

China's Former One-Child Policy

The Aftereffects of China's One-Child Policy

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China's one-child policy was established by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to limit communist China's population growth and limited couples to having only one child. Although designated a "temporary measure," it remained in effect for more than 35 years. Fines, pressures to abort a pregnancy, and even forced sterilization of women accompanied second or subsequent pregnancies.

The policy was not an all-encompassing rule because it was restricted to ethnic Han Chinese living in urban areas.

Citizens living in rural areas and minorities living in China were not subject to the law.

Unintended Effects of the One-Child Law

There have long been reports that officials have forced women pregnant without permission to have abortions and have levied steep fines on families violating the law. In 2007 in the southwestern Guangxi Autonomous Region of China, riots broke out as a result, and some people may have been killed, including population control officials.

The Chinese have long had a preference for male heirs, so the one-child rule caused many problems for female infants: abortion, out-of-country adoption, neglect, abandonment, and even infanticide were known to occur to females. Statistically, such Draconian family planning has resulted in the disparate (estimated) ratio of 115 males for every 100 females among babies born. Normally, 105 males are naturally born for every 100 females.

This skewed ratio in China creates the problem of a generation of young men not having enough women to marry and have their own families, which has been speculated may cause [future unrest](#) in the country. These forever bachelors will not have family to care for them in their old age, which could put a strain on future government social services.

The one-child rule has been estimated to have reduced population growth in the country of nearly 1.4 billion ([estimated, 2017](#)) by as much as 300 million people over its first 20 years. Whether the male-to-female ratio eases with the discontinuation of the one-child policy will come clear over time.

Chinese Now Allowed to Have Two Children

Though the one-child policy may have had the goal of preventing the country's population of spiraling out of control, after several decades, there were concerns over its cumulative demographic effect, namely the country having a shrinking labor pool and smaller young population to take care of the amount of elderly people in ensuing decades. So in 2013, the country eased the policy to allow some families to have two children. In late 2015, Chinese officials announced the scrapping the policy altogether, allowing all couples to have two children.

Future of China's Population

China's [total fertility rate](#) (the number of births per woman) is 1.6, higher than slowly declining Germany at 1.45 but lower than the U.S. at 1.87 (2.1 births per woman is the replacement level of fertility, representing a stable population, exclusive of migration). The effect of the two-child rule hasn't made the population decline stabilize completely, but the law is young yet.

For more information about the one-child law, see these [one-child policy facts](#).

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