9	77.7	0.1 (1971)	16.5	ND	0.47	Buddhism (66.8%) (2005)	Lao (54.6%) (2005)
Malaysia	10,804	30,723	10,552	24,989	43.1	49.3	2.9 (1979)	31.8	0.398	0.29	Islam (61.3%)	Malay (50.1%) (2010)
Myanmar	26,381	52,404	743	5,071	73.4	75.1	1.3 (1972)	14.9 (2012)	ND	0.37	Buddhism (88.0%) (2014)	Burman (Bamar) (68.0%)
Philippines	35,805	101,716	4,010	6,875	47.6	50.5	20.2 (1971)	40.3 (2014)	0.483	0.44	Roman Catholic (81.0%) (2000)	Tagalog (28.1%)
Singapore	2,075	5,535	34,340	80,892	50.7	58.2	4.0	94.5	0.252	0.07	Buddhism (33.3%)	Chinese (74.1%)
Thailand	36,885	68,658	6,650	15,237	75.9	62.9	2.7 (1976)	57.3	0.4	0.37	Buddhism (93.6%)	Thai (97.5%) (2015) <sup>f</sup>
Timor-Leste	605	1,241	ND	2,151	44.6	26.8	ND	15.2 (2010)	ND	ND	Christianity (98.7%) (2004)	Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) (ND)
Vietnam	42,729	91,713	1,501	5,667	73.7	73.8	1.3 (1976)	28.9	0.383	0.34	No Religion (80.7%) (1999)	Kinh (85.7%) (2009)

(Continued)



**Table 1** (Continued)

Country	Total population (in thousands) <sup>a</sup>		GDP per capita <sup>a</sup>		Female labor force participation <sup>a</sup>		Percent female gross tertiary enrollment ratio <sup>b</sup>		Gender Inequality Index <sup>c</sup>		Dominant religion (percentage) (year of latest data if not 2017) <sup>d</sup>	Dominant ethnic group (percentage) (year of latest data if not 2017) <sup>e</sup>
	1970	2015	1990	2015	1990	2015	1970 (alternate year)	2015 (alternate year)	1995 (alternate year)	2015		
<b>South Asia</b>												
Afghanistan	11,126	33,736	ND	1,861	16.4	19.1	0.22	3.67 (2014)	ND	0.67	Muslim (99.7%) (2009)	Pashtrun (ND)
Bangladesh	65,048	161,201	1,288	3,133	61.9	43.1	0.4	11.4 (2014)	0.656	0.52	Islam (89.6%) (2001)	Bengali (98.0%) (2011)
Bhutan	298	787	2,325	7,736	50.3	58.7	0.2 (1978)	9.2 (2013)	ND	0.48	Buddhism (75.0%)	Ngalop (Bhote) (50.0%)
India	553,579	1,309,054	1,755	5,754	34.8	26.8	2.2 (1971)	26.7	0.687	0.53	Hinduism (80.5%) (2011)	Hindi-speaking (41.03%) (2001)
Maldives	116	409	ND	11,994	20.2	57.3	ND	20.3 (2014)	0.649	0.31	Islam (93.9%) (2014)	South Indians (ND)
Nepal	11,998	28,656	1,198	2,301	79.2	79.7	0.6 (1976)	15.1	0.71	0.50	Hinduism (81.3%) (2011)	Chhetri (16.6%) (2011)
Pakistan	58,091	189,381	3,055	4,695	13.4	24.3	1.0 (1971)	9.2	0.766	0.55	Islam (96.4%) (2010)	Punjabi (44.7%)
Sri Lanka	12,514	20,966	3,666	11,062	45.5	30.2	0.9	24.0	0.471	0.39	Buddhism (70.1%) (2012)	Sinhalese (74.9%) (2012)

Data were retrieved August 17, 2017 unless otherwise specified. Abbreviations: GDP, gross domestic product; ND, no data available; PDR, People's Democratic Republic.

<sup>a</sup>Total population numbers, GDP, and female labor force participation are from World Bank Open Data (<https://data.worldbank.org/>).

<sup>b</sup>Data on female gross tertiary enrollment ratio are from UNESCO Inst. Stat. (2017). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, except for data for Singapore, which are from <http://data.gov.sg>, accessed on December 7, 2016.

<sup>c</sup>Gender Inequality Index data are from the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports 2016 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GDI>).

<sup>d</sup>Data on religion are from UNSD (2017), except for Myanmar, which is from the 2014 Myanmar Census, and Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are from CIA (2017).

<sup>e</sup>Data on ethnicity are from CIA (2017), except for India, for which data are from the 2001 Census of India.

<sup>f</sup>Some alternative estimates of the ethnic Thai proportion of the population are considerably lower, depending on the numbers considered to be Sino-Thai, Malay, Khmer, hill tribe populations, and others.



and Development average of \$40,000. Singapore's per-capita GDP has more than doubled in the past two decades, as have those of Malaysia and Thailand, which are currently approximately \$25,000 and \$15,000, respectively. Indonesia has reached a per-capita income of just over \$10,000. The other countries (except Brunei) still have a GDP per capita below \$10,000, though they also experienced high growth. South Asian countries are at an even lower developmental stage, with most countries' GDP per capita below or near \$10,000 and those of Nepal and Bangladesh near \$2,000. This heterogeneity is also reflected in the composition of the respective economies, with agriculture dominating in Myanmar, India, Nepal, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, and the manufacturing and service sectors playing important roles in Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia.

A significant phenomenon observed throughout Southeast and South Asia is the rapid rise in female educational enrollment rates in all countries. Higher tertiary enrollment rates are related to lower fertility and delayed marriage. Singapore and Thailand experienced very rapid growth in female tertiary enrollment rates, from below 5% in 1970 to 94.5% and 57.3%, respectively, in 2015. Their growth exceeded that of the Philippines, which was well ahead of them in 1970, but its rate nonetheless doubled to 40% in 2015. In most other Southeast Asian countries, significant increases were observed in the mid-1990s, but from a significantly lower base, so that in most of these countries, 30% or fewer young adults are currently enrolled in tertiary education. Likewise, in South Asia, the base of tertiary education in 1970 was very low, and all countries now have female gross tertiary enrollment rates of under 30%, with the highest in India and Sri Lanka of 27% and 24%, respectively.

