

POLITICS IN OVERPOPULATION POLICIES

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Is it justified for a country to implement government policies to control its population?

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As civilizations grow, they become increasingly dependent on authorities to guide their daily lives, which becomes an issue with overpopulation. When communication and representation decreases between these groups, politics begin to influence many of the countries' laws and regulations. In China, when overpopulation threatened the stability of the country, the government implemented the one-child policy, which improved the quality of life, but downplayed moral rights. Implementing government policies to control population growth has been a very controversial topic globally, as it is linked to many aspects such as: politics, religion, ethics, etc. Many overpopulated countries participate in implementing policies to control the population growth, but only a handful of them do so publicly due to opposition from much more powerful governments and international organizations. The countries that are against the implementation of policies to control population growth take the stand that it is not justified that such policies lead to political interventions, violate human rights, and potentially destabilize the country in the long run.

Implementing government policies to control population growth puts a country at risk of becoming dependent on the policy even after the population stabilizes, which can lead to a shift in the workforce. From 1949 to 1976, the population of China nearly doubled from 560 million to 960 million. According to Rajan, chair professor of the Centre for Development Studies in India and a two decade researcher in foreign affairs, the doubling of the population leveled off the age ratio, causing there to be many more people under the age to work than those of age to support themselves; which in turn caused many socioeconomic and environmental problems to arise (Rajan, 1994). In

1979, under Deng Xiaoping's rule, China's one-child policy was introduced to alleviate these problems. This policy stated that citizens should have only one child in order to control the population growth. Though the policy helped decrease the population drastically, by preventing 400 million births, it once again leveled off the population age charts into an inverted pyramid. According to the National Population & Family Planning Commission of China, the fertility rate dropped to 1.4, whereas the necessary rate to maintain population stability in China was 2.1 (Woods, 2013). The reciprocal effect of stabilization also put pressure on government healthcare and pensions, where the government was giving out more money than the country was profiting. As a result of continuing the this one-child policy for longer than necessary, the initial goals of achieving socio-economic balance had a boomerang effect which destabilized China even more so than before.

In maintaining policies, to control overpopulation in that it corrupts those advocating the policy and takes away freedom from parents to choose to reproduce. China being one of the few countries that have actively and publicly advocated their one-child policy to control overpopulation has received criticism from around the world for being totalitarian. According to Shaomin, a respected and widely published scholar who grew up in China received a Ph.D. in sociology from Princeton and is a naturalized US citizen, to make sure that the citizens abided by the policy, provinces in China would reward those who abided with tax exemptions, interest free loans, and cash bonuses; whereas those who went against the policy would be responsible to pay more taxes and those who could not pay had their houses confiscated (Shaomin, 2014). As was reported in many cases, parents with extra children or female children would either participate in

human trafficking, abort the child, or not register them in order to receive government rewards: all of which the Chinese government often either overlooked or participated in too (Woods, 2013). In most cases around the world, as in China's, women were often sterilized after giving birth to a child to prevent any more pregnancies. Amartya Sen, a highly influential Indian philosopher and researcher on overpopulation, argues that lower fertility rates can be achieved not only through sterilization or policies, but also through improving the status of women (Stuart, 2002). This argument can be seen in Japan, where the fertility rate has dropped due to women wanting to focus on jobs rather than building families. Through this argument, the Chinese one-child policy, which does not call for the improving of women's position in society, is viewed as dramatic in that the government did not consider other methods.

Enforcing government policies with little to no guidelines for officials to follow, greed becomes a determining factor on how well the policies are followed. The one-child policy in China, which has been enacted for three decades now, had an original penalty of paying a fine if a couple chose to reproduce more than one child. These fines were supposed to go towards compensating for the space and resources the child would use up, and improving the province in which the fine was collected. However, Zhang, a Chinese journalist who reports on the economics and politics of China to The Atlantic, recently reported interviewees stating otherwise (Zhang, 2013). Wu Youshui, a lawyer from the Province of Zhejiang interviewed by Zhang, stated that he had sent in requests to track where the money, \$1.6 billion worth, had been going and received responses from China's 31 local governments which all stated the money was being used for providing children better resources (Zhang, 2013). But what they state has not been seen being

enacted. Through further investigation, it was found that the fine money, in reality, goes back to the Family Planning Commission, who then rewards it to the officials who collected it in the first place (Zhang, 2013). A different report issued by Watts, an award-winning journalist who served as president of the Foreign Correspondents Club of China, found that these officials, driven by the greed of earning more money for maintaining one child per couple in their province, often forced abortions on women (Watts, 2005). Each province was in this mindset, that it was a race against one another to limit the amount of children being reproduced. This greed led to many cases of inhumane regulations of the policy where the officials would use brutal methods towards the mother and the family, to go through an abortion.

