



**GA3: DETERMINING THE
EXTENT TO WHICH A
GOVERNMENT CAN CONTROL
ITS PEOPLES' POPULATION**

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Introduction

In every country across the globe, there is a government that represents and supports the people of the country it governs. One of a government's most important responsibilities is to ensure the well-being of its people and to take action when a challenge presents itself. One of the most noticeable challenges in recent years is that of imbalanced demography, where a country is home to too many or too few individuals. As mentioned above, it is a government's responsibility to look after its people, but there has been controversy over what actions they should be allowed to take. Several countries have taken measures in the past to combat imbalance in their populations, with China adopting a one-child policy and Singapore encouraging couples to have a maximum of two children. Russia, meanwhile, is encouraging couples to have more children through financial incentives. These practises have sparked global debate on whether or not they are ethically supported. Many argue that restricting the number of children a family can raise and imposing government regulations not supported by the population is a violation of the right to free will. Others state that these measures are better than the alternative, which is extreme over- or under-population. This gives rise to the requirement of finding a balance between the freedom of the people and ensuring that future populations are sustainable.

Explanation of Key Terms

Human population planning: the practice of intentionally controlling the rate of growth of a human population. Historically, human population planning has been implemented with the goal of increasing the rate of human population growth.

One-child policy: a policy implemented by the Chinese government as a method of controlling the population, mandating that the vast majority of couples in the country could only have one child.

Population programmes: deliberately constructed or modified institutional arrangements and/or specific programs through which governments influence, directly or indirectly, demographic change.

Demography: the study of statistics such as births, deaths, income, or the incidence of disease, which illustrate the changing structure of human populations.

Baby boom: a marked rise of birthrate. An example is the increased birth rate that happened after World War 2.

Infertility: inability to conceive children or young.

Abortion: the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy

Pronatalism: the state of supporting reproduction and population growth. Example: Russia

Antinatalism: the state of opposing reproduction and population growth. Example: China

Background Information

China

The one-child policy started in China in the year 1979 because of the population problem they were having. The population grew to a point where there was barely enough space for any more people to inhabit the country. There were some exceptions, with farmers and parents with a first-born daughter being allowed to have a second child, along with ethnic minorities¹. This caused some ethical standards to be broken, such as sex-selective abortions, which resulted in a larger male population. In 2016, there were 33.59 million more men than women². Another problem arose as it became apparent that children without siblings would have to look after both their parents and grandparents on their own. This caused a change in the policy in 2009, which stated that if both parents were only children, they were allowed to have two children. This was then changed again in late 2013 to allow a couple to have two children if at least one of them was an only child.³ The strict enforcement of the policy has caused many Chinese people to undergo abortions or sterilisation, presumably against their will.

Because of the problems the one-child policy caused, in 2016 the government decided to replace the original policy with a two-child policy. However, even now that the one-child policy has been rescinded, China's birth and fertility rates remain low, leaving the country with a population that is rapidly ageing, resulting in a shrinking workforce⁴. The actions taken by the Chinese government, whilst well-intentioned, could leave China in a state of economic decline as the deficit of workers and surplus of reliant individuals take their toll.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One-child_policy

² <https://www.britannica.com/story/the-effects-of-chinas-one-child-policy>

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-child_policy#China_\(Mainland\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-child_policy#China_(Mainland))

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/story/the-effects-of-chinas-one-child-policy>

Singapore

Singapore added the two-child policy to prevent the post-war baby boom and uncontrolled population growth. Following World War 2, there was a global baby boom, causing the birth rates to increase worldwide. Singapore, in an attempt to prevent this baby boom, started a government programme called “Stop at Two” which turned out to be successful. However, it was too successful and caused a population decline. Singapore then tried reversing the effects of “Stop at Two”. Their attempts were unsuccessful due to the fact that many policies from “Stop at Two” remained in effect, causing the majority of the population to have one child or none at all.⁵ On the 1st of March 1987, Singapore became pronatalist and removed their two-child policy for a new policy with the slogan “Have three or more, if you can afford it”.⁶

Russian Federation

Russia has had a long history of underpopulation, mostly due to the widespread use of unsafe and harmful contraceptives and a large number of deaths from alcohol consumption. In 2006, President Putin put certain measures in place to prevent the population from declining any more. These included benefits dependent on how many children were in a family, a longer parental leave following the birth of a child, and increased financial aid to mothers of second and third children. Some considered taxing families without children, but this course of action was discarded.

Putin’s measures had a positive impact, increasing the fertility rate by 21% from 2006 to 2011. Many more second and third children were born. However, the increase began from a very low starting point, meaning that the population did not increase enough to fulfil the replenishment number, which is the fertility level required to completely replace the current population of a country. As such, Russia’s population is still likely to decrease.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_planning_in_Singapore

⁶ <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/1d106f7e-aca1-4c0e-ac7a-d35d0772707d>

Japan

One of the oldest populations on Earth is Japan. At present, 26% of the Japanese population is over the age of 65. This is because of a great change in the structure of Japan's population in 1945, which was largely due to a decrease in both birth and death rates. The elderly population has increased from 0.8 million out of 112 million in 1975 to 2.5 million out of 127 million in 2000. At present, there are approximately 32 million Japanese citizens aged over 65 years. Combined with the fact that under-eighteens make up only 13% of the population, Japan is facing numerous problems related to its ageing population. These include a depletion of the labour force, a deterioration of the economy, and a lack of facilities for the elderly. This raises the question of whether the crisis could have been averted through pronatalism and actions taken to increase the birth rate in the past.

