

Family de-planning

The coercive campaign to drive down indigenous birth-rates in Xinjiang

Nathan Ruser and James Leibold



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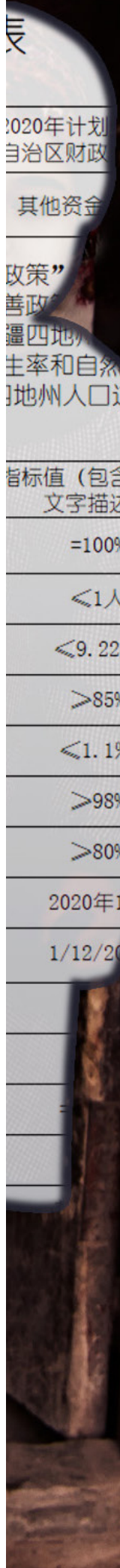
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1. Introduction

In this report, we provide new evidence documenting the effectiveness of the Chinese government's systematic efforts to reduce the size of the indigenous population of Xinjiang through a range of coercive birth-control policies.

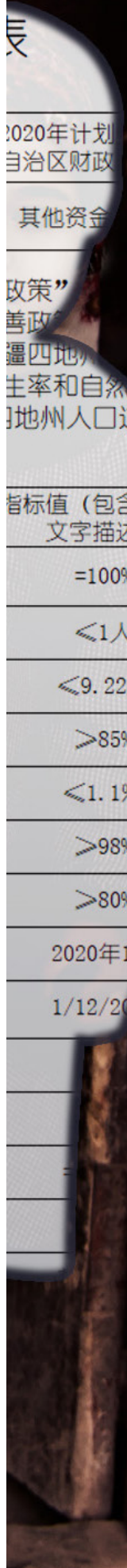
Using the Chinese government's own publicly available statistics, we have compiled a dataset of county-level birth-rates (natality) across 2011-2019. We then marshal this data to analyse trends across nationalities and spatial regions in Xinjiang, before and after the 2016 crackdown, and comparatively with other countries as recorded in the UN population dataset. Finally, we place these statistics in context through our analysis of county-level implementation documents and other official Chinese language sources which have been previously overlooked.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a long history of state-directed demographic engineering, or what officials euphemistically call “family-planning” (计划生育) in the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹ Chairman Mao declared China's large population was its greatest resource during the 1950s, only to backflip during the early 1970s and insist “population growth must be controlled.”

In 1979, Deng Xiaoping launched the “one child policy” and created a complex set of bureaucratic institutions and practices for controlling population growth. Party officials rather than women would decide what they did with their bodies.

The one-child policy has seen a dramatic drop in China's fertility rate and unleashed new concerns about a looming demographic crisis. Yet the instinct to control remains. As Party officials are loosening family-planning rules on Han women, they are simultaneously cracking down on the reproductive rights of Uyghur and other indigenous nationalities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) over perceived fears of instability and uneven growth.

In the name of stability and control, the CCP under President Xi Jinping is seeking to fundamentally transform the social and physical landscape of Xinjiang. This includes the construction of hundreds of prison-like detention centres² and the mass internment of Uyghurs, Kazakh and other indigenous nationalities;³ a regime of highly intrusive and near constant surveillance;⁴ the erasure of indigenous culture, language and religious practices and sites;⁵ and mandatory job assignments that are indicative of forced labour;⁶ among other now well-documented human rights abuses.⁷



2. Key findings

Beginning in April 2017, Chinese Communist Party authorities in Xinjiang launched a series of “strike-hard” campaigns against “illegal births” with the explicit aim to “reduce and stabilise fertility at a moderate level” and decrease the birth-rate in southern Xinjiang by at least 4 children per thousand people from 2016 levels. This followed years of preferential exceptions from family-planning rules for indigenous nationalities (see Sections 3 and 5 of our report).

The crackdown has led to an unprecedented and precipitous drop in official birth-rates in Xinjiang since 2017. The birth-rate across the region fell by nearly half (48.74 percent) in the two years between 2017 and 2019.

The largest declines have been in counties where Uyghur and other indigenous communities are concentrated (see Section 4). Across counties that are majority-indigenous the birth-rate fell, on average, by 43.7 percent in a single year between 2017 and 2018. The birth-rate in counties with a 90 percent or greater indigenous population declined by 56.5 percent, on average, in that same year.

In 2017, the Chinese government’s approach to birth control among minority nationalities shifted from “reward and encourage” towards a more coercive and intrusive policing of reproduction processes. Hefty fines, disciplinary punishment, extrajudicial internment, or the threat of internment were introduced for any “illegal births.” Family-planning officials in Xinjiang were told to carry out “early detection and early disposal of pregnant women found in violation of policy” (see Section 5).

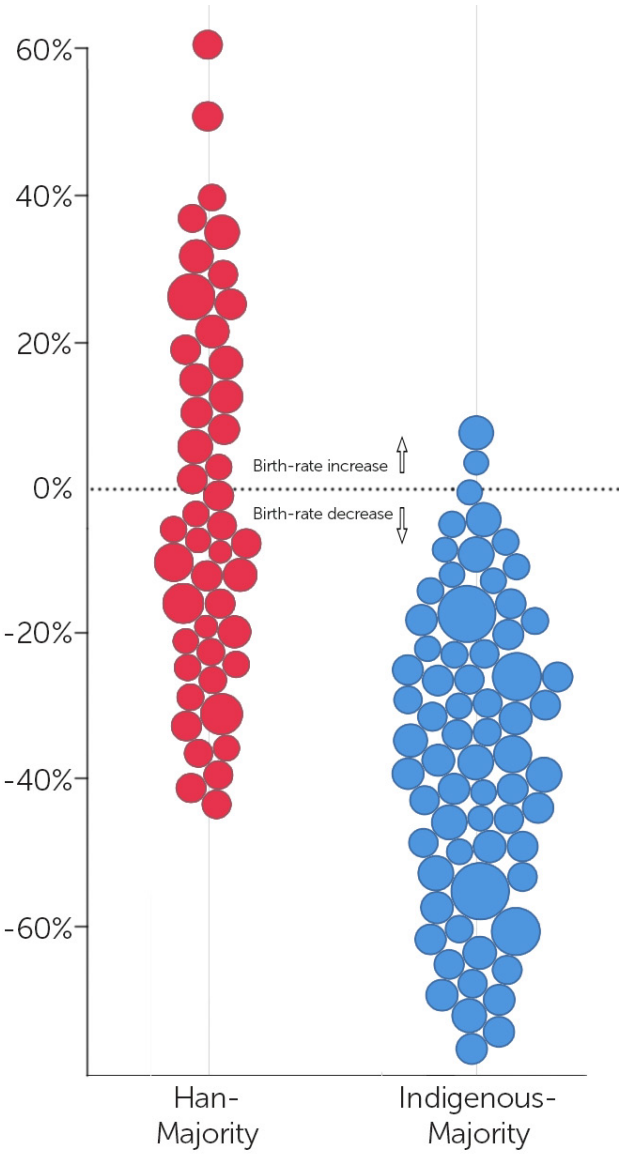
While the Chinese government argues it has adopted a uniform family-planning policy in Xinjiang, the county-level natality data suggests these policies are disproportionately affecting areas with a large indigenous population, meaning their application is discriminatory and applied with the intent of reducing the birth-rate of Uyghurs and other religious and ethnic minorities. This policy also stands in stark contrast to the loosening of birth control restrictions elsewhere in China (see Sections 6 and 8).

