

Demographic Trends for the Future Planet

Recent census results have evidenced a slowdown in China's population growth. • Part of it is tied to aging, but another part is connected to the country's longstanding one-child policy. • While India's census results also showed a population growth, the country is nonetheless poised to surpass China as the world's most populous country. • Of the two, India may have the rosier future, since it has a growing contingent of tech-savvy young people who speak English. • Yet both countries are still weighed down by immense social problems that will take decades to fix. • by Donato Speroni

Years that end with a zero or a one are important to the world. Most censuses are held once each decade and the hundred or so being conducted between 2010 and 2011 (Italy's is on Oct. 9) are expected to



give a full overview of global population shifts. The first major census came in United States, held on April 1, 2010. It was preceded, as always in the U.S., by bitter controversy mostly related to the issue of reapportionment, namely how population changes affect the number of congressmen allotted to each of the 50 states based on their population. The Republican Party challenged the inclusion of illegal immigrants in the overall count, a criterion that tends to give increased weight to large states that tend to vote Democratic states.

But the actual results favored the Republicans, since notable growth in Southern and Western states will increase their congressional representation. Texas gained four seats and Florida two, creating additional hurdles for incumbent Democratic President Barack Obama.

Overall, the U.S. census showed a national population of 308,745,538 people, an increase of 9.7 percent over 2000. This represented the lowest increase since the Great Depression.

At the same time, most expect the U.S. population reach 400 million people in 2050. By comparison, Europe's population, which currently numbers 738 million people according to UN estimates, is expected drop (immigration included) to 719 million in 2050.

This downward trend has immense social and economic implications, because it reflects a different age population structure, based on age and the extent to which the elderly population will place a burden on European budgets. Demographics are among the reasons the dollar has managed to hold its own despite recent economic difficulties.

China slows

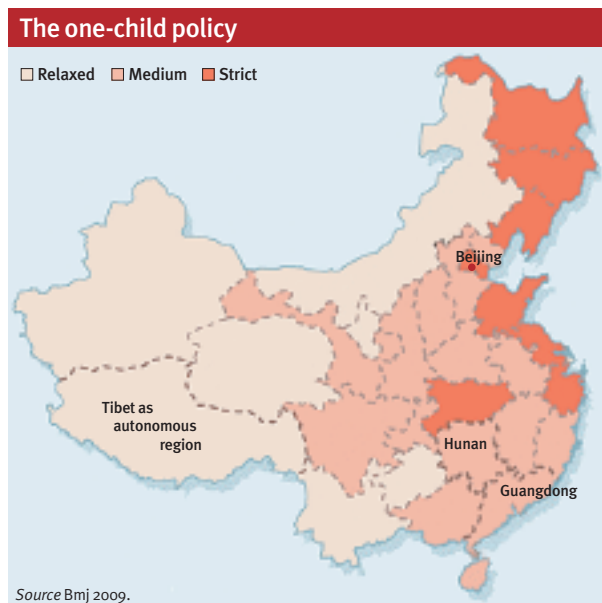
China's sixth census was held in November 2010, involving some 10 million "enumerators," or interviewers, who ranged far and wide through the country's cities and its countryside. Early conclusions from the massive amount of data gathered suggest something that was already widely known: The population figure 1.34 billion represents an increase of 74 million people since the last census, in 2000. That's down from the increase of 132 million in the decade between 1990 and 2000, with the average annual national growth rate cut in half (0.57 percent vs. 1.07 percent).

Neodemos, a site that focuses on demographics, provided a tidy summary of the figures. "The demographic

evolution of China," wrote Neodemos, "is characterized not only by a low birth rate, but also by strong internal migratory patterns toward the entire eastern part of the country and the coast. This territory contains a number of large metropolitan areas (Beijing, Tanjin, Shanghai, Guangdong), manufacturing hubs, and huge infrastructural works. In short, this vast region represents the vortex of the country's vast economic growth over the last quarter century. The data clearly reflect this trend: Between 2000 and 2010, the macro-East Coast region (which contains 41.4 percent of the entire population) accounted for four-fifths of all national population growth (59 of 74 million), an increase of 12 percent, reaching as high as 40 percent in parts of Beijing and Shanghai. The other



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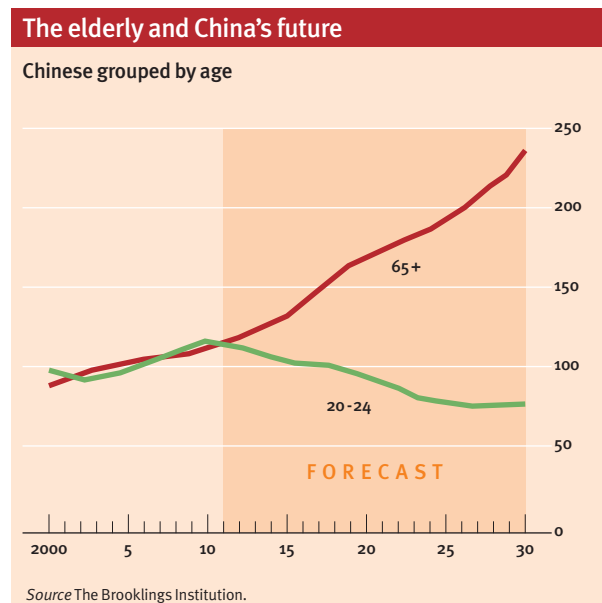
macro-regions have lagged behind, with slight 2.8 percent increases in the Northeast (8.2 percent of the total population), 1.7 percent in the Center-East (28.6 percent), and a drop of 0.2 percent in the North-West-Central regions (19.5 percent). Only in the country's Far West (which represents only 2.2 percent of total), and included Tibet and Xinjiang, was growth above the national average (+12.5 percent)."