### Gender Inequality and Labor Market Opportunities for Women

Southeast and South Asia are characterized by a high, though declining, level of gender inequality in many countries. **Table 1** shows the Gender Inequality Index, comprising indicators of gender inequality in health, labor force participation, and political representation, with a higher score indicating greater gender inequality. While inequality has generally decreased over time, most countries in South Asia—Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal—have higher inequality than any of the Southeast Asian countries. Singapore has the lowest level of gender inequality, followed by Malaysia.

The trend in the female labor force participation rate (FLFPR) affects the family system significantly. Although we typically expect a U-shaped curve of female employment, with more women employed in agricultural economies, a decline in the FLFPR with economic growth, and then a rise in the FLFPR as services emerge, this trend is not true for these regions (Dasgupta & Verick 2017). In Southeast Asia, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam have had an FLFPR of approximately 80% since 1990. Thailand also had a high FLFPR (76%) in 1990, but it has declined to the current level of 63%. In contrast, most countries in South Asia have a much lower FLFPR than those in Southeast Asia: lower than 30% in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Cultural factors are, no doubt, part of the explanation, along with some underreporting of women's work (Verick 2014). Also, the combination of increasing crowding in agriculture and limited nonagricultural opportunities has led to stagnation and even a decline in the FLFPR in South Asia—for example, the Indian FLFPR fell from 35% to 27% between 1990 and 2015 (Dasgupta & Verick 2017).

The rapid socioeconomic transformations, together with evolving cultural norms and values, have led to far-reaching changes in family life in Southeast and South Asia. In the following sections, we review changes in family functions and behavior, as reflected in fertility, marriage, family structure, and intergenerational relations, and how the developmental and ideological contexts have shaped these changes in the past few decades.

## CHANGES IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN FAMILIES

### Fertility Trends

Fertility levels in South and Southeast Asia were almost identical in the 1950s and 1960s, but as shown in **Table 2**, fertility declined more rapidly in Southeast Asia than in South Asia from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. After that, the decline in Southeast Asia slowed down (mainly because of a stalling of Indonesia's fertility decline), and the difference of almost one child in TFR between the two regions narrowed to 0.2 children by 2015. In both regions, there is enormous intercountry variation. In Southeast Asia, the TFR in 2015 ranged from 1.2 in Singapore and 1.5 in Thailand to about 3 each in the Philippines and Lao PDR and 5.6 in Timor-Leste. In South Asia, the TFR ranged from 2.0 in Bhutan and 2.1 in Sri Lanka to 4.7 in Afghanistan. But in both regions, most people lived in countries where the TFR was close to or slightly higher than the replacement level—this was true for India, Bangladesh and Indonesia. Due to the high fertility rates in the past few decades, the population in this region is relatively young, and most countries have enjoyed demographic dividends.

The distinctive characteristic of South and Southeast Asia is that they have experienced some of the most rapid fertility declines to replacement-level fertility, or near-replacement-level fertility, ever recorded. Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Bangladesh fit into this category; Indonesia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka are not far behind. Singapore's trajectory, in particular, is similar to East Asian countries. While fertility remains high in some states of India, it has fallen below the replacement level in several major southern states (Guilmoto & Rajan 2013). The most rapid fertility declines in Singapore and Thailand considerably predated the corresponding decline in Vietnam, which, in turn, slightly predated that in Bangladesh. Not only were these declines in fertility remarkably rapid, but some of them took place in countries with very low levels of socioeconomic development—notably, Vietnam from 1979 to 1993 (Bryant 2007, Haughton 1997), and Bangladesh from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s (Hayes & Jones 2015).

### Drivers of Fertility Decline: Contrasting Experiences of Thailand and Bangladesh

It is difficult to argue that a single theoretical framework can explain fertility decline in this region due to differences in trajectories as well as conditions under which these declines took place. Thailand and Bangladesh have both experienced significant fertility declines. In Thailand, sharp declines began around 1970, and the replacement level of fertility was breached in the early 1990s. In Bangladesh, there was not much decline before the 1980s; indeed, in 1980–1985, the TFR in Bangladesh was 3 children higher than in Thailand. But the TFR fell by almost 2 children over the subsequent decade, stalled for a time, and resumed a steady decline thereafter.

These declines have, however, taken place under very different structural conditions. There are some similarities in fertility decline in these two countries: In both countries, fertility declines occurred while two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas, and the decline was pervasive across all regions and socioeconomic groups, though considerable differentials remained between regions and groups. However, there were vast differences in other antecedents between the two countries. Knodel and colleagues (1987) argue that the factors supporting a rapid fertility decline in Thailand included relatively low mortality, high female literacy, cultural and religious homogeneity, rapid development of the highway system, and the spread of electricity and of the consumer goods that are reliant on electricity. Postponement of marriage, which has increased in recent times, has also played a role. Consumer aspirations rose, and with the expansion of education, the perceived