Policy implementation documents from Xinjiang explicitly set birth-rate targets that are among the lowest in the world, and the birth-rate has declined from a rate similar to those in neighbouring countries such as Mongolia or Kazakhstan to only slightly higher than Japan, where the low birth-rate is seen as a “national crisis” (see Sections 6 and 7).

The sharp drop in birth-rates in Xinjiang (a region with a population of nearly 25 million) is proportionally the most extreme over a two-year period globally since 1950. Despite notable contextual differences, this decline in birth-rate is more than double the rate of decline in Cambodia at the height of the Khmer Rouge genocide (1975-79) (see Section 7).

The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, to which China is a signatory, prohibits states from “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group,” as an aspect of the physical element to genocide. Our analysis builds on previous work and provides compelling evidence that Chinese government policies in Xinjiang may constitute an act of genocide; however further research is required to establish the intent and mental element of this crime. We call for the Chinese government to give researchers, journalists and human rights experts full and open access to Xinjiang.

Figure 1: Change in crude birth-rate, XUAR, from a pre-crackdown baseline to the 2018 birth-rate with counties sorted into Han-majority and Indigenous-majority.



表

2020年计划
自治区财政

其他资金

政策”
善政
疆四地
生率和自然
地州人口

指标值 (包含
文字描述

=100%

<1人

<9.22

>85%

<1.1%

>98%

>80%

2020年1

1/12/20

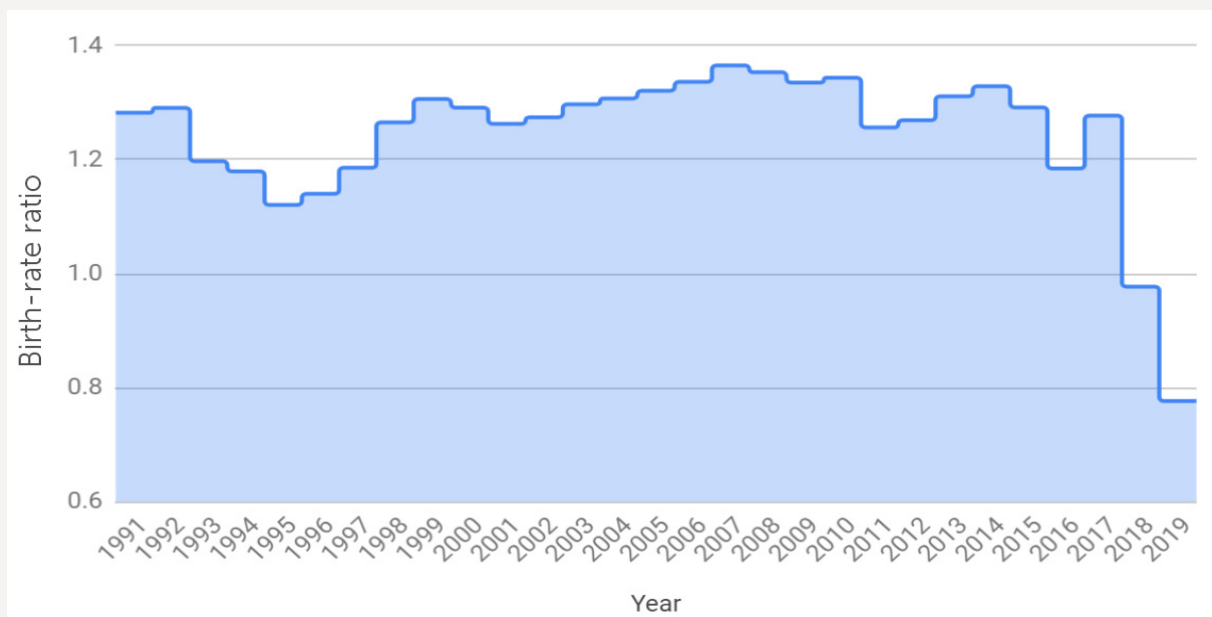
3. The campaign to eliminate “illegal births”

In the past, China permitted minority families living in urban areas to have two children and rural families to have three children while pursuing a single-child policy among Han majority families. This and other preferential policies for non-Han communities generated intense controversy and helped spur a more assimilatory approach towards indigenous communities under Xi Jinping.⁸ In 2014, then Xinjiang Party-secretary Zhang Chunxian called for the “implementation of a family-planning policy that is equal for all nationalities” in order to “lower and stabilise fertility [in Xinjiang] at a moderate level.”⁹

At the region-wide level, birth-rates in Xinjiang remained relatively stable and moderate across the history of the PRC. For the first decade of the one-child policy from 1979 to 1989, the birth-rate in Xinjiang was in fact lower than China’s average; under subsequent family-planning policies since 1990, the XUAR’s birth-rate stabilised at roughly 125 percent of China’s national average (Figure 2).

Yet that XUAR-wide rate belies much variation and fluctuation in crude birth-rates at the county level. A number of counties, especially in the Uyghur-majority south of Xinjiang, witnessed years of exceptionally high birth-rates over the last decade. For example, in Kashgar prefecture in 2014, the birth-rate soared to nearly 68 children per thousand people, while the region-wide rate was relatively stable around 16.5 per thousand.

Figure 2: Crude birth-rate ratio, XUAR versus the whole of China, 1991-2019.



Despite the relatively stable birth-rate ratio between Xinjiang and the rest of China, policy makers in Beijing and Urumqi saw high birth-rates in southern Xinjiang as an increasingly urgent problem and source of perceived instability, literally a breeding ground for the “three evil forces” of extremism, terrorism, and splittism.¹⁰

Take, for example, Xu Jianying, a professor at the Chinese Social Science Academy in Beijing, who called for “long term strategic thinking” in 2014 in order to “alter the population structure of southern Xinjiang” and confront the scourge of religious extremism.¹¹ In a 2019 interview, he repeated this call,

and claimed to have found Uyghur families in southern Xinjiang having 7 or 8 children (or even as many as 10) during his field research in 2014.

