

Calls for a 'one-child policy' in India are misguided at best, and dangerous at worst

November 15 2022, by Aprajita Sarcar and Joel Wing-Lun



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

India will surpass China as the country with the world's largest population in 2023, according to the United Nations World Population Prospects 2022 [report](#).

The UN also projects the [global population](#) has [reached eight billion as of Tuesday](#).

As early as March 2022, reports [circulated on Chinese social media](#) that India's population had already surpassed China's, though this was later dispelled by experts.

Women in India today are having fewer [children](#) than their mothers had. But despite a lower fertility rate, the country's population is still growing.

The idea the country should adopt something like China's former "one-child [policy](#)" has been moving from the fringe [to the political mainstream](#).

But the notion that India should emulate China's past population policies is misguided at best, and dangerous at worst.

Both countries are struggling with the legacy of harsh population policies, and stricter population controls in India could have disastrous consequences for women and minority communities.

Given Australia's [growing ties to India](#), it should be concerned about what population policy could mean for the erosion of democratic norms in India.

Unintended consequences

India implemented the world's first national family planning program in 1952. The birthrate began to drop, but only gradually, and family sizes remained stubbornly high. The government then implemented [widespread forced sterilization](#) particularly of Muslims and the urban poor, especially during "The Emergency" years of 1975-77.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, infant mortality dropped significantly. Between 1950 and 1980, China's population [almost doubled](#). The "one-child policy"—limiting births per couple through coercive measures—was implemented in the early 1980s, and fertility dropped dramatically.

In both India and China, these population policies had unintended consequences.

In China, the government found that once [fertility rates](#) dropped, they were faced with an aging population. Even after relaxing [birth](#) control policies to allow all couples to have two children in 2015, and three children in 2021, birth rates [remain low](#), particularly among the urban middle class favored by the government.

In both countries, skewed [sex ratios](#) caused by sex selective abortions have led to a range of social problems, including [forced marriages](#) and [human trafficking](#).

China has found that despite reversing course, it cannot undo this rapid demographic transition. Urban, middle-class couples face mounting financial pressure, including the [cost of raising children](#) and of caring for the elderly. While the government has encouraged "high quality" urban women to give birth, rural and minority women are still [discouraged from having more children](#).

As in China, in some states in India, women's education and their aspirations for their children have [contributed to lower birth rates](#). Like China, these states now face an aging population. Birth rates in other states with high Muslim populations have [also declined](#), but at a slower rate.

Unfair impact

Despite declining [birth rates](#), [some](#) politicians have advocated for the adoption of something like China's former one-child policy in [northern states](#) with large Muslim populations. These calls have less to do with demographic reality, and more to do with majoritarian [Hindu nationalist concerns](#) around Muslim and "lower-caste" fertility.

The worry here is that the coming population milestone will push India to adopt knee-jerk population policies. These could in turn unfairly affect women and minorities.

Four Indian states with large Muslim populations have already passed [versions](#) of a "two-child policy". What's more, built into many of these policies are incentives for families to have just [one child](#). And in 2021, a senior government minister [proposed](#) a national "one-child" policy.

Like past [population](#) control policies, they're targeted at Muslim and lower-caste families, and illustrate a broader Hindu nationalist agenda with [anti-democratic tendencies](#).

As happened at the height of China's [one-child policy](#), Indians could lose government jobs and more if such laws were passed at the national level. Some Indian states and municipalities have already legislated that people with more than two children are [ineligible for government jobs](#) and [to stand for political office](#).

The irony is that India's birth rate and the size of families are [decreasing](#) because of women's own reproductive choices. Many women are getting [surgical contraception](#) after having two children (or after having a son).

However, [financial inducements](#) for doctors and the [women](#) means [poorer women](#) are pressured to undergo these procedures.

In other words, the trend in India is towards smaller families already. As

the 2022 UN report itself notes, [no drastic intervention from the state is required](#).

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Calls for a 'one-child policy' in India are misguided at best, and dangerous at worst (2022, November 15) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-one-child-policy-india-misguided-dangerous.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.