**Table 2** Marriage and fertility trend indicators for Southeast and South Asian countries, 1970–2015

Country	Total fertility rate <sup>a</sup>			Singulate mean age at marriage (female) <sup>b</sup>			Percent female singles (aged 30–34) <sup>c</sup>			Percent elderly (65+) <sup>a</sup>		
	1970	1990	2015	1970 (alternate year)	1990 (alternate year)	2015 (alternate year)	1970 (alternate year)	1990 (alternate year)	2015 (alternate year)	1970	1990	2015
<b>Southeast Asia</b>												
Brunei	5.8	3.5	1.9	22.4(1971)	25.1(1991)	ND	9.7(1971)	19.5(1991)	21.3(2011) <sup>d</sup>	3.6	2.7	4.4
Cambodia	6.5	5.6	2.6	21.3(1962)	22.5(1998)	22.0(2010)	4.2(1942) <sup>d</sup>	10.0(1998)	11.2(2008)	2.6	2.9	4.1
Indonesia	5.5	3.1	2.4	19.3(1971)	21.6	21.8(2012)	2.2(1971)	4.5	6.0(2010)	3.3	3.8	5.2
Lao PDR	6.0	6.2	2.9	ND	21.2(1995)	20.5(2012)	ND	6.6(1995)	5.1(2011) <sup>d</sup>	3.1	3.5	3.8
Malaysia	4.9	3.5	1.9	22.1	24.6(1991)	ND	ND	12.4(1991)	17.9(2010)	3.3	3.6	5.9
Myanmar	6.0	3.5	2.2	21.3(1973)	24.5(1991)	23.6(2014)	9.3(1973)	19.6(1991)	20.8(2014)	3.7	4.2	5.4
Philippines	6.3	4.3	2.9	22.8	23.8	23.4(2013)	11.7	13.4 <sup>d</sup>	15.9(2010)	3.0	3.1	4.6
Singapore	3.1	1.8	1.2	24.2	27.0	27.9(2010)	9.7	20.9	25.1(2010)	3.3	5.6	11.7
Thailand	5.6	2.1	1.5	22.0	23.5	ND	8.1	14.2	23.5(2010)	3.5	4.5	10.5
Timor-Leste	5.9	5.3	5.6	ND	ND	23.1(2009)	ND	ND	7.9(2009) <sup>d</sup>	2.6	1.7	5.6
Vietnam	6.5	3.6	2.0	ND	23.1(1989)	22.3(2011)	ND	11.1(1989)	8.1(2011)	5.4	5.7	6.7
<b>South Asia</b>												
Afghanistan	7.5	7.5	4.7	18.1(1973)	ND	21.2(2011)	1.6(1972)	ND	3.6(2010)	2.6	2.2	2.5
Bangladesh	6.9	4.5	2.1	16.4(1974)	18.1(1991)	19.2(2013)	0.6(1974)	1.1(1991)	1.8(2011)	2.7	3.1	5.0
Bhutan	6.7	5.6	2.0	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	4.8(2010) <sup>d</sup>	2.4	3.0	5.1
India	5.6	4.0	2.4	17.7(1971)	19.3(1991)	20.7(2011)	0.9(1971)	1.8(1991)	2.7(2011)	3.3	3.8	5.6
Maldives	7.2	6.0	2.1	17.5(1977)	18.9(1995)	ND	0.7(1977)	1.3	5.1(2014) <sup>d</sup>	2.3	2.8	4.7
Nepal	5.9	5.2	2.2	17.5(1971)	18.5(1991)	20.7(2014)	1.4(1971)	1.9(1991)	2.9(2014) <sup>d</sup>	2.9	3.5	5.5
Pakistan	6.6	6.0	3.6	20.3(1981)	21.3(1998)	23.1(2013)	3.0(1975)	3.8 <sup>d</sup>	6.9(2012) <sup>d</sup>	3.8	3.9	4.5
Sri Lanka	4.3	2.5	2.1	23.5(1971)	25.0(1987)	ND	10.9(1971)	15.2(1987) <sup>d</sup>	10.2(2012) <sup>d</sup>	3.7	5.5	9.3

Data were updated until August 22, 2017 unless otherwise specified. Abbreviations: ND, no data available; PDR, People's Democratic Republic.

<sup>a</sup>Data for elderly aged 65+ and total fertility rate are from World Bank (2017a).

<sup>b</sup>Data for singulate mean age at marriage (female) are from World Bank (2017b) and UN Popul. Div. (2015).

<sup>c</sup>Data for female singleness rate are from UN Popul. Div. (2015).

<sup>d</sup>Indicates reports of "percent never married."

costs of rearing children have increased. An efficient family planning program, which was not too heavily reliant on doctors, facilitated the use of contraception by those motivated to do so (Knodel et al. 1987).

In contrast, the role of economic development in shaping Bangladesh's fertility decline remains contested. Bangladesh is probably the poorest country so far to achieve near-replacement fertility, and some authors have attributed this decline to a strong family planning program, at least until the early 1990s (Cleland et al. 1994). Proponents of development and modernization as drivers of fertility decline argue that significant changes in educational achievement, economic activity, family size norms, and development aspirations of the people were already occurring, raising the demand for limiting family size, which was, in turn, facilitated by family planning services (Caldwell et al. 1999, Barkat-e-Khuda et al. 2001). A different perspective is provided by Adnan (1998), who postulates that Bangladesh's fertility transition had been driven not by alleviation of poverty but by a change in the nature of poverty: Increasing rural landlessness and decreasing average size of landholdings reduced the need for child labor in small-holder farm production and resulted in a decline in the economic value of children.

**The role of family planning programs.** The role played by family planning programs in fertility declines in Thailand and Bangladesh has already been mentioned. Family planning programs have been active in many countries of South and Southeast Asia from the 1960s to the present (Robinson & Ross 2007). There has been a controversy about the relative role of developmental factors and the facilitating role of family planning programs in fertility declines throughout this region, and not only in Bangladesh (Bongaarts 1997, Pritchett 1994). The general consensus is that economic and social change, exemplified by parents' altered quantity/quality trade-off for children in the face of expansion of compulsory education and other factors (Montgomery et al. 2000), was crucial, and was facilitated in some countries (e.g., Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, and Bangladesh) by family planning programs. Although these programs were, in some cases, marred by coercive practices in certain periods, as in India during the late 1970s (Visaria et al. 1999), they were relatively effective (Hayes & Jones 2015, Hull 2012, Pachauri 2014, Robinson 2007).

**Divergence within and between countries.** India's population is such a dominant component of South Asia that it is important to note its large interstate differences in fertility rates. The broad differences are marked by a north-south divide (or more accurately, a north and east versus south and west divide) denoting marked cultural differences (Dommaraju & Agadjanian 2009, Dyson & Moore 1983). In 2011, the four southernmost states, along with the west-central state of Maharashtra, the eastern state of West Bengal, and a number of other states and Union territories, had below-replacement fertility. But a TFR above 3 was recorded in many areas in the north, including in the large states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. Large interdistrict variations within states made the situation even more complex (Guilmoto 2016, Mohanty et al. 2016). Similarly, there is considerable variation in fertility and contraceptive use among the four provinces of Pakistan (Sathar et al. 2014). There are also substantial interprovince differences in fertility in Southeast Asia's largest country, Indonesia, with two provinces (Jakarta and Yogyakarta) having TFRs of 1.9 and six provinces having TFRs above 3.0. However, in contrast to India, the provinces with high fertility in Indonesia, with the exception of North Sumatra, are not very populous.

In Vietnam, there are significantly large differences in fertility between the two regions with the highest level of economic development: the southeast (lower fertility) and the Red River delta (higher fertility). Higher levels of urbanization in the southeast and greater son preference in the Red River Delta are consistent with usual theoretical explanations for differences in fertility levels, but the lower average level of education in the southeast is not (GSO & UNFPA 2016). It

appears that the more rapid economic development in the Mekong Delta, and greater exposure to influences from abroad, may have played a role in the decline in fertility. In contrast, Myanmar's rapid fertility decline occurred in the absence of some of the factors invoked to explain fertility declines in the other countries, and the reasons for its decline remain poorly theorized. Myanmar's remarkably high levels of singlehood are more of a factor than low fertility within marriage (Dep. Popul. 2016).