In the minds of CCP officials, efforts to “alter and optimise the ethnic structure of Xinjiang’s population” requires not only the luring of Han settlers onto the frontier but also the strict enforcement of family-planning rules among Uyghurs and other minorities.¹² In the past, local officials in southern Xinjiang complained about the lack of resources and personnel to “control rapid population growth,” and family-planning work was widely seen as perfunctory and ineffective, focused more on incentivising reporting compliance and less on punishing those who gave birth to more children than family planning rules allowed.¹³

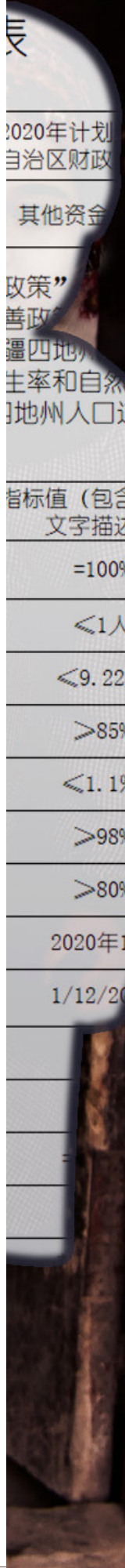
That changed with the arrival of the new Party-secretary, Chen Quanguo, in October 2016. As a part of his “clenched fist” (组合拳) approach to eliminating all sources of instability in the region,¹⁴ Chen initiated a “strike-hard campaign” (专项治理行动) against “illegal births” (违法生育). On 28 April 2017, he convened a high-level Party conference on family-planning in the four prefectures of southern Xinjiang,¹⁵ at which he demanded local officials “reduce and stabilise fertility at a moderate level,” carry out an “equal family-planning policy among all nationalities” in Xinjiang, and ensure “effective containment of illegal births in the four southern prefectures of Xinjiang through a clear transformation of the masses’ concept on childbirth.”¹⁶

As CCP officials in Xinjiang were overseeing the mass internment of Uyghurs and other minorities in purpose-built “re-education” camps, local family-planning officials were conducting a series of strike-hard campaigns against illegal births across the region, using strict quotas to eliminate unauthorised births in counties with large minority populations (see Section 5 for additional details).¹⁷

In a 2017 interview with state media, the Deputy Mayor of Bay County in Aksu Prefecture, Hayrigul Sawut, asserted that those who exceed family-planning guidelines must be “punished and punished resolutely... never tolerate nor soften.”¹⁸ In order to “actively guide” fewer and better births and strictly control illegal births, Hayrigul Sawut called for the levying of hefty fines,¹⁹ which one county-level implementation document called “an important tool for punishing illegal births and educating, warning, and shocking the masses into implementing family-planning.”²⁰

Once mobilised, family-planning officials operated with brutal efficiency across Xinjiang’s indigenous communities. In Chapchal County (68 percent indigenous), for example, officials collected nearly US\$1 million (6,018,000 RMB) in fines for 629 cases of illegal childbirth over a four-month period in late 2017 after deploying 85 new family-planning specialists.²¹ This resulted in a subsequent drop in the county’s birth-rate from 15.54 per thousand in 2017 to just 7.26 per thousand in 2019. A local judgement issued in Uchturpan County (95 percent indigenous) in 2018 ordered a 20 percent reduction in 57-year-old widow Tunisahan Rahman’s pension after she failed to pay a 11,513 RMB (US\$1,781) fine for having an “illegal” third child back in 1992, due to what the judgement admitted was a “serious illness” that led to her retirement in 2009 (see Box 1).²²

Violations of family-planning regulations and the failure to pay related fines is the most frequently cited reason for the detention of people in re-education facilities, according to a leaked government document from Karakash County (98 percent indigenous).²³ One implementation document from Cherchen County (73 percent indigenous) explicitly instructs local officials to dispatch women who have given birth to more than two children to re-education camps: “In addition to collecting the social compensation fee, send them off to undergo vocational and technical training.”²⁴



Yamansu Kyrgyz Government Pronouncement (2018) Number 96

Judgement on Reducing the Benefits of Tunisahan Rahman, a Retired Cadre of the Yamansu Township Agricultural Machinery Station

Tunisahan Rahman, female, Uyghur nationality, born on 9 April 1961, native of Uchturpan County, Xinjiang with a technical secondary school degree, started working in April 1978 at the Agricultural Machinery Station in Yamansu Township, Uchturpan County. She retired in February 2009; and from February 2009, she has been recovering from illness at home.

Upon investigation, it was discovered Tunisahan Rahman has the following problems in violation of national law and regulations:

On 20 April 1985, Tunisahan Rahman married Mamat Gayit, the cadre of the Yamansu Township Agricultural Machinery Station. Both of them have an urban household registration. After their marriage, Tunisahan Rahman gave birth to a boy, Arslan Mamat, on 14 July 1987. She gave birth to his second child, Geyretjan Mamat, on 11 May 1989. According to Article 15 of the "Regulation on Population and Family-planning of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," "A couple with urban household registration can have two children, and a couple with rural household registration can have three children." After giving birth to two boys in good health, the couple were not eligible for another birth. On 9 September 1992, Tunisahan Rahman and her husband violated the law and gave birth to another boy Anwerjan Mamat. In 2003, Tunisahan Rahman's husband, Mamat Gayit, died of illness. The problem of Tunisahan Rahman's illegal extra birth was never discovered.

In 2017, the Autonomous Region issued the "Opinion of the General Office of the Party Committee of the Autonomous Region and the General Office of the People's Government of the Autonomous Region on Strengthening and Improving Family-planning Work in the Four Prefectures of Southern Xinjiang" (Xinjiang Party Office [2017] no. 38). When the Family-planning Office of Yamansu Township, Uchturpan County, carried out an investigation to root-out the problem of extra-births across the entire township, they discovered that Tunisahan Rahman had illegally had one extra child.

On 12 November 2017, the People's Government of Yamansu Township issued its "Decision on the Collection of Social Compensation Fee" in accordance with the Regulation on Population and Family-planning of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and decided to impose a 11,513 RMB social compensation fee on Tunisahan Rahman as administrative punishment. Tunisahan Rahman has yet to pay her social compensation fee due to serious illness.

As a staff member of a public institution, Tunisahan Rahman violated national law and regulations by exceeding family-planning rules by having one extra child. In accordance with Article 21, Item 4 and Article 44 of the "Provisional Regulation on the Disciplinary Measures for Staff at Public Institutions" and after a 6 August 2018 deliberation meeting of the Yamansu Township Party Committee and government team, it was decided to reduce Tunisahan Rahman's benefits by 20 percent starting in September 2018.