When policies to decrease the fertility rate are enacted in a country, many women fall susceptible to corruptive ways of preventing births. A prime example of political intervention and human rights gone wrong would be in Uzbekistan. In this developing country, the government has encouraged coercive sterilization of women. Holt, who writes for *The Lancet*, a highly prestigious peer-reviewed medical journal, wrote that although the government stated that this should be done under informed consent in order to improve socio-economic problems, many patients have reported being pressurized, tricked, and threatened (Holt, 2012). As was issued to *The Lancet*, many major international organizations, such as World Health Organization (WHO) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have been requested to speak out against such methods but in doing so against authorities, private foreign workers have reported, would result in "serious consequences" for their organizations (Rich, 1993).

Uzbekistan having political connections with Europe and the United States puts these

workers in a sensitive political environment, where dictating or punishing those who are wrong may jeopardize the peace between many countries.

Although implementing government policies may seem as the only way to consistently control population growth, it causes many issues in the long run. As was demonstrated by China and Uzbekistan, it violates many human rights and downplays the importance of ethics when considering many people's lives. Political intervention becomes a sensitive area, wherein punishing a country for its wrong methodologies has risks of causing disputes. Political intervention in the long run causes corruption not only within the government but it also causes there to be a lack of trust in the government from the citizens. And what is a government whose citizens do not trust them. It is not justified from a political standpoint, for a country to implement government policies to control population growth.

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Reflection

Through the research of overpopulation and policies that have potential in controlling it, I have learned a lot of things that I would not have necessarily thought of without going through this process. Although I was one of the people to propose and back up the research of this topic, I did not have as strong of a background in overpopulation as compared to now. I knew it was an issue that was more prominently visible in Europe and Asia, specifically underdeveloped countries, because I took AP Environmental Science, where we discussed the environmental problems associated with overpopulation and depletion of sources. But I did not really consider it an issue that affected me in anyway because it is rarely brought up anywhere outside of school, and in school it is mainly used as an educational purpose to teach sustainability and vulnerability of the human race. Originally, I really had no stance on whether or not government policies should be implemented to control overpopulation, because the only example I knew of was China's one-child policy. That being said, I knew the bare minimum on that example.

After researching through scholarly articles and blogs, I began to see a pattern. It was obvious that people kept their opinions on the matter vague in order to prevent controversy; which made me wonder how politics influenced the decision making on whether or not government policies should be implemented to control population.

Through researching different countries, both developed and underdeveloped, I compared them to China's one-child policy and the effects of the policy. I found that although there were instant benefits from implementing policies, there were issues in the long run. I also found the methods and policies these countries implemented to be violating human rights.

One specific example was in Uzbekistan, where the government enforced a quota on doctors to sterilize a certain amount of women per month in order to keep their license. Being under the pressure to meet this quota, the doctors would threaten the women or even trick them into being sterilized. In my personal opinion, this urgency to control one countries' population became inhumane. So I took on the perspective where politically, governments should not be allowed to implement policies to control the population.

Problems in my paper occurred when I began focusing extensively on the human rights of the people and elaborated more on the morality of example policies instead of debating politically. Though there was a reason behind that being that my research was very limited, because as I said before, many politicians and organizations avoided extensive talk on overpopulation and implementing policies because by doing so, it was seen as a totalitarian move. In many of the articles that I have read, where China's one-child policy and the effects are being discussed, it was more often than not that the author mentioned how it was a totalitarian move to control the decision making on giving birth. My research was also limited in that many of the policies were corrupt, so the country itself would not have any information out of these policies implemented, nor would they outright say that they were trying to control their population. I had to depend on the credentials of the authors and where they were writing to really decipher whether or not the source was reliable and unbiased.

What really helped though, was when we started writing the group paper. Once we started the paper and began sharing what we found and our possible stance, I was able to gain more perspectives in which I could reanalyze my political perspective. We bounced many ideas off each other *as* well as sources that talked about multiple

perspectives. We found that ethics, environment, economics, and politics often went hand in hand on the topic of overpopulation. Therefore, each one of us began incorporating all of those perspectives in our individual papers as well as the group paper, so we had a better foundation of how each perspective shaped government policies.

These ideas though, became repetitive in the group paper and we had to edit our individual papers again to reevaluate that we stayed on topic with our specific perspective. As I stated before, my research was very limited and thus a lot of my paper sounds more like a report on a few different perspectives that tie into one overarching question. In the end though, my research all came to the conclusion, that politically, it was not justified for a country to implement government policies for population control.