A few studies deal with ethnic and religious differentials in fertility in the region. While it is argued that after applying various controls, Buddhism is correlated with lower levels of fertility (Skirbekk et al. 2015) and Islam is generally associated with higher levels of fertility (Heaton 2011, Morgan et al. 2002) than other religions, all these studies lack clear differentiation of fertility differentials across adherents of a given religion according to levels of religiosity or traditionalism. As for socioeconomic fertility differentials, a clear inverse relationship between education and fertility is observed in almost all South and Southeast Asian countries: The modal ratio of fertility of those who have a primary-school education or less to those with upper secondary education is around 1.2 to 1.4, while the modal ratio of fertility for those with postsecondary education as compared with those with upper secondary education is around 0.7 to 0.9 (Lutz et al. 2014).

**Contrasts: early childbearing and childlessness.** Two important correlates of fertility trends need to be mentioned here. The first is age at first birth, which is very young in some Southeast and South Asian countries, particularly northern India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Early marriage, often to an older man, helps protect young women's chastity, protect a family's honor, and cut women off from their natal families so that they accept the authority of their new family. These are more often practiced in Hindu and Muslim societies. Almost all the first births in these countries occur within marriage, mainly because parent-arranged marriages occur at very young ages, but partly because premarital pregnancy, where it does occur, tends to be quickly followed by marriage, as the alternatives of abortion or having a child out of wedlock are normally considered out of the question (on Indonesia, see Bennett 2005). Teenage fertility rates have been falling almost everywhere in the region (World Bank 2015b), with the exceptions of Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand (Natividad 2013, UNFPA 2013).

In stark contrast with the countries concerned about excessive teenage fertility, in the countries where the "flight from marriage" has occurred, the rate of childlessness for women nearing the end of their reproductive period is very high—23 per cent in Singapore, and around 15 per cent in Thailand. Yet, Thailand actually falls into both categories of countries—those with high rates of childlessness but also relatively high, and increasing, levels of teenage childbearing (UN Fund Popul. Act. 2013).

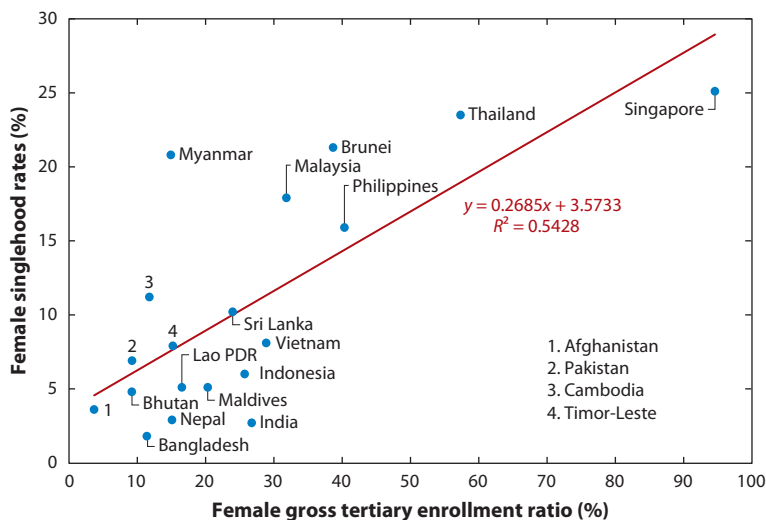
**Missing girls: role of son preference.** Although the problem of skewed sex ratios in Asia has long been recognized, Amartya Sen's estimate of more than 100 million missing women worldwide (Sen 1990) attracted increased public attention to this problem. Since then demographers have tried to obtain precise estimates of the number of missing women (Klasen & Wink 2003) and have come up with slightly different estimates, but there is widespread agreement that this problem has its roots in a preference for sons and aversion to daughters similar to the phenomenon found in China.

Biologically, girls have a greater survival advantage, but South Asian nations have documented more boys than girls in the age group of 0 to 6 years. This cultural preference for sons over daughters is a striking area of divergence between South Asia and most nations of Southeast Asia, which show no such preferences. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal exhibit a significant preference for sons, resulting in fewer girls aged 0–6 than is considered biologically plausible (Das Gupta 2006, Dyson 2012, Kaur 2016, Klasen & Wink 2002). Sex ratios of males to females

at birth from 2000–2008 were over 120 in the Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan, and 112 in Pakistan and Vietnam (Guilmoto 2009). While female neglect and infanticide have been historically implicated in producing an imbalanced sex ratio (Basu 1989, Das Gupta 1987), the availability of sex determination technology now allows for prenatal sex selection (Guilmoto 2012b, Tohit et al. 2012). Declining availability of women has led to a marriage squeeze, resulting in the importation of brides from other countries and distant regions, and has led observers to suggest that over time, this will lead to a reduction in son preference (Kaur 2016). In most of South Asia, declining fertility has increased the pressure on parents to ensure that at least one of their two children is a boy and at times has led to a worsening of the sex ratio even in areas which were historically not known for female deficit. For example, in Tamil Nadu, India, sex ratios in the 0–6 age group rose steadily between 1961 and 2001, though this rise was reversed between 2001 and 2011, seemingly due to government interventions to counter female infanticide and excess mortality of girls (Srinivasan & Bedi 2013).

### Changing Marriage Patterns

**Early and universal marriages but rising singlehood in some countries.** Countries of Southeast Asia and South Asia have historically been characterized by near universal marriage (Jones & Yeung 2014, Mensch et al. 2005). As **Table 2** documents, circa 1970, with the exception of Sri Lanka, 95% of the women in South Asia had married by age 35, while the corresponding figure was slightly lower for Southeast Asia. Although singlehood rates at ages 30–34 have risen sharply, marriage remains a dominant institution shaping the life course of men and women in the region. In Southeast Asia, Singapore currently has the highest proportion of women (25%) who are still single at ages 30–34, followed by Thailand, Brunei, and Myanmar. Countries in South Asia have much lower rates of singlehood at this age, with Sri Lanka having the highest rate at 10%. **Figure 3** shows



**Figure 3**

Female singlehood rates (aged 30–34) by female gross tertiary enrollment ratio in Southeast Asia and South Asian countries, 2015. Female singlehood rate data are from United Nations Statistics Division and United Nations World Marriage Data 2015. Female gross tertiary enrollment ratio data are from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics, except Singapore, for which data are from <http://data.gov.sg>. Abbreviation: PDR, People’s Democratic Republic.



that the female singlehood rates are positively and moderately correlated with the female gross tertiary enrollment ratio. They are also slightly more weakly correlated with GDP per capita (not shown). Myanmar is an outlier where high singlehood rates have occurred in the absence of development. India, Nepal, and Bangladesh are outliers in the other direction, where singlehood rates are lower than might be expected on the basis of educational attainment. This suggests that kinship patterns—flexible bilateral in the case of Myanmar and patriarchal in the case of South Asia—play an important role. Adding a sex ratio of under-age-5 mortality, a marker for gender culture, to this regression increased the percentage of variance explained by approximately 15% (not shown).