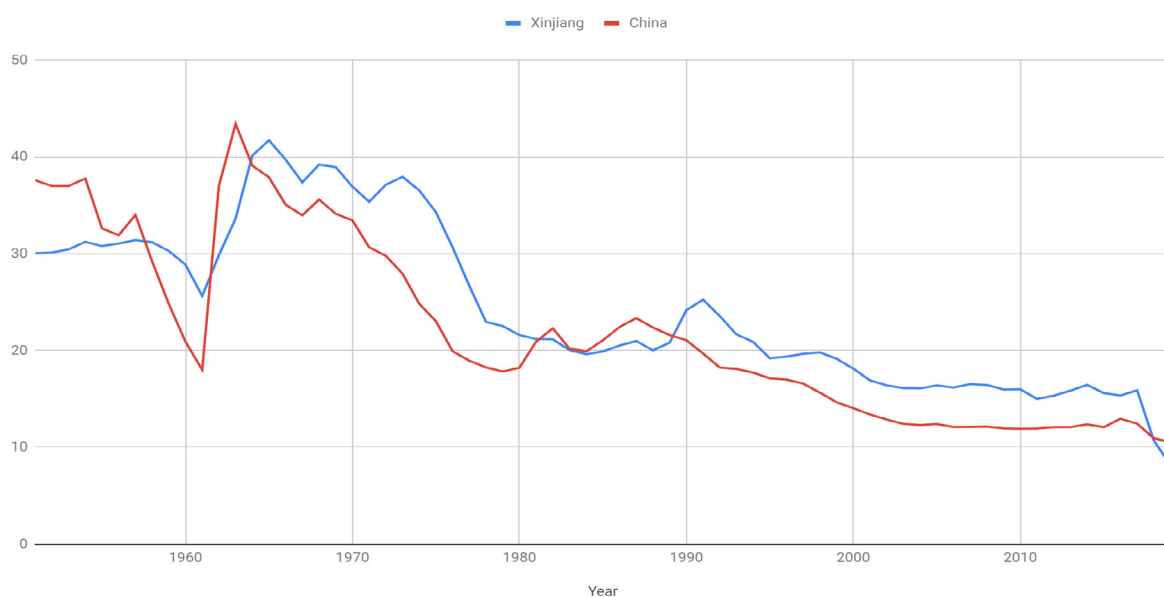
People's Government of Yamansu Kyrgyz Nationality Township
6 August 2018

In order to comply with Chen Quanguo’s directives, the XUAR legislature revised its family-planning regulations on 28 July 2017 to eliminate all preferential births for non-Han minorities in Xinjiang and implemented a uniform family-planning policy.²⁵ This new regulation provided the legal basis for the strike-hard campaign and a more coercive policing of reproductive rights in Xinjiang.

Under the revised regulation, regardless of their nationality, families with urban household registration (*hukou*, 户口) are permitted two children, while those with a rural *hukou* are permitted (in theory) three children. In one part of Uchturpan County, however, local officials piloted a “rural two-child” policy in 2018 that rewarded women who were willing to undergo tubal ligation after having two children with a one-time payment of 2000 RMB (US\$ 312).²⁶ The rapid urbanisation of Xinjiang, with ambitious plans to achieve an urbanisation rate of over 60 percent by 2025, means fewer women are legally permitted a third birth each year.²⁷

As a result of this crackdown, Xinjiang’s region-wide birth-rate decreased significantly in 2018 and 2019, dropping from around 125 percent of the national average to less than 80 percent (Figure 3). Such radical fluctuation in rates hadn’t been seen in Xinjiang since the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), when birth-rates dropped sharply before soaring upward after the end of the great famine associated with Mao’s failed experiment in collectivization.²⁸

Figure 3: Crude birth-rates, XUAR versus the whole of China, since 1951.



This decline is also remarkable when compared to Chinese provinces with a similar societal or economic profile as Xinjiang. The provincial-level administrative units of Ningxia, Qinghai and Yunnan have a significant (though varied) proportion of minority nationalities and are worthwhile comparisons to Xinjiang. Similarly, the provinces of Sichuan, Jiangxi and Shanxi are largely Han-dominated but provide interesting economic benchmarks which Xinjiang can be compared against. Across these six jurisdictions, the fertility rate remained relatively stable over the last decade, with birth-rates dropping, on average, by 3.02 percent since 2010, compared to the sharp 49 percent decline in Xinjiang’s birth-rate since 2010 (see Figure 4).²⁹

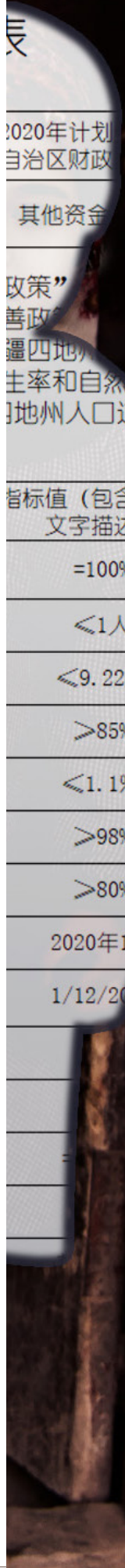
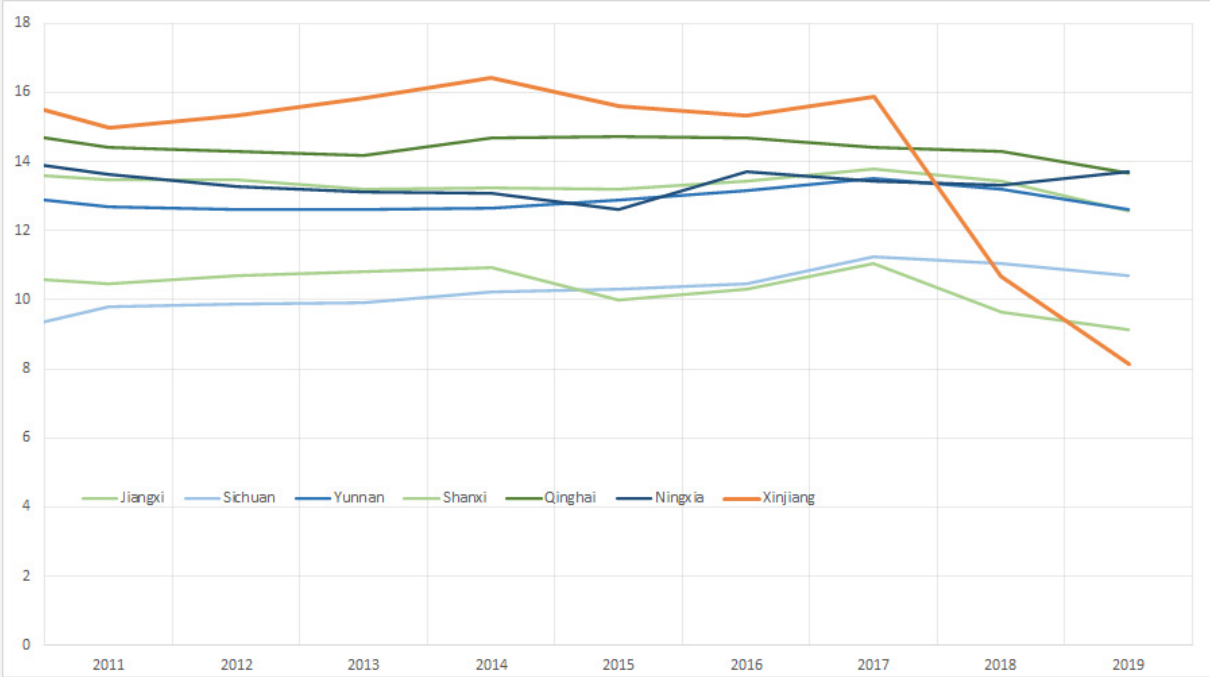


