



China's population growth lowest rate in decades

Context:

The seventh census released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Beijing, noted 12 million babies were born in 2020, the lowest number since 1961.

Relevance:

GS-I: Indian Society (Population and Associated Issues)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. About the recent census and trend in China's Population
2. About the Problem of China's dropping Population and Age
3. Population Growth in India and the Challenges
4. How does China's and India's growth fare?

About the recent census and trend in China's Population

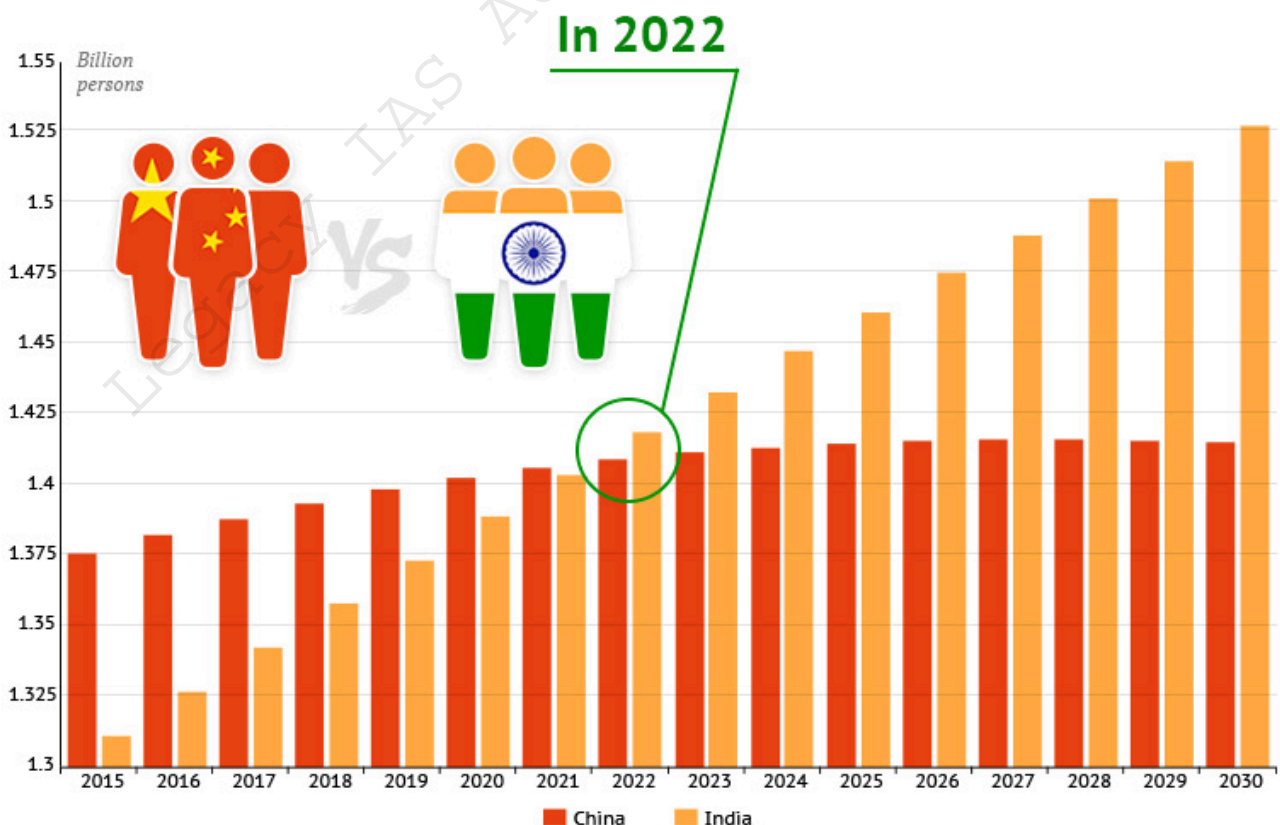
- The latest census shows that the number of births in China in 2020 is lower than 1961 – to put it into perspective, 1961 is the year when China was in the midst of a four-year famine unleashed by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward policy in 1958 that devastated the farm sector and claimed millions of lives.
- China's population was 1.41 billion in 2020, according to the census, increasing by 72 million since the last census in 2010, recording a 5.38% growth in this period. The average annual growth was 0.53%.
- The slowing growth rate, a consequence of China's stringent family planning rules over