Major Players Involved

China: implemented a one-child policy in 1979 to counter the population problem they were having. There were several exceptions to this policy, and in 2016 the policy was changed to a two-child policy. Strongly believe in monitoring and controlling their population.

Singapore: had a two-child policy to prevent a post-war baby boom. This policy created negative effects for Singapore which they attempted to fix. In 1987 Singapore replaced the two-child policy with a new policy, which encouraged having three children, or more if they could afford it.

Russia: Wants a population increase as there is a prediction of a massive decrease in the Russian population. This would not have benefits for the Russian government, which is one of the reasons a population increase is necessary and the support for high fertility rates is there.

UAE: The UAE is very much against population planning as it is a crime and sin to have an abortion if it is not under the two following exceptions - if the pregnancy endangers the mother's life or if there is evidence that the baby will be born with fatal deformities and will not survive.⁷ The stance of the scholars in the UAE depends on their interpretation of Sharia; however, most agree that it is a sin and therefore forbidden. Even with the exceptions, the abortion must occur within 120 days of conception. Some scholars argue that it should be forbidden from the 42nd day of the foetus' life under any circumstances.

⁷ <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/health/abortion-and-the-law-in-the-uae-1.375815>

Japan: Very old population, which is causing problems in the economy as the working force must support a substantially large proportion of the population. Whilst not known to use extreme population planning, the population might have benefitted from incentives to increase the birthrate in the past.

Timeline of Events⁸⁹¹⁰

1953 - Chinese leaders suggest that the population should be controlled and approve a law on contraception and abortion, but the plan is later stranded by political upheaval and the 1959-1961 famine.

1970 - China's population exceeds 800 million.

1972 - Singapore implements the two-child policy to make sure the country does not have a post-war baby boom.

1973, August 1 - Singapore penalises couples who have more than two children from this point onward.

1975 - China adopts the slogan "late, long, few", encouraging couples to have one child, and urging them to have no more than two.

1979 - The Communist party in China says couples should have no more than one child. A new marriage law says couples are obliged to practise family planning, placing a de facto limit of one child for each family.

1984 - China adjusts the policy, allowing a second child for some families in rural areas and for couples who were both an only child, and in some other specified circumstances.

1987, March 1 - Singapore replaces their two-child policy with a new policy, with the slogan "Have three, or more if you can afford it".

1994 - The UN implements the programme of action which was adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development (IPCD). The Population Division prepares the official United Nations demographic estimates and projections for all countries and areas of the world, helps States build capacity to formulate population policies, and enhances coordination of related UN system activities through its participation in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

⁸ http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-11-09_103740.html

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/15/china-one-child-family-policy-timeline>

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/>

2001 - New laws in China decreed to better manage the administration of the policy, including penalties for unapproved births. The laws allow local government to impose fines for additional children.

2013 - China adds an exemption allowing two children for families in which one parent, rather than both, is an only child.

2016 - The one-child policy is scrapped, allowing all couples to have two children for the first time in more than three decades.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

An attempt to resolve the overpopulation issue was the creation of the United Nations Population Fund (previously known as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities) or UNFPA for short.¹¹ The UNFPA was created in 1969, the same year that the General Assembly said: “Parents have the exclusive right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.”. The UNFPA helps over 150 countries, which contain more than 80% of the world’s population, with their reproductive healthcare to ensure that all pregnancies are wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person’s potential is fulfilled. The UNFPA helps provide modern contraceptives for the benefit of women, supports the prevention of gender-based violence, supports the abandonment of female genital mutilation, helps prevent teen pregnancies, which are the leading cause of death for girls the age of 15 to 19, supports efforts to end child marriage, and helps with delivery of safe birth supplies. The UNFPA has had a lot of progress, cutting the number and rate of women dying due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth by half, but it still isn’t enough. Due to extreme poverty, over 760 million people are left behind. The leading cause of death and disability in the developing world are sexual and reproductive health problems, young people are at high risk for HIV infection and unintended pregnancy, and millions of girls face the possibility of child marriage and/or other harmful practices, such as genital mutilation. In 2018, the UNFPA launched efforts to reach 3 results; ending unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal death, and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices.

Methods of Solving the Issue

In order to limit the government’s control over its population, regulations would have to be made to limit how much control they have over the population, for example, “can the government dictate the number of children a couple can have?” or “can the government decide whether a pregnancy can be terminated or not?”. Population programmes could also be a solution to overpopulation but could yield to unethical choices such as sex-selective abortions, so if population programmes turn out to be a solution for solving the issue, the influence they have on a family, and what the family can and cannot do, must also be discussed.

Another possible solution is to move immigrant populations to countries that need an increase in population. This would demographically benefit countries such as Russia, who have a low population, and would provide a place for families to stay in an ethically balanced way.

¹¹ <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>

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