Figure 4: Decline in crude birth-rates, XUAR compared to Jiangxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Shanxi, Qinghai and Ningxia, since 2010.



4. Sharply declining birth-rates in indigenous-majority counties

Our analysis of official Chinese government sources reveals a sharp decline in indigenous birth-rates in Xinjiang and a coercive regime of population control in which restrictions are disproportionately applied to Uyghurs and other indigenous communities.

CCP officials have gradually loosened family-planning rules among Han women since 2016, moving from a “one-child policy” to a universal “two-child policy,” due to concerns about a ticking “demographic time bomb”: with China recording its lowest ever birth-rate in 2019, 10.48 per thousand people down from 17.82 in 1979.³⁰ There are now prominent voices, such as leading economist Ren Zeping, calling for not only the full liberalization of birth-control rules in China but also the active encouragement of more births.³¹

Meanwhile, in Xinjiang, CCP officials are systematically violating the reproductive rights of Uyghur and other minority women who previously enjoyed preferential family-planning exemptions from the one-child policy. These contradictory shifts in family-planning policy are fundamentally about social control, argues noted expert Mei Fong,³² as the CCP leadership seeks to literally manufacture social stability while preserving its political hegemony.

Previous research by both Chinese and foreign experts has examined the tightening of birth-control policy in Xinjiang and a corresponding drop in natural population growth beginning in 2015, but even more dramatically after 2017.³³ Our analysis builds on that research at a finer geographical scale by using county-level birth-rate statistics (see Appendix for our full methodology), and provides further evidence of the systematic targeting of indigenous communities.

Across the 29 counties with indigenous-majority populations for which we have 2019 or 2020 data, the birth-rate has fallen by 58.5 percent from the 2011-2015 baseline average. In those counties that are over 90 percent indigenous, the birth-rate fell at an even greater rate, showing a 66.3 percent decrease in 2019-2020.³⁴

For example, 99 percent of the population in Hotan County in southern Xinjiang is Uyghur. Hotan experienced a drop in birth-rate from 25.41 per thousand people in 2012 to 7.41 per thousand in 2018, or a decrease of 70.8 percent. This is the continuation of a distinct pattern across Xinjiang since the region-wide crackdown began, in which birth-rates have decreased drastically and disproportionately in counties with large non-Han populations (Figure 5).

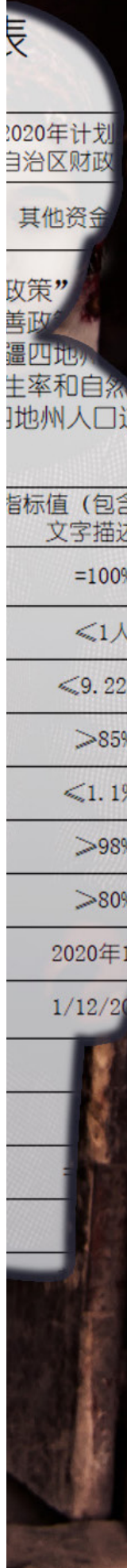
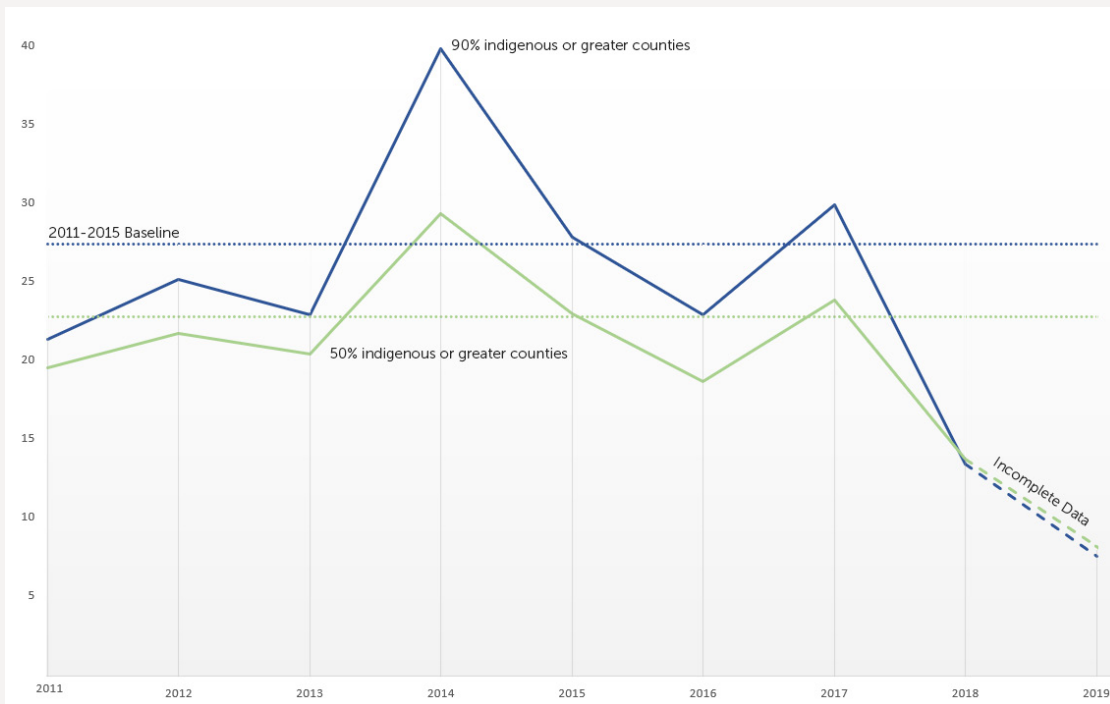
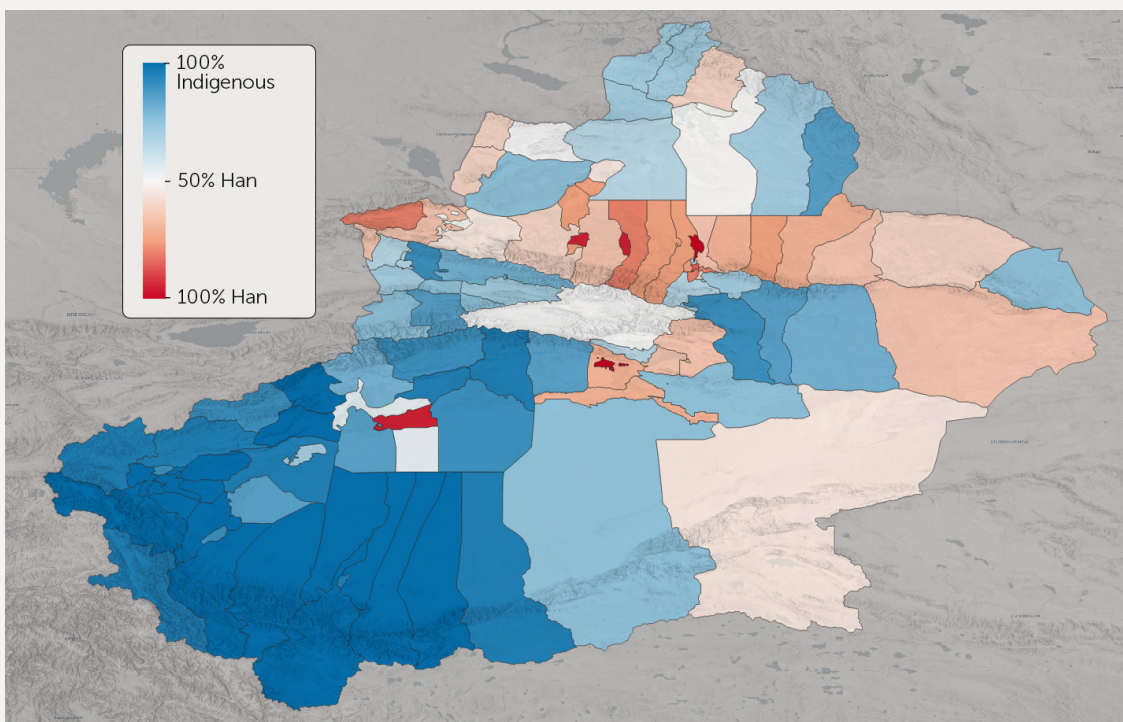


