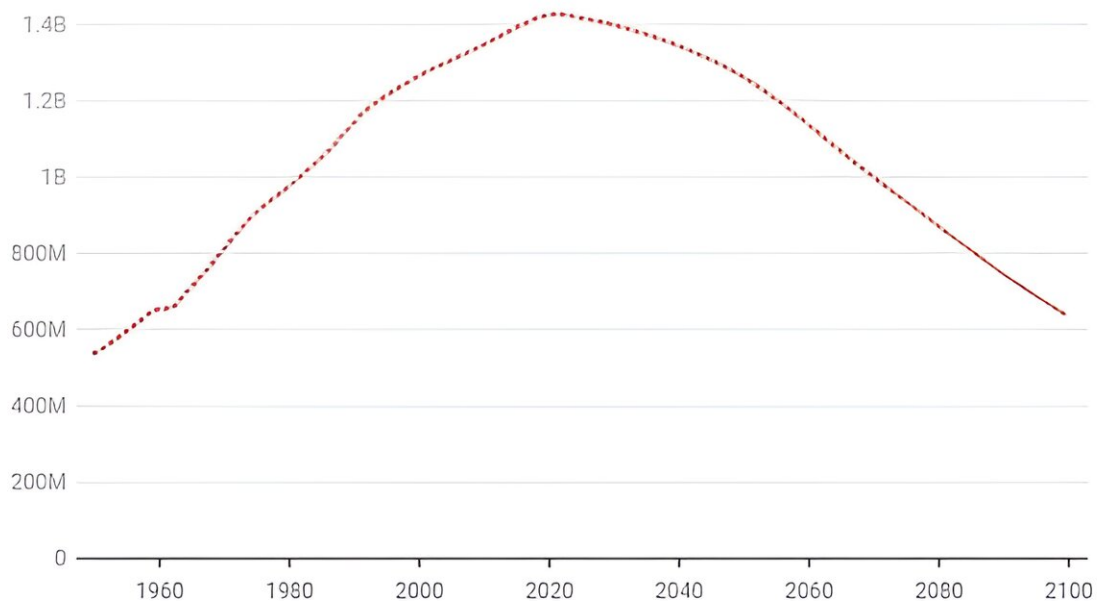


Raising the retirement age won't defuse China's demographic time bomb—but mass immigration might

August 15 2024, by Dudley L. Poston Jr.

The rise and fall of the Chinese population

China's population peaked in 2021 at 1.427 billion. Over the next 70 years it will fall by more than half.



Credit: The Conversation

Chinese workers may soon have to work just a little bit longer.

In late July 2024, China's ruling Communist Party adopted a resolution that would see the country's statutory retirement age [gradually rise over the next five years](#).

The final retirement age has not been specified, but an [earlier official report suggests](#) it is likely to end up at around 65 years old.

This would put the country [more in line with other large economies](#), including the U.S. At present, China has [one of the lowest retirement ages](#) in the world, at 60 for men, and 55 for women in white-collar jobs or 50 if they are in blue-collar jobs.

Party leaders have mulled reforming China's retirement plan for several years. But the apparent urgency now [reflects growing concern over the impact that a shrinking](#)—and aging—population will have on the country's dwindling pension pot.

Funds set aside to cover retirement costs in China look set to be [completely used up by 2035](#), the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences projected just a few years ago.

Raising the retirement age will no doubt stretch funds for a few extra years.

But it will not be a permanent fix—and it does nothing to address the [serious underlying demographic problems](#) that China faces.

I have [studied China's population](#) for over 40 years; I believe the demographic issue confronting China now represents one of the most serious problems facing the country in centuries.

With a [fertility rate of 1.1 children per woman](#)—way below the 2.1 births per woman needed to maintain a [native population](#)—and [more](#)

[deaths each year than births](#), China's future is one of declining population, with an enormous increase in the numbers of elderly. Compounding the problem, China has long been hostile to the idea of [supplementing its native population through immigration](#); just 0.1% of its population is foreign-born—that's the smallest percentage of [any major country in the world](#).

Demographers know about shrinkage

For most of its [life span](#), Communist China has seen population growth.

In 1950, several months after the [founding of the People's Republic of China](#), the country's population numbered 539 million. It then rose every year for nearly 70 years, reaching 1.43 billion in 2021.

But at that point it peaked. In the subsequent years, China has had more deaths than births and has lost population. Furthermore, [United Nations population projections](#), suggest that if [current trends](#) continue, China's population will fall below 1 billion in 2070, below 800 million in 2086 and down to 633 million by 2100.

That represents a loss of more than half its current population in around 75 years. A population decline that drastic would wreak havoc on its labor force, causing untold economic problems.

Older and smaller

But it isn't simply about the drop in total number. Potentially more concerning is the shift in how the population is made up.

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