



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 29, 2015

## China's One-Child Policy Becomes Two-Child Policy

China's one-child policy is officially coming to an end, the Communist Party of China announced Thursday. But don't think this means the government is getting out of the population-control business altogether: Couples will now merely be permitted to have a maximum of two children instead of one.

The policy change was announced at the conclusion of a four-day Communist Party Central Committee plenary session.

According to the state-run [Xinhua](#) news agency, its purpose is "to balance population development and address the challenge of an aging population." Xinhua said the policy still has to be approved by the legislature, but that is a mere formality in a one-party state. No timeline was given for its implementation.



The one-child policy was introduced in 1980, following a long period of rapid population growth in China. The moribund economy, itself the result of decades of communist control, was, the government said, incapable of supporting the growing population. But like governments everywhere, rather than repeal the policies that had caused the problem, the Chinese government doubled down by restricting couples to one-child families. The policy was soon relaxed slightly for rural couples, allowing them to have two children if the first was a girl; and in 2013 it was opened up even more, permitting two children for couples if either the father or the mother is an only child.

The policy was enforced ruthlessly. Women were forced to have abortions or to be sterilized to prevent them from exceeding their offspring allotment; Chinese pro-life activist [Chen Guangcheng](#) told a congressional committee in 2013 that he had documented 130,000 forced abortions in 2005 alone and 600,000 family members persecuted in relation to those abortions. Policy violators were also punished with fines — being good leftists, the communists pegged the fines to income — or even the loss of their livelihoods.

Beijing credits the one-child policy with having prevented 400 million births, which officials have long considered a positive outcome. The lack of young people, however, is becoming a serious problem.

For one thing, because of a cultural preference for boys, girls are more often aborted. Today China has a birthrate of roughly 115 boys for every 100 girls, compared with a normal rate of about 107 to 100. That has made involuntary bachelors of many Chinese men and, according to the [Associated Press](#), "is believed to fuel the trafficking of women as brides."

An even bigger problem as far as the government is concerned is the lack of young working people to help pay for the state's massive social programs for the elderly. "China has the world's largest



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population at 1.37 billion,” reported the [Wall Street Journal](#). “But China’s working-age population — those who are 15 to 64 — is drastically shrinking. The United Nations projects that the number of Chinese over the age of 65 will jump 85% to 243 million in 2030, up from 131 million this year.” Those people will retire and have to be supported by taxes on workers; without enough workers, the system will go belly up.

There is also the matter of transitioning to a consumer economy, which the government wants to do instead of relying on heavy industry. Besides the fact that such central plans seldom pan out as expected (see the one-child policy), fewer workers and less income for them will make achieving this even more difficult.

These factors, plus increasing criticism from activists such as Guangcheng, are believed to have influenced Beijing’s decision to up the per-couple child quota to two. However, observed the AP, “The move may not spur a huge baby boom in part because fertility rates are believed to be declining even without the policy’s enforcement. Previous easings of the one-child policy have spurred fewer births than expected, and many people among China’s younger generations see smaller family sizes as ideal.”

“The good news is, it is here. The bad news is, it is too little, too late,” Cai Yong, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, told the AP.

Not everyone is so pessimistic. “It’s better late than never,” Willy Lam, an expert on Chinese politics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, told the news agency. “It might serve to address the current imbalance in the sense that if they do not boost the growth rate then very soon, within 20 years or less, the working population will be supporting four aged parents.”

Whether the new policy solves the state’s problems or not, Chinese who want more children rejoiced at the news.

“I have looked forward to this for so many years — even had dreams about it! I cried every time when I woke up and realized it wasn’t yet true. I thought it was so unfair,” 36-year-old Su Weihua of Guangzhou told the AP. “I do not care if the second child is a boy or a girl, at my age, as long as he or she is healthy.”

Others were less enthusiastic because they consider additional children too much of a drain on both their pocketbooks and their personal energy reserves. Shanghai-based bank worker Li Shuning and her husband, Wang Jian, both 32 years old and parents of one, told the *Journal* they have no intention of having another child. “For a second child, my answer is no, no, no,” Li said. “Doesn’t matter what the policy is.”

As welcome as the news of the two-child policy is, it still leaves the Chinese government in charge of family sizes and with the means to enforce the new limit.

“The move to change China’s one-child policy is not enough,” William Nee, China researcher at Amnesty International, said in a [statement](#). “Couples that have two children could still be subjected to coercive and intrusive forms of contraception, and even forced abortions — which amount to torture.”

“The state has no business regulating how many children people have,” Nee added. “If China is serious about respecting human rights, the government should immediately end such invasive and punitive controls over people’s decisions to plan families and have children.”



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