With some exceptions—for example, Thailand and the Philippines (Abalos 2014)—premarital sex and cohabitation remain rare, and marriage continues to form the lynchpin of individual life course (Strijbosch 2015). However, the institution of marriage has not been left untouched by the social and economic transformations discussed earlier. Two areas in which these changes are most visible are those pertaining to age at marriage and the selection of marriage partners.

**Age at marriage.** The age at marriage has been rising universally in the region and may also be associated with a transformation of what individuals are seeking from marriage and marriage partners (Thornton et al. 2012), at least among the metropolitan elite. A study based on focus group interviews in the capitals of Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines found that although men and women see the institution of marriage as important, many urban men and women now prefer to delay marriage in order to ensure that they are marrying the right person (Williams & Guest 2005).

Research also suggests that the magnitude of the increase in age at marriage depends on the starting point. Countries with very low age at marriage experience a more rapid gain in the mean age at marriage. However, once the average age at marriage approaches 25, further gains are harder to achieve. In Southeast Asian countries, where age at marriage was high to begin with, the changes between the 1990s and 2010s have been relatively modest, with the average age at marriage being 22–25 for women and 25–28 for men. Singapore is an exception, with the mean age at marriage being 28 and 30, respectively, for men and women, figures that are closer to those of East Asian countries than to other Southeast Asian nations (Jones & Yeung 2014).

In South Asia, home to a large proportion of child marriages (Choe et al. 2005, Verma et al. 2013), the number of girls getting married before age 15 has dropped sharply (Hossain et al. 2016, Raj et al. 2012). For example, the proportion of girls getting married before age 14 dropped from 33% to 18% in Bangladesh between 1991 and 2007.<sup>1</sup> Declines in child marriage were also seen in India, Pakistan, and Nepal over the same period (Raj et al. 2012). As **Table 2** shows, between the 1970s and 2010, the singulate mean age at marriage (SMAM) for women in India increased by 3 years, on an average, starting from a low of 17.7. Pakistan, which began with an SMAM of 20.3, also gained 3 years by 2010.

However, the changes in age at marriage are not a mechanical function of the starting point. Two lines of research explaining the trends in age at marriage in this region are noteworthy. The first set of explanations centers on economic growth and educational expansion and suggests that as economic development takes place, school and college enrollment also grows and tends to result in delayed marriage (Bajracharya & Amin 2012, Jayakody et al. 2008, Jones & Yeung 2014, Nobles & Buttenheim 2008). The second set of explanations stresses that change in cultural traditions and norms leads to delayed age at marriage (Ghimire & Axinn 2006, Malhotra & Tsui 1996).

<sup>1</sup>However, Matlab demographic surveillance data show that almost two-thirds of the women aged 15–29 years misreport their age at marriage in retrospective surveys, but this misreporting is not random; 56% underreported their age at marriage while 7% overreported it (Streatfield et al. 2015).



Diverse cultural patterns often explain geographical differences in kinship patterns and gender norms, and suggest that the areas in which kinship patterns are highly patriarchal and rest on the absorption of women into their marital families also tend to be areas in which marriages take place at a relatively young age (Dahal et al. 1993, Desai 2010, Dyson & Moore 1983). However, as societies are increasingly incorporated into a global culture, ideational changes that transcend these historical norms may take place, thereby encouraging greater autonomy in marriage and resulting in delayed marriage (Allendorf & Thornton 2015, Jayakody et al. 2008, Maertens 2013, Schuler et al. 2006a, Thornton et al. 2012). While one may assume that economic growth and educational expansion will go hand in hand with ideational change, research in South Asia suggests that this is not always the case, which may be one of the reasons why rapid educational expansion resulting from school stipend programs in Bangladesh and smaller experiments in India have shown smaller than expected impacts on age at marriage (Schurmann 2009).

**Spouse selection.** The nature of marriage arrangements and partner selection forms another major axis of transformation. Marriage markets in South Asia and Southeast Asia have been affected by two changes in the balance between men and women—first, the change in the overall gender ratio for people of marriageable age and, second, the changes in the pool of potential spouses with the characteristics that, according to society, define suitable partners. Regarding the first, along with a decline in fertility, a preference for boys manifested itself through sex-selective abortion and female feticide in India, China, Taiwan, and Korea (Guilmoto 2012a, Jeffery 2014), thus creating an imbalance between numbers of marriageable men and women. This imbalance results from an increase in the number of men unable to find brides in their own communities—the importation of brides from distant areas and neighboring countries has become an important aspect of the marriage market, especially for men with low education levels and poor job prospects (Jones 2012). This has led to increasing cross-border marriages, with brides from Vietnam traveling to China and Korea in search of marriage partners (Lu & Yang 2010), while brides from Nepal and other parts of India are being imported into regions of India characterized by bride shortage, such as the state of Haryana (Kaur 2016). The social and economic consequences of this type of marriage migration are only just beginning to receive attention (Bélanger & Linh 2011, Cheng & Choo 2015, Lauser 2008, Lee & Ng 2012).

The selection of marriage partners in South Asia is further distinguished by the continued prevalence of arranged marriage. The self-selection of partners continues to be rare, with parents assuming the primary role in selecting appropriate marriage partners for their children. However, rising education levels have led to the increasing involvement of brides in the selection of their partners, with parents seeking appropriate matches with the involvement of and consent from the bride and groom (Allendorf & Pandian 2016, Ghimire & Axinn 2006, Schuler et al. 2006b). While the strong parental role in partner selection allows for strong proscriptive norms about the appropriate marriage partners (Fricke et al. 1998), these norms vary considerably between different regions. Marriage patterns in north India, for example, are built around a tradition that assumes that all men and women in a village are part of a single kinship network, and hence, marriage within one's natal village is proscribed. In contrast, the Hindu kinship pattern in South India is built around the concept of encouraging marriage between close kin and favors uncle-niece and cross-cousin marriages (Dyson & Moore 1983), often resulting in the marriage of a young niece with a much older maternal uncle. Consanguineous marriages are also favored among the Muslim societies of South Asia and some of such societies in Southeast Asia (Bittles 1994). It should be noted that although parental involvement in spouse selection is most prevalent in South Asia, it has also been documented in the case of certain Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand (Cherlin & Chamratrithirong 1988). In Buddhism-dominated countries such as Cambodia, Lao

PDR, Myanmar, and Bhutan, choice of spouse is more relaxed than that in Hindu or Muslim societies.