The census suggested that China, going forward, faces at least three serious problems: the conflict between town and country, an aging population, and a growing male-female imbalance.

Fading cities

In line with what's happening worldwide, the survey indicated that China's urban population had reached 50 percent of the national total, compared to 37 percent in 2000. China's urban population has increased by 207 million this decade, while its rural population has dropped by 133 million.

For the first time, census officials counted people where they actually lived, and not in their official place of residence. This in turn made it possible to calculate that some 220 million Chinese had been away from the residence for at least six months during 2010, and suggested the size and shape of the country's temporary mi-



gration patterns. But it's no sure thing that this tremendous reservoir of cheap labor will continue to fuel the growth of megacities. "Farmers move to booming cities seeking work," writes BBC correspondent Michael Britow in Beijing. "But once they get to their new residences, they soon realize that they have only limited access to public services such as health care or schooling for their children."

Migration could well slow down, and the country already faces some very real problems, as the newspaper China Daily recently pointed out. "The country's twin engines, the economic areas of the Yangtze Delta and the Pearl River, are beating their heads against the wall because they lack sufficient migrant workers, particularly in the services and manufacturing sector. The cause is the climbing cost of living and stagnant wages."

One-child dead end

China's one-child policy currently applies to approximately a third of the population, excluding ethnic minorities, residents of some rural areas, parents who are only children, and occasionally couples who already have a girl. There's plenty of confusion and favoritism in the powerful family planning bureaucracy. Even local governments like the policy, since they're quick to line their coffers with fine gathered from overly



Apartment residences in Chongqing.

prolific couples. Beijing authorities argue that the one-child policy prevented a drastic population surge; the figure is pegged at some 400 million, which would have been disastrous for overall living conditions. But the only child obligation has also accelerated the aging of the population.

The census only reignited the longstanding debate over the policy's usefulness. Based on new data, the current fertility rate is estimated as being equal to 1.4 children per woman, well below the 2.1 that would ensure a stable population.

A group of Chinese demographers not only demanded the abolition of the policy, but also questioned its past utility. Wang Feng, director of the Brookings-Tsinghua Center for Public Policy, argues that when the one-child policy was introduced in 1980, the fertility rate had already dropped to 2.3, compared to 5.8 in 1950. The drop meant there was no need for state intervention in limit-

ing population. Now, even senior Chinese officials are beginning to speak out. After the census, another Zhang Feng, who heads the Commission for Population and Family Planning in Guangdong, among the most populous provinces in China, publicly called on Communist Party leaders to loosen the one-child policy.

Zhang Feng has never been one to shy away from controversy. Discussing Guangdong province in 2009, he said: "We have 30 million migrants who live away from their wives or husbands, and whose appetite for sex has never been addressed by the government. If we want to steer clear of being overwhelmed by AIDS cases, we need to create conjugal visits for spouses, and even hand out sex toys. There's nothing at all to ashamed of, and at least they prevent diseases."

Too many males

But rubber sex dolls can't do much to address the country's gender imbalance, which the census confirmed. Chinese families have traditionally preferred sons, a trend that has resulting in the killing of

girl newborns in rural areas and abortions among urban families with access to ultrasound testing. With only one child allowed, the male trend was strengthened. As a result, 118 boys are born for every 100 girls in 2010. In 2025 China is expected to have 96 million males between 20 and 30 years, but only 80 million females. In short, China’s population policy is in urgent need of change.

President Hu Jintao, remarking on the results of the census, suggested change in a typically elliptical way “China,” he said, “will continue and enhance its current policy of family planning.” Wrote The Economist: “This certainly doesn’t mean, ‘Have as many as you want,’ but it could mean, ‘Have two or three...’”

Indian memories

India’s 15th census began March 9 by “counting” both President Pratibha Patil and Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, the only surviving member of a team

of terrorists that attacked Mumbai in 2008. Ajmal is on death row. This odds case gave Indian media means to hammer home the obvious point: Everyone needed to be counted.

The Indian census, like the one in China, demanded an immense organizational effort. Some 2.3 million inspectors made their way into 630,000 villages and 5,000 cities. India’s enumerators didn’t limit themselves only to counting people, but also surveying living conditions, including whether a home had running water or air conditioning. Efforts to include the homeless in the census saw officials walking down desolate streets and into train stations where thousands bed down.