Figure 5: Crude birth-rates for counties with 50 percent+ and 90 percent+ percent indigenous populations, XUAR, 2011-2019.³⁵



Our dataset shows that across Xinjiang’s Han-majority counties birth-rates stayed relatively steady (despite some county-level fluctuations) and that approximately 1000 more children were born in 2018 compared to what would be expected from the pre-crackdown baseline (2011-2015). Meanwhile, in indigenous-majority counties, approximately 163,000 fewer children were born in 2018. Incomplete data compiled from roughly 60 counties, which includes mostly reported data from 2019 as well as three county’s target birth-rate figures, shows that this decrease continues to accelerate, particularly in heavily Uyghur areas.

Figure 6: XUAR county-level administrative units by Han versus minority percentage, 2018.



The drastic declines in birth-rates are heavily skewed towards areas with a high proportion of indigenous nationalities, such as Uyghurs. In the past, the *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* reported county-level birth-rate data for all nationalities; however, following the implementation of new family-planning directives in 2017 and coinciding with the wider crackdown in Xinjiang, those statistics were no longer included in the yearbook (see Section 9). It is now impossible, using official statistics, to break down and compare birth-rates by nationality.

In order to analyse the effect of the new birth-control policies, it is necessary to examine birth-rates on a geographical basis and then compare them with reported population figures and ethnic breakdowns for each county. Among Xinjiang's 102 county-level administrative units, the proportion of the minority population ranges from roughly 4 percent in Wujiaqu City in northern Xinjiang to 99 percent in Hotan County in southern Xinjiang. Due to that extreme variation, analysis of birth-rates at the county level can illuminate how trends differ between Han and minority-dominated counties in Xinjiang.

Before the crackdown, counties with a high proportion of indigenous nationalities (predominantly in the south of Xinjiang) showed higher birth-rates. This is an example of how county-level statistics and their analysis can be highly reflective of the differences between indigenous and Han communities in Xinjiang.

By plotting the decline in birth-rates from a pre-crackdown baseline (2011-2015) against the published statistics from 2018, it is evident that birth-rates have declined far more sharply in counties with high minority populations. This suggests that these family-planning policies have a disproportionate impact on Uyghurs and other non-Han nationalities, and that this impact occurs consistently across Xinjiang and beyond the four southern prefectures singled out in policy directives.

Across Xinjiang, on average, for every 10 percent greater share of indigenous population a county contains, the 2018 birth-rate declined an additional 7.2 percent when compared to pre-crackdown levels (Figure 7). All other things being equal, the correlation (R-squared value) is strong enough that 54 percent of the variation in birth-rate decline can be explained by the percentage of the minority population alone.

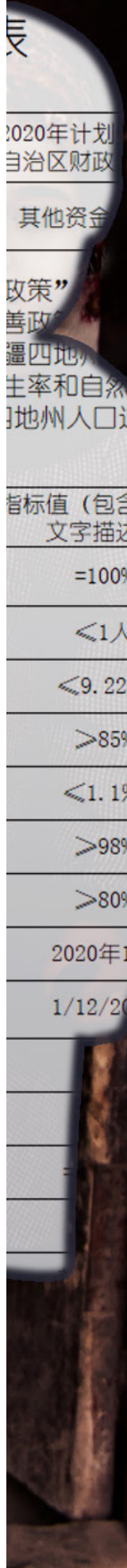


Figure 7: Change in crude birth-rates in 2018 compared to a pre-crackdown baseline in administrative units (counties and prefectures) throughout Xinjiang. The X-axis shows the county's proportion of minority population. It can clearly be seen that, as a county's minority proportion increases, so has its decline in birth-rate since the 2017 policy change.



That trend continued into 2019, for which the available data shows an even greater decrease in birth-rates, especially in counties with large indigenous populations. Looking at complete 2018 birth-rate data, the average decline in indigenous-majority counties was 35.7 percent; in 2019 (looking at incomplete data) the average decrease was 56.6 percent (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Decline (or increase) of crude birth-rates in 2019 compared to a pre-crackdown baseline in administrative units throughout Xinjiang, for areas with 2019 data available.