Spouse selection is closely linked with economic exchanges at marriage, and payments from the groom in the form of bride price have been observed in some nations, including Vietnam (Teerawichitchainan & Knodel 2012), while other countries such as India and Bangladesh employ payments from the bride in the form of dowry or groom price (Jeffery 2014, Mari Bhat & Halli 1999).

## Divorce

In the past, a wide range of situations could be observed in Southeast and South Asia with regard to divorce and community attitudes to divorce. In the Philippines, divorce was not legally possible; among Islamic populations in parts of Indonesia and Malaysia, divorce rates in the 1960s were the highest in the world (Jones 1997); in Vietnam, and among the Chinese and Indian populations in Malaysia and Singapore, divorce was abhorred; in India, and in much of South Asia, divorce was very rare and, on the whole, was not a viable option for ending a disharmonious marriage. More recently, divorce rates among the Islamic populations in Southeast Asia fell drastically and then began to rise again (Cammack & Heaton 2011, Heaton et al. 2001, Jones 1997, Tey 2011). Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, divorce rates have tended to rise over time (Dommaraju & Jones 2011); in India, they have risen from a very low base (Dommaraju 2016), but elsewhere in South Asia, there is very little information to pinpoint trends.

One problem in studying divorce in this region is that while the dissolution of marriages is very common, especially among the disadvantaged populations and in slum areas, it is more likely to be manifested in desertion than in formal divorce. For example, in the slums of Delhi and Dhaka, legalized divorce remains a rarity for practical reasons and because of the high financial costs of litigation (Grover 2011, Jesmin & Salway 2000). This is even more the case among the poor populations in the Philippines, given their lack of a divorce option.

The reason for the massive declines in divorce rates among the Malay-Muslim populations of Southeast Asia in the context of rising education and rapid economic development was that divorce had been an escape route (sanctioned by the community) from unsatisfactory parent-arranged marriages at very young ages. When this system of marriage arrangement broke down and was largely replaced by love marriages, this escape route was no longer needed (Jones et al. 1997). A tightening of the legal restrictions on divorce also contributed to the fall in divorce rates. However, these rates are now again on the increase among Malay-Muslim societies, probably driven by similar factors as in the West (Cammack & Heaton 2011, Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan 2003).

In Vietnam, divorce rates rose quite rapidly during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Tran 2016), though they were lower than in Thailand and Singapore (Dommaraju & Jones 2011). In Thailand and Singapore, divorce rates rose steadily from the early 1980s onwards, though in Singapore, the rates leveled off in the early 2000s. In Singapore and Malaysia, divorce rates among Muslims are higher than among non-Muslims, and divorce tends to occur earlier in the marriage (Dommaraju & Jones 2011).

In South Asia, the rarity of divorce in most countries is doubtless a key reason for little information being available about divorce rates; data systems have not been oriented to the systematic collection and presentation of data on the subject. However, some information is available for India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. In India, only about 2% of all marriages end in divorce or separation within 20 years of marriage, with the figure varying from approximately 4% in the Northeast and 3% in the South to less than 1% in the North. Not only are these very low rates, but even among

estranged couples, only approximately 28% are divorced. The divorce rates are considerably higher for women with no children, or with no son, highlighting the great strain posed on marital bonds by childlessness and son preference in India (Dommaraju 2016). In the Chitwan Valley in Nepal, only 10% of women who first married in the 1980s had experienced the dissolution of that marriage by 2008 (Jennings 2014). The limited data available on divorce in Bangladesh suggest that it is not such a rare event, though in the one locality where notable information is available over time (Matlab), the proportion of marriages ending in divorce appears to have declined over time (Alam et al. 2000, Bhuiya et al. 2005).

The diversity of divorce patterns in Southeast and South Asia precludes any easy generalization, although (notwithstanding the earlier-noted obstacles to divorce faced by the poor in certain circumstances) the inverse correlation between divorce rates and levels of education and social status appears to hold almost universally (for India, see Dommaraju 2016; for Islamic Southeast Asia, see Jones 1994; for Thailand, see Hirschman & Teerawichitchainan 2003; for Nepal, see Holden 2008; for Bangladesh, see Alam et al. 2000, Bhuiya et al. 2005). In some Southeast Asian countries, the shame and stigma attached to divorce appear to be fading or have become less effective in holding unhappy marriages together. In a system such as the north Indian marriage system, the low level of divorce can tell us nothing about the degree of marital satisfaction. As for the effect of the shift in India's marriage system from arranged marriages toward a more hybrid form involving a degree of choice, this "could either stabilize a marriage because of a more compatible match or destabilize it in the absence of anchoring support of close family and kin" (Dommaraju 2016, p. 214).

### **Family Structure, Kinship, and Intergenerational Relations**

The average household size in Southeast and South Asia has decreased over the past several decades, largely as a consequence of fertility decline, though at different rates in different countries (Dommaraju & Tan 2014). Starting at between 5 and 7 members in the 1970s, Singapore and Thailand had the smallest household size at 3.5 persons in 2010, with Indonesia and Vietnam close behind at 3.9 persons each in the same year. Another reason for the smaller household size is an increase in migration. Other countries have, however, seen a more gradual decline. The household size in Lao PDR remained high at 5.6 in 2010, while that for Cambodia and Myanmar was slightly smaller at below 5. South Asian countries have witnessed only a small decline. In India, the household size only declined from 5.1 in 1980 to 4.7 in 2000. Pakistan's household size fell from 6.8 in 1995 to 6.5 in 2010, though there is a suggestion that extended-family households are in decline and the number of nuclear-family households is rising due to an increase in education and individualism (Farooq et al. 2015). Afghanistan's average household size remained high at 7.3 in 2005, while that for Bhutan and Bangladesh declined to approximately 4.5, and that for Sri Lanka to 4 in 2010.