There was an additional hindrance. The census afforded an opportunity to issue new biometric cards, which contain the photos and fingerprints of every Indian over 15 years. The document is touted as essential if India is to improve access to social services. But many poor peo-

NEW CENSUS METHODS ARE AN URGENT NEED

In statistical terms, a census is a survey that counts a nation’s people. The U.S. Supreme Court explicitly ruled out that no census could be obtained by using questionnaires or samplers. It’s a particularly delicate subject in the United States, where census results determine the apportioning of state seats in the House of Representatives,

Yet the house-to-house system may be ending. According to The Economist, among European states presently undertaking or planning a census, at least 17 will mix new data with pre-existing information. At least nine states will base their census on already available data, bypassing census-takers.

Reasons for the shift vary, but current state of public finances is among the key reasons. Even the U.S. may be forced to alter its approach. The last U.S. censuses cost the government \$13 billion and the

next one, in its current format, could double that amount (the 40-year trend, in fact, has been a doubling in census cost with each passing decade). Every American counted in the 2010 census cost the federal government \$42, infinitely more than the Indian sum (40 cents per person) or the Chinese (about \$1). A census can also be a risky undertaking. During the 2001 South African count, 15 census-takers were killed. There’s also a growing desire to protect personal privacy. In Germany, a powerful lobby whose mantra is “only sheep are for counting” has prevented the country from carrying out a head-count census for 24 years, a record surpassed only by the likes of Angola.

But Berlin, facing new and more rigorous European Union standards, finally launched a census survey in May. It relied mostly on public registry lists, corrected and abridged based on direct interviews with a 10 percent sample of the population. Citizens chosen for inter-

views were told to answer questions or face high fines.

The UNECE, the European Commission in the UN, ensured the harmonization of census data by filtering them through the European Conference of Statisticians. Paolo Valente of the UNECE reviewed some of the new methods on the website neodemos.it. While the Dutch “virtual census” integrates direct data with information obtained in sample surveys, France’s “rolling census,” introduced in 2004, issues surveys and carries out census-taking over the course of a year instead of breaking it up over longer stretches, the more conventional method. The new techniques save money, present the public with a more user-friendly (and less invasive) model, and ensure that data is continuously updated (unlike the once-a-decade head count). People today are more mobile and their demographic realities change more rapidly, making the head count method seem outdated.

Demographic Indicators in India and China (1950-2050)

	Population (in millions)		Percentage of population under age 15		Average number of children per mother		Life expectancy from birth	
	INDIA	CHINA	INDIA	CHINA	INDIA	CHINA	INDIA	CHINA
1950	372	551	38,9	33,6	5,97	6,11	37,9	44,6
1980	700	983	38,5	36,5	4,89	2,93	54,2	66,3
2010	1225	1341	30,6	20,0	2,73	1,64	64,2	72,7
2050	1692	1296	19,0	13,5	1,87	1,77	73,7	79,2

Source United Nations, World Population Prospects. The 2010 Revision, New York, 2011. See neodemos.it for 2050 figures.

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ple either don’t know or won’t state their date of birth, data that is essential to the new card. In an effort to establish birthdates, interviewers were given region-by-region calendars that noted memorable events, including the independence of India in 1947, the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, India’s 1983 World Cup cricket victory, and Mother Teresa’s death in 1997. The census-takers essentially tried creating a more or less accurate registry using memories.

Growing pride

At the end of March, the Indian Census Bureau released its first results. Since the last census, India’s population had climbed to 1.21 billion, an increased of 181 million, which is about the population of Brazil. Though the growth rate slowed (17.6 percent from 2001 to 2011 compared to 21.5 percent over the previous decade), the Indian outlook presents a totally different picture from that of China. Based on estimates, the Indian population will rise to 1.7 billion after 2050.

While the Chinese results induced a moment of reflection that tended toward an awareness of problems, the Indian data was cause for national pride and increased confidence in the future. “We are the next China,” wrote the India Finance & Investment Guide. “While we have great expectations for economy, it’s the demographic picture that guarantees our success by 2030. The new India will join the world into a single country.” This giddy self-confidence was based on data endorsed by the UN Population

Division in its latest projections (see table). It suggested that within two decades India would become the world’s most populous nation, surpassing China shortly after 2020.

It will be a nation full of young people, most with a high level of technological know-how. A widespread knowledge of English and the country’s democratic foundation is likely to put it ahead of China in many respects. The UN data contained in the projection seems to confirm these predictions.

At the same time, the numbers also show that India still has a long way to go, particularly in social terms. For example, life expectancy at birth is 8.5 years less than in China and that gap will be only partially covered over the next 40 years.

The census data had many positives, including a nine-point jump in the Indian literacy rate among those aged seven and up, reaching 74 percent. At the same time, it also possesses major great gender imbalance in favor of males. India is also a country where female infanticide is still common and where the state has barred doctors from telling parents the sex of unborn children based on ultrasound results. The situation isn’t getting any better. In the 0-to-six age group, there were 914 girls per 1,000 boys, down from the 927 girls of a decade ago. This imbalance also produces inhumane practices, including the sale of girls by poor families to the landowners of other regions. They ostensibly seek a wife for their male children. In most cases, however, they’re buying a slave.