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ECONOMIC DATA | ST. LOUIS FRED

FRED

CPI

+2.4 % Chg. from Yr. Ago on Mar 2025

Civ. Unemploy. Rate

4.2 % on Mar 2025

10-Yr. Treas. Rate

4.32 % on 2025-04-24

Real GDP

+2.5 %, Comp. Annual Rate of Chg. on Q4 2024

IP

-0.3 % Chg. on Mar 2025

Payroll Employment

+228 on Mar 2025

Recent St. Louis Fed research

Archives

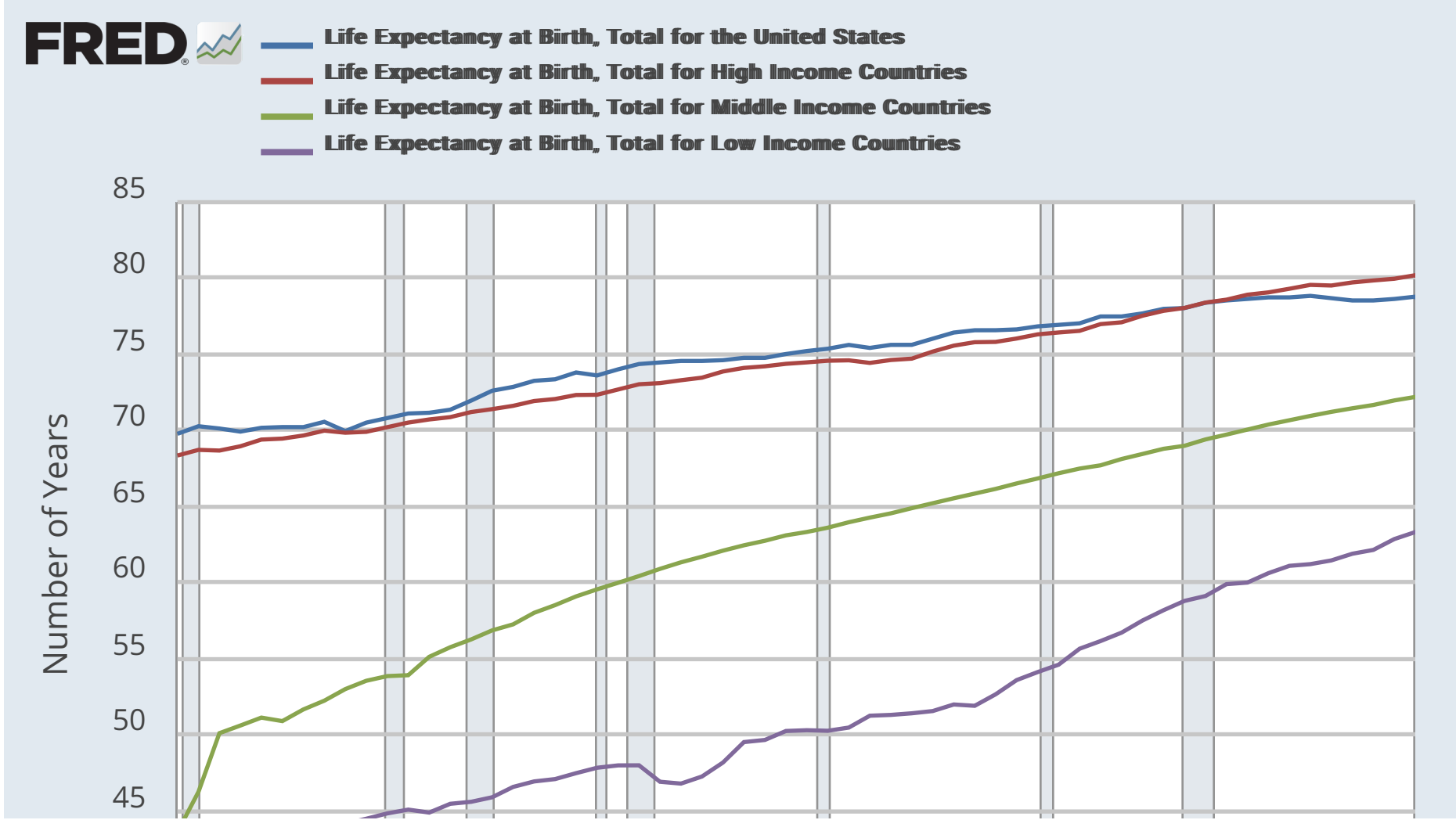
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The FRED® Blog

National income’s connection to life expectancy

Tracking countries with high, middle, and low income

Posted on June 15, 2020



There is a strong positive correlation between life expectancy and national income: That is, higher (lower) life expectancy for a country’s population is associated with higher (lower) GDP for that country. The FRED graph above provides the supporting evidence.

The red, green, and purple lines plot life expectancy at birth for high-, middle-, and low-income countries, respectively, since 1960. We can see the relationship between life expectancy and national income through (1) the comparison of income groups at any point in time and (2) the time trend of each individual income group.

In any given year, life expectancy is always highest for high-income countries and lowest for low-income countries. Over time, the group average for life expectancy increases for all three income levels and their national incomes also rise.

This graph also shows that the life expectancy gap between high- and low-income countries narrows over time:

- In 1960, the average life expectancy for high-income countries was 68.5 years, while the average for low-income countries was 39.3 years, a gap of 29.2 years.
- In 2018, this gap shrank to 16.9 years, with an average life expectancy of 80.7 for high-income countries and 63.8 for low-income countries.

This global increase of life expectancy over the past 60 years, especially for low-income countries, has been a significant achievement in human history. However, there’s a bit of country-specific variation, even within the high-income group. The U.S. is good example.

The blue line shows life expectancy for the U.S., which is always included in the high-income group over the sample period. U.S. life expectancy was slightly higher than that of high-income countries overall in the 1960s, was about even with them in the 1970s and 80s, and started to lag behind in the 1990s and even declined in recent years. The 2018 data show that life expectancy in the U.S. is 2 years lower than the average for all high-income countries. In short, U.S. life expectancy has increased, though its rate of increase for the past half century is lower than life expectancy for other high-income countries.

How this graph was created: Search for and select one of the “life expectancy and income” series for income groups (high, middle, low), then use the “Edit Graph” panel’s “Add Line” feature to search for the rest, plus the life expectancy total for the U.S.

Suggested by [YiLi Chien](#).

View on FRED, series used in this post: [SPDYNLE00INHIC](#), [SPDYNLE00INLIC](#), [SPDYNLE00INMIC](#), [SPDYNLE00INUSA](#)

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