Southeast Asia is characterized by its predominantly nuclear families (Bourdier 1998, de Guzman 1985, Demont & Heuveline 2008, Limanonda 1994). Back in 1990, approximately 65% of the households in Indonesia, and more than half in Thailand and Vietnam, were nuclear. Studies have shown that the nuclear family system in Java dates back to at least the nineteenth century (Schröder-Butterfill 2004, Schröder-Butterfill & Marianti 2006), and to as early as the fifteenth century in Vietnam (Khuat 2009), contrary to Goode's assumption that nuclear families would emerge after industrialization. Among the nuclear families, the number of single-parent households remains small in proportion (Yeung & Park 2015), and these mostly result from widowhood or desertion of one spouse by the other rather than divorce. In Southeast Asia, this proportion has declined in many countries. For example, in Malaysia, it declined from 9% in 1970

to below 4% in 2000. Cambodia, Singapore, and Vietnam have all seen a similar trend. In South Asia, single-parent households have been rare over time, generally less than 5% of all households.

In Southeast Asia, the prevalence of extended families has remained stable over time at 20–40% since the 1970s. In general, extended families are even more common in South Asia. For example, in India, there has been a consistently high prevalence of extended families (about half of all households) since the 1980s. The other half of the households in South Asia are predominantly nuclear families, with only a small proportion of other household types. In several countries—Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Pakistan—there has been an increase in the number of extended families in the past decade despite economic growth, which is likely due to the aging trend (Minn. Popul. Cent. 2016).

The preponderance of nuclear families does not imply a lack of intergenerational support. Studies have shown the prevalence of extended kinship relations and transfers (Knodel et al. 2010, Xenos 1996, Zimmer et al. 2008). In almost all the countries of Southeast and South Asia, a majority of the elderly live with their children, with the figures ranging from 60% to a high of 80% of older adults in each country. Studies show a diverse variety of coresidence of the elderly with different family members and the frequent exchange of assistance between the elderly and their children (Beard & Kunharibowo 2001, Friedman et al. 2003, Knodel & Debavalya 1997, Zimmer & Kim 2001, Zimmer et al. 2008). Both sons and daughters provide support to aging parents in Southeast Asian countries (Friedman et al. 2003), while sons remain primary caregivers in South Asia (Barik et al. 2017, Liebig & Rajan 2003). In Thailand, there is a slight preference among the elderly for living with a daughter than with a son (Zimmer & Kim 2001). Dommaraju & Tan (2014) show that Thailand and Indonesia have seen an increased number of married women living with parents or parents-in-law. In South Asia, the prevalence is even higher, with 70–80% of the elderly in India and Nepal living with mostly sons (Ghuman & Ofstedal 2004, Golandaj et al. 2013). Regardless of whom the elderly live with, however, their care is often performed by family members, especially females in both South and Southeast Asia (Aziz & Yusoooff 2012, Knodel & Chayovan 2012).

Throughout the regions, older persons who do not live with their children still have regular contact with and receive assistance from them. However, the increased migration of adult children has already contributed to a steady decline in coresidence with adult children and has increased proportions of older persons living alone or only with a spouse (Giang & Pfau 2007, Yeung & Cheung 2015). Despite the increase, studies show living alone does not necessarily mean a lack of support (Teerawichitchainan et al. 2015), as family members living nearby often provide strong family support (Knodel & Pothisiri 2015). In South Asia, less than 5% of elderly live by themselves (Dommaraju 2015).

## CONCLUSION

This review has focused on historical macro trends partly because of space constraints, but also partly because micro-level data, especially those that are longitudinal in nature, have only started to become available recently in countries such as India, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam. We expect more work to appear in the future about how these broad structural changes affect family dynamics and relations in this region.

We began by noting the features of Southeast and South Asian families that are distinct from those in East Asia. We then showed vast cross-regional and within-country diversities in the trends and patterns of family formation and functioning in these regions that reflect a complex mix of economic development, ideational changes, cultural norms and values, and public policies. These heterogeneities underscore the danger of an overgeneralization using the term “Asian families.”

This review finds, as predicted by Goode, that family sizes have become smaller and parental involvement in arranging children's marriage has weakened. However, in many Southeast Asian countries, nuclear families were prevalent long before industrialization, which indicates the Eurocentric assumption of extended family as a starting point of global family change is incorrect. Fertility rates in most countries have declined below 3 children per woman, and a large proportion of women have participated in the labor force. Furthermore, a majority of older adults in this region live with or near their children and have frequent interaction with them.

We find that in this region, signs of the second demographic transition remain limited, as cohabitation and out-of-wedlock births are rare even in one of the world's most modern countries, Singapore. In the case of Singapore, such trends are strongly influenced by state policies that aim at upholding the practices of "parenthood within legal wedlock" and the two-parent family type. The ultra-low fertility and high proportion of never-married and childless women in Singapore reflect a combination of rising individualism and slow institutional adaptation to the rapid changes in women's status in the last few decades, which has made family-work life balance difficult to achieve. Racial differences within Singapore and other countries suggest the nonnegligible influence of cultural norms shaped by Confucian, Islamic, and Hindu ideologies (Yeung & Hu 2018). The Chinese Singaporeans share many similar trends with East Asian countries that are also influenced by Confucian ideology. In South Asia, cultural impact remains strong in the face of rapid development, as evidenced in the relatively small decline in son preference, child marriages, arranged marriages, and marriages between close kin. Marriage and kinship patterns in some countries seem to be remarkably resistant to major changes. In certain areas, marriages occur at very young ages and remain nearly universal.

This resistance to change is surprising because with global influence through mass media, we might expect to see growth of development idealism, in which Western modern family forms are seen as desirable. Some evidence of this is visible in the rising education for both boys and girls and declining gender inequality in education. However, its impact on other aspects of family life, for example, the preference for sons, has been more limited, perhaps because social and economic conditions that foster developmental idealism have not been present. Singapore's experience illustrates the powerful influence of social policies in consciously striving to avoid western family values and behavior.

How do we explain rapid change in some areas of family life while remarkably little change in others? It seems possible that economic growth coupled with rising education has led to an aspirational revolution, causing parents to curtail family size and invest in children's education (Basu & Desai 2016), ensuring that their daughters as well as their sons acquire as much education as possible before marrying. However, the cultural patterns and social norms do not change simply because of economic growth; the fundamental fabric of social life changes far more slowly (Desai 2017, Liechty 2003) than economic growth would lead us to expect. Even relatively high female enrollment ratios in tertiary education in a country such as Pakistan may be more for the purpose of catching the right husband and symbolizing the family's wealth and prestige than preparing them for finding employment (Noureen & Awan 2011). Whether this disjunction will continue or whether cultural patterns will give way to the onslaught of globalization remains to be seen. Three factors, in particular, moderate the potential impact of economic growth and increasing globalization.