Although these trends are clearly visible region-wide, they are also starkly visible in the eight sub-district (county-level) administrative units in the regional capital of Urumqi. Urumqi is Xinjiang’s largest city, with a population of over 3.5 million.³⁶ It is also a Han-majority city where Han residents make up over 70 percent of the population. The city is one of the few areas in Xinjiang that has witnessed a rise in birth-rates compared to pre-crackdown levels. In 2018, the city’s birth-rate grew by about 25 percent compared to the pre-2017 baseline, from 8.5 births per thousand people to 12 per thousand.

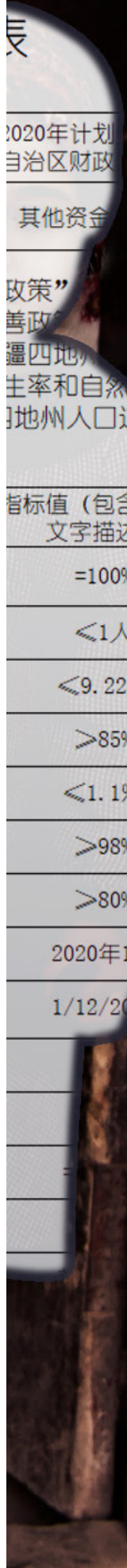
However, that growth has not been uniform across the city. Of the eight districts in Urumqi, six are Han-majority districts. Among those, each one has seen a rise in birth-rates compared to the pre-crackdown baseline; Shuimogou District’s birth-rate has risen by 50 percent, and Toutunhe District’s by 60 percent. The two indigenous-majority districts of Dabancheng and Urumqi County, on the other hand, show a drastically different situation: the birth-rate in the two areas declined by 17.34 percent and 9.9 percent, respectively.

Estimating the decline in indigenous births

The crude birth-rate statistics show significant demographic shifts across Xinjiang. There are now hundreds of thousands fewer births in parts of Xinjiang compared with what would have been expected prior to the crackdown, but the missing children are disproportionately in indigenous-majority areas.

Based on complete data from 2018, Han-majority counties had, on average, a very slight increase in the birth-rate compared to pre-crackdown levels: around 1000 more children were born in 2018 than would have been if the birth-rate had stayed static at the pre-2017 baseline. This shows that in Han-majority counties the birth-rate has remained essentially stable. In comparison, almost all indigenous-majority counties had decreases in the number of children born, totalling 162,700 fewer children in 2018 than would have been expected before to the crackdown.

In 2019, at least 186,400 fewer children were born in Xinjiang compared to what would have been expected if birth-rates had remained static at the pre-2017 baseline. Although complete county-level data for 2019 has not been released, based on the information that has been published, roughly 95 percent of Xinjiang’s missing births in 2019 appear to be in indigenous-majority counties.



5. From carrot to stick: population “optimisation” in Xinjiang

Under Chen Quanguo’s rule, the budget for family-planning work in Xinjiang increased dramatically. The XUAR government allocated 500 million RMB (US\$76 million) to carry out its “reward and encouragement” family-planning policies in the rural villages of southern Xinjiang in 2016.³⁷ That funding more than doubled by 2019, when it amounted to 1.08 billion RMB (US\$166 million).³⁸

County-level implementation documents call for a “drag-net style” (拉网式) investigation of illegal child births as far back as the early 1990s or even earlier, and the serious investigation and punishment of illegal births from 2017 or 2018 onward, in order to achieve complete coverage without any “blind-spots” or “dead-ends”; recent violations are to be treated severely and distant transgressions more leniently.³⁹

In remote Ulughchat County on the border with Kyrgyzstan, where more than 90 percent of the population is non-Han, chiefly Kyrgyz, CCP officials set up a hotline for reporting illegal births and offered a 500 RMB (US\$75) reward for successful tip-offs,⁴⁰ while in Hejing County (51 percent minority) CCP officials encouraged violators to come forward with self-confessions while also rewarding those who doxed on their neighbours.⁴¹

Party officials in Xinjiang speak about pursuing “long-term birth control measures” (长效节育措施) or “long-acting contraception” (长效避孕) among women of childbearing age, chiefly through the insertion of intrauterine devices (IUDs), tubal ligation surgery, sterilization rings and other forms of birth control.⁴²

Implementation has focused not only on curbing fertility but also on rooting out lax enforcement of family-planning targets. In the Midong District of Urumqi (34 percent non-Han population), the CCP launched a “strike-hard” campaign in July 2019 to investigate not only illegal births but also how this problem was being handled by local officials. The campaign targeted so-called “two-faced people” (两面人) and those grassroots cadres who fail to act, falsify reports or collude or intentionally conceal family-planning violations.⁴³

Reporting illegal births and maintaining accurate population data are now a key performance indicators for state and Party officials. It functions as a highly punitive “single ballot veto” (一票否决), meaning failure to meet family-planning targets, regardless of other accomplishments, automatically blocks promotion and any performance bonuses.⁴⁴ The violation of family-planning regulations is now grounds for immediate demotion or even dismissal from the CCP and government posts.⁴⁵

In Hotan Prefecture, where 97 percent of the population is Uyghur or from other non-Han nationalities, 460 CCP members and state employees were investigated and punished for having illegal births in 2017, and an additional 70 leading Party cadres and 22 family-planning officials were punished for perfunctory or unsatisfactory handling of their family-planning responsibilities.⁴⁶

The 2017 XUAR directive on reducing fertility rates set a goal of decreasing the birth-rate by at least 4 per thousand people compared to 2016 levels in order to “effectively and thoroughly resolve rapid population growth in the four prefectures of southern Xinjiang.”⁴⁷ In reality, county-level targets and

actual birth-rates have surpassed that 4 per thousand reduction target. For example, Uchturpan County’s 2020 family-planning budget document states that the goal is to reduce the birth-rate to 9.22 per thousand people in 2020 down from 19.23 per thousand in 2016.⁴⁸ That’s more than double the 4 per thousand reduction goal.

In Marbeleshi County (94 percent indigenous), local authorities set their 2020 birth-rate target as “no higher than 4.1 per thousand people” - a remarkable 88.6 percent decrease from the pre-crackdown birth-rate of 36.04 per thousand, and nearly eight times the reduction goal of 4 per thousand. Across the 16 counties in southern Xinjiang, for which data is available on birth-rates targets or actual figures in 2019-2020, the average reduction has been 12.51 per thousand from the 2016 birth-rate statistic, or over three times the stated goal.

Minority nationalities in Xinjiang have long been subjected to family-planning oversight, even when they were permitted preferential treatment. In 2010, according to data from the *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*, the rate of family-planning policy penetration across Xinjiang was claimed to be 99.82 percent, with not a single region having less than 99 percent of its population covered by family-planning policies (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Extract from the 2011 *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* showing the family-planning rates for 2010.