decades - known as the “one-child policy” but involving a range of varying restrictions across urban and rural areas - has evoked concerns of a rapidly ageing society and the impact on China’s labour force, and fears that China will, as some experts have said, “get old before it gets rich.”

- The census recorded 264 million in the age group of 60 and over, up by more than 5% since 2010 and accounting for almost 20% of the population. Those in the 15-59 age group were 894 million persons, down by almost 7% since 2010 and accounting for just over 60% of the population.
- **The findings from the census were not entirely dire. The census also shed light on China’s increasingly educated workforce and its rapid pace of urbanisation.**
- **With the number of births falling for the fourth consecutive year, experts say that we will likely see China’s population peak - and be overtaken by India’s - by as early as 2025.**

When will India have more people than China?



About the Problem of China’s dropping Population and Age



-
- Chinese experts acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, without linking it directly to the history of the Communist Party's harsh family planning policies.
 - China loosened family planning rules and allowed couples to have two children in 2016, but that has failed to mark a boom amid changing lifestyles and declining preferences, particularly in urban areas, for larger families.
 - The impact on the labour force and healthcare is a particular concern. China's workforce in the 15-59 age bracket peaked at 925 million in 2011, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said previously. That number was down to 894 million in this census and would drop to 700 million by 2050, according to the ministry.
 - The census did not offer a specific year for the population to peak, but experts said that could happen by 2025.

Population Growth in India and the Challenges

- According to the UN's World Population Prospects 2019 report, India is projected to become the most populous country by 2027 surpassing China and host 1.64 billion people by 2050. The fertility rate in the country still lies in the range of 2.1-4.
- It would be a challenge to achieve optimal fertility rate in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh — which have higher fertility rate as per Sample Registration System data.
- India's low literacy rate and poor skilling of human capital will turn demographic dividend into a burden. There will be a need to spend more on education, healthcare system, grow more food, and to add capacity to basic infrastructures, such as roads, transport, electricity, and sewage to provide a minimum quality of life to every citizen.
- As per India Ageing Report 2017 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the share of the population over the age of 60 could increase from 8% in 2015 to 19% in 2050. India will have to spend more on their health along with geriatric care.
- In the face of an increasing population, unequal distribution of income and inequalities within the country would be a possible outcome.

How does China's and India's growth fare?

- China and India started rebuilding their economies as independent nations in the 1950s, with India having a greater structural advantage.
- Both economies struggled after the initial euphoria and faced tremendous challenges in tackling a burgeoning population and a very poor growth rate.
- Excessive government control, corruption and civil dissatisfaction were proving to be a serious menace in both.
- In 1978, after the death of Mao, China liberalised its economy, by inviting foreign capital and promoting its coastal areas for investment. Agriculture was freed from state control



and “One-child policy’ was introduced to reduce population in China.

- India took to liberalisation in 1991 after an economic crisis and grew at around an impressive 8% per annum from then. India incentivised capital-intensive industries and missed focusing on job creation in the initial years and India’s policy of reserving many goods for the MSME sector and the regressive labour policies inhibited free business. Only an effective 4.7% of India’s GDP was invested whereas the need was at least 6.5%, which was 8.5% in China’s case.
- With a \$2.5 trillion economy compared to China’s \$12.5 trillion economy (the 2nd largest in absolute terms and the largest in PPP terms) – India is currently way behind China.

-Source: The Hindu

Legacy IAS Academy