First, development and increasing movement away from agriculture have led to an aspirational revolution, resulting in low fertility. However, this has not coincided with a transformation of family structure, largely because emotional nucleation of family ties, first described by Caldwell (1976), has yet to take place in South Asia, with intergenerational ties remaining extremely strong. The incidence of extended families remains prevalent and has even increased in South Asia, despite

rapid economic growth. By contrast, in Southeast Asia, the nuclear family had already been the predominant family form before the advent of rapid industrialization.

Second, while the correlation between the patterns of decline in fertility, delayed age at marriage, and reduced family size and changes in indicators of economic and social development suggest the impact of rapid modernization and related ideational changes, we also show that the assumption of a global family system converging from a diverse form to a breadwinner-homemaker nuclear family form is incorrect. South and Southeast Asia are affected by different trends, but both sets of trends carry a lower burden of work-family conflicts than seen in East Asia. Women's labor force participation rates are particularly low in South Asia and seem to have declined over time in some countries, notably India, where nonagricultural employment opportunities have stagnated and demand for women's labor in agriculture has declined. Thus, the pressure of work-family conflicts, prevalent in East Asia, has been less experienced by South Asian families. Southeast Asia, in contrast, has seen greater increases in women's nonagricultural employment but has a more relaxed gender division of labor in household activities. As Brinton & Lee (2016) suggest, more gender egalitarian norms make it easier to combine work and family and may help to explain why Southeast Asian families have not exhibited the ultra-low fertility and retreat from marriage visible in East Asia.

Third, many countries of South and Southeast Asia exhibit tremendous regional, religious, and cultural diversity. This diversity is often associated with heterogeneity in family patterns within the country, with some groups exhibiting low fertility and/or delayed marriage that others do not. Colonial history of the region and internal diversity have been associated with a high degree of politicization of family laws and policies that moderates the impact of ideological transformations. Opposition to legal reforms to regulate polygamy and raise the minimum age at marriage in Indonesia and difficulties involved in establishing uniform civil codes across different religious groups in India are examples of challenges faced by national governments in the area of family policy.

This review underscores some limitations in major theoretical frameworks of global family changes that are based largely on western experiences and assume unilinear evolution. Little attention is paid in these frameworks to the kinship system, religion and culture norms, and the influence of public policies that we show to have played important roles in explaining the family diversity in Southeast and South Asia.

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# Contents

## Prefatory Article

- On Becoming a Mathematical Demographer—And the Career  
in Problem-Focused Inquiry that Followed  
*Jane Menken* ..... 1

## Theory and Methods

- Historical Census Record Linkage  
*Steven Ruggles, Catherine A. Fitch, and Evan Roberts* ..... 19
- Interpreting and Understanding Logits, Probits, and Other Nonlinear  
Probability Models  
*Richard Breen, Kristian Bernt Karlson, and Anders Holm* ..... 39

## Social Processes

- Consumer Credit in Comparative Perspective  
*Akos Rona-Tas and Alya Guseva* ..... 55
- Control over Time: Employers, Workers, and Families Shaping Work  
Schedules  
*Naomi Gerstel and Dan Clawson* ..... 77
- Silence, Power, and Inequality: An Intersectional Approach to Sexual  
Violence  
*Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Miriam Gleckman-Krut, and Lanora Johnson* ..... 99

## Formal Organizations

- Globalization and Business Regulation  
*Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid Quack* ..... 123
- Transnational Corporations and Global Governance  
*Tim Bartley* ..... 145

## Political and Economic Sociology

- Boundary-Spanning in Social Movements: Antecedents and Outcomes  
*Dan Wang, Alessandro Piazza, and Sarah A. Soule* ..... 167
- Globalization and Social Movements  
*Paul Almeida and Chris Chase-Dunn* ..... 189



Political (Mis)behavior: Attention and Lacunae in the Study of Latino Politics <i>Michael Jones-Correa, Hajer Al-Fabam, and David Cortez</i> .....	213
<b>Differentiation and Stratification</b>	
Credit, Debt, and Inequality <i>Rachel E. Dwyer</i> .....	237
Environmental Inequality: The Social Causes and Consequences of Lead Exposure <i>Christopher Muller, Robert J. Sampson, and Alix S. Winter</i> .....	263
Occupations, Organizations, and Intragenerational Career Mobility <i>Arne L. Kalleberg and Ted Mouw</i> .....	283
Poverty in America: New Directions and Debates <i>Matthew Desmond and Bruce Western</i> .....	305
Stress-Related Biosocial Mechanisms of Discrimination and African American Health Inequities <i>Bridget J. Goosby, Jacob E. Cheadle, and Colter Mitchell</i> .....	319
<b>Individual and Society</b>	
The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and its Consequences for Family Life <i>Jan Van Bavel, Christine R. Schwartz, and Albert Esteve</i> .....	341
<b>Demography</b>	
Integrating Biomarkers in Social Stratification and Health Research <i>Kathleen Mullan Harris and Kristen M. Schorpp</i> .....	361
The Sociology of Refugee Migration <i>David Scott FitzGerald and Rawan Arar</i> .....	387
<b>Policy</b>	
Modern Trafficking, Slavery, and Other Forms of Servitude <i>Orlando Patterson and Xiaolin Zhuo</i> .....	407
Redistributional Policy in Rich Countries: Institutions and Impacts in Nonelderly Households <i>Janet C. Gornick and Timothy M. Smeeding</i> .....	441
<b>Sociology and World Regions</b>	
Families in Southeast and South Asia <i>Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, Sonalde Desai, and Gavin W. Jones</i> .....	469



From Chicago to China and India: Studying the City in the Twenty-First Century <i>Xuefei Ren</i> .....	497
Globalization of Quantitative Policing: Between Management and Statactivism <i>Emmanuel Didier</i> .....	515
Latin America, a Continent in Movement but Where To? A Review of Social Movements' Studies in the Region <i>María Inclán</i> .....	535

## Indexes

Cumulative Index of Contributing Authors, Volumes 35–44 .....	553
Cumulative Index of Article Titles, Volumes 35–44 .....	557

## Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Sociology* articles may be found at  
<http://www.annualreviews.org/errata/soc>