		(2010 年)			
地 区	Region	计划生育率 (%) Family Planning Rate (%)	领证率 (%) Coverage of One-child Certificate (%)	领取计划生育证人数 (人) Number of Persons Receiving Certificates of Honor (person)	领取独生子女证人数 (人) Number of Married Couples with One-child Certificate (person)
总 计	Total	99.82	34.83	561084	771315
城 镇	Urban	99.69	55.64	214726	537932
农 村	Rural	99.86	23.45	346358	233383

In the past, the Chinese government sought to incentivize fewer births among the indigenous population of southern Xinjiang by offering cash inducements. In 2006, the XUAR government announced the “fewer births, faster prosperity” (少生快富) reward scheme.⁴⁹ Minority women with two or fewer births who were willing to undergo “long-term contraceptive measures” (IUD insertion or tubal ligation) were entitled to a single-time cash payment of 3000 RMB (US\$460).⁵⁰

In 2017, the Chinese government’s approach to birth control among minority nationalities shifted from “reward and encourage” towards a more coercive and intrusive policing of reproductive processes. Cash rewards were now supplemented with hefty fines, disciplinary punishment, internment or the threat of internment for any “illegal births.”⁵¹

As a part of “mass supervision,” cash rewards are now handed out for informing on a neighbour or colleague. In Aksu City, for example, 5000 RMB (US\$772) was offered for verified reports of illegal births and 2000 RMB (US\$309) for exposing any fraud, underreporting, false reporting or concealment of illegal births by family-planning officials in 2019.⁵²

Family-planning officials in Xinjiang are told to carry out “early detection and early disposal of pregnant women found in violation of policy,”⁵³ and women of childbearing age must be visited monthly and undergo quarterly pregnancy checks. Only those women who are willing to undergo long-term birth control measures are considered “trustworthy” citizens.⁵⁴

The result, as Chinese government officials openly admit, is a significant decline in the minority birth-rate.⁵⁵ In the words of Xinjiang’s leading sociologist, Li Xiaoxia, the government has eliminated “old childbearing concepts and cognition” and “backward and outdated thoughts on mate selection and procreation” by actively guiding women to “emancipate their minds” and adopt “the idea of civilized modern life” by limiting their reproduction.⁵⁶

This is part of what Chinese scholar-officials call the “optimisation” (优化)⁵⁷ of Xinjiang’s population structure⁵⁸ and the gradual uplifting of its “bio-quality” (素质).⁵⁹ which in practice means fewer “low-quality” (低素质) Uyghur and other indigenous births. This sort of eugenic thinking is not only deeply rooted in modern Chinese thought but was also commonplace in the West during the first half of the 20th century.⁶⁰

The “optimisation” of Xinjiang’s population structure also involves concerted efforts to lure more Han settlers and families into the region. The region’s chief colonising vehicle, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, 兵团), has a plan to settle an additional 300,000 mostly Han migrants in the region, chiefly in southern Xinjiang.⁶¹ Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged the XPCC to “develop towards the south” (向南发展),⁶² become a “mechanism for stability” (稳定器),⁶³ and coalesce the masses of different nationalities into a “large melting pot” (大熔炉).⁶⁴

To achieve this, XPCC regiments are actively recruiting poor Han peasants and workers from across China.⁶⁵ They are producing emotive videos of migrant success stories, the bounties of Xinjiang’s landscape, and the lure of Uyghur brides.⁶⁶ They are also offering lucrative inducements for Han migrants and their families to settle in Xinjiang: guaranteed land or jobs; free transport; subsidised housing; free medical and education benefits; and even lump-sum cash payments as high as 20,000 RMB (US\$3,050).⁶⁷ In one case, they are also handing out additional 20,000 RMB subsidies to settlers who bring their children and parents as a reward for helping to achieve Xinjiang’s “population security.”⁶⁸

To date, the results have been modest. The XPCC’s population increased by around 143,000 or 4.6 percent in 2019. The cohort had a birth-rate of 5.79 per thousand people and a natural growth rate of only 1.61 per thousand.⁶⁹

6. China's declining fertility rates

Amid the crackdown on “illegal births” in Xinjiang, wider Chinese society is facing a looming population crisis as birth-rates slump to their lowest level since 1949.⁷⁰ In late March 2021, a working paper published by the People's Bank of China,⁷¹ which is China's central bank and a cabinet-level department under the State Council, provided a sober assessment of China's declining fertility rate and its consequences. It states that:

“education and technical progress cannot compensate for the decline in population. In order to achieve the long-term goals in 2035, China should fully liberalise and encourage childbirth.”

and:

“The ageing population and declining birth-rate in developed countries have caused serious problems for the economy and society... our country's population transition is faster... and [our] declining birth-rate more serious... China is likely to face a tougher challenge than in developed countries.”

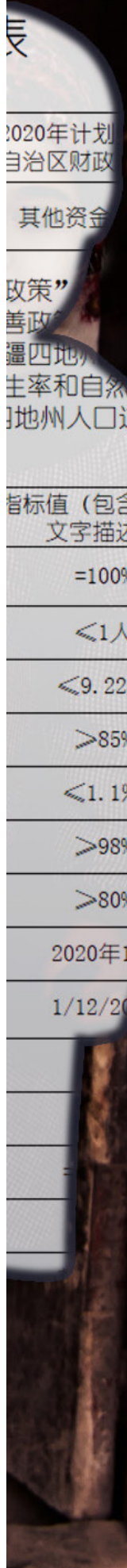
The report highlights China's already overstretched labour force, increased government expenditure on pensions and other forms of social welfare for retirees, and the threat of economic stagnation. As part of their analysis, the authors conclude that “it is necessary to increase the fertility rate” and to “vigorously encourage childbirth,” specifically mentioning the target of “at least three births per family.”⁷²

At the opening of the National People's Congress in March 2021, Premier Li Keqiang stated that the CCP would “work to achieve an appropriate birth-rate.”⁷³ Demographers quoted in the *Global Times* state media outlet told the paper that China's 14th Five-Year Plan is a critical window for reversing the country's declining fertility rate and flagged that the government might lift restrictions on births and even implement preferential policies for prospective mothers as soon as the sixth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee later this year.⁷⁴

The challenges facing China are similar to those facing much of the rest of the developed world, where falling natality rates are, or will shortly become, a strategic threat to national security. Japan, which has a birth-rate similar to that of Xinjiang, considers its low fertility rate to be a “long-term crisis.”⁷⁵ Yet, the high fertility rates among Uyghurs and other indigenous communities in Xinjiang are considered an existential threat to “population security” and “national security” by CCP officials and scholars, especially when viewed against the backdrop of declining natural growth rates among the region's Han population.⁷⁶

In fact, county-level family-planning documents in Xinjiang (as discussed