The One-Child Policy  
Opposition Brief by Drew Magness



Words have meanings. When you google “definition of need” (as I’m sure we’ve all done a hundred times this year) the very first result is “Requiring something because it is essential or very important.”[[1]](#footnote-1) A lot of negatives this year are attempting to force affirmatives to justify things that were neither essential nor very important.

Don’t let that happen. This week, we’re looking at one of those examples: the one-child policy. This horrific legislation was enacted in China in the face of what seemed to be a need for a population decrease.

However, that doesn’t mean there was a legitimate public need for the policy. Turns out that the Chinese population really didn’t need to be stifled. Even if it did, private property ownership would have been a better solution to the problem.

Those are the two key points in this brief:

1. There was no public need.
2. Private property rights solve the problem better.

This strategy is strong when faced against any argument. Always give yourself two avenues to win on so even if your opponent can provide great arguments, you should still win the round.

Opposition Brief: One-Child Policy

One-Child policy wasn’t what stopped the population

Michael Bristow of The BBC September 20th 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7000931.stm> Michael Bristow MD, PhD, is currently Professor of Medicine (Cardiology) at the University of Colorado, Anschutz Medical Center in Aurora, CO

But team leader Wang Feng, of the University of California, Irvine, says this reduction is mainly due to a fall in the fertility rate in the 1970s, rather than any more recent initiatives. During the 1970s, China began encouraging delayed marriages, longer intervals between births and fewer children. "The total fertility rate - the number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime - was reduced from over five to slightly over two," Prof Wang says. All this happened before the current family planning policy was introduced in 1978. The fall in fertility rates is also, at least partly, due to improving social and economic circumstances. In other East Asian countries, such as Thailand and South Korea, modernisation has led to women having fewer children, and yet these countries do not have strict family planning policies.

**Impact:** The one child policy wasn’t a public need. Plus the problem was only corrected through improving economic circumstances which only happen when private property rights are prioritized.

China’s population would have decreased anyway

Charlie Jan Anders of Gizmodo January 2014 Besides being the managing editor at io9.com, Charlie Jane has written for Mother Jones Magazine, the Wall Street Journal, the San Francisco Chronicle and a ton of magazines and anthologies. http://io9.gizmodo.com/did-chinas-one-child-policy-actually-reduce-population-1511784972

But in fact, China's fertility rate had already fallen from 5.8 births per woman in 1970 to 2.8 births per woman in 1980, meaning it more or less halved before the one-child policy took effect. So claiming that the one-child policy caused fertility declines that actually happened in the 1970s is "like Obama taking credit for economic growth during the Clinton years," says Mara Hvistendahl, a contributing editor for Science and author of [*Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men*](http://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/publicaffairsbooks-cgi-bin/display?book=9781586488505). In the 1970s, the Chinese government was experimenting with less authoritarian approaches to population control, including the "Later Longer Fewer" policy, which encouraged women to wait longer to have children and have fewer of them. "Compared to the brutal one-child policy, it's more benign," says Cai.

**Impact:** No NEED for the one child policy.

China’s population density isn’t even that bad

[Walter E. Williams](https://tinyurl.com/3yxje22) Nov 10 2011 is a prominent commentator and economist at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. https://fee.org/articles/47-the-solution-to-overpopulation-is-population-control/

Let’s look at some other population density evidence. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, West Germany had a higher population density than East Germany. The same is true of South Korea versus North Korea; Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore versus China; the United States versus the Soviet Union; and Japan versus India. Despite more crowding, West Germany, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States, and Japan experienced far greater economic growth, higher standards of living, and greater access to resources than their counterparts with lower population densities. By the way, Hong Kong has virtually no agriculture sector, but its citizens eat well.

**Impact:** No NEED for the one child policy.

One-Child policy was unnecessary

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But a rising group of demographers and sociologists is disputing that idea. By taking a closer look at population figures before and after the policy took effect, and by doing a more careful statistical analysis, researchers have found that China's population growth rate would have decreased in any case, and the policy was not just cruel, but unnecessary.

**Impact:** Not a public need.

One Child Policy was a social experiment about central power

Nicholas D. Kristof April 7th 2016 Nicholas D. Kristof is a columnist for The New York Times. His most recent book, with his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, is A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/04/07/chinas-worst-policy-mistake/>

China’s leaders wanted sharper cuts. There were internal conferences in which some demographers and economists warned against cutting back too abruptly, with one expert named Liang Zhongtang arguing that it would amount to a “terrible tragedy.” That was not what the leadership wanted to hear, and for the Politburo members it was an easy step from central planning of the economy to central planning of family size. On September 25, 1980, China’s Communist Party issued an open letter to Party members asking them to limit themselves to one child. That was the first announcement of a policy that quickly grew to encompass compulsory sterilization and forced abortion, and sometimes the kidnapping and sale of children who were unauthorized. Fong writes that it was “the world’s most radical social experiment, which endured for thirty-five years and continues to shape how one in six people in this world are born, live, and die.”

**Impact:** The policy wasn’t put in place to meet a public need. There were experts saying it was a tragedy and wouldn’t work. It was permitted to expand government power as a social experiment.

Voluntary family planning worked better

Nicholas D. Kristof April 7th 2016 Nicholas D. Kristof is a columnist for The New York Times. His most recent book, with his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, is A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/04/07/chinas-worst-policy-mistake/>

But as Fong, a former reporter in China for *The Wall Street Journal*, writes, by the early 1970s China had adopted a highly successful voluntary family planning program called “Later, Longer, Fewer.” Its slogan was “One child isn’t too few, two are just fine, three are too many.” And within about a decade it managed without coercion to reduce the average number of births per woman from six to three, a remarkable achievement. It’s rarely acknowledged that the biggest drop in Chinese fertility came not from the one-child policy, but earlier during this voluntary birth control campaign. If it had continued, China’s birth rates would have continued to drop, as they have for the rest of the region (Malaysia today averages just under two births per woman; Bangladesh averages 2.2).

**Impact:** Even if there was a legitimate public need, the public need in this instance was to value private property rights so there’s no conflict.

Market solved better

Allison Schrager Nov 15th 2015 Allison Schrager is an economist, writer, and pension geek. She writes about retirement and how to hedge risk in more unconventional situations. <https://qz.com/539398/the-government-in-your-bedroom/>

In some ways, a one-child policy in China was unnecessary because economic forces already meant women were having fewer children. Prosperous countries that need more young people are left with two choices: immigration or boost fertility. Before the recession, America’s relatively high fertility was somewhat unusual for a rich country.

**Impact:** Not a public need and private property rights solve the problem better which makes them a public need so no conflict.

The Chinese population is crippled because of the policy

Hannah Beech December 2nd 2013 Hannah Beech is TIME's East Asia and China Bureau Chief. She lives in Shanghai and was previously based for TIME in Beijing, Bangkok and Hong Kong. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2158138-2,00.html>

In implementing the largest social-engineering experiment in human history, the People's Republic has merely traded one population time bomb for another. China now faces a multitude of social woes usually seen in more-developed economies better equipped to handle these challenges. It is growing old before it grows rich--bringing about an explosion of elderly Chinese even as the government has presided over a fraying of the nation's socialist safety net.

**Impact:** It literally did the opposite of provide for the public need. It ended up creating a bigger problem.

1. <https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+need&oq=definition+of+need&aqs=chrome..69i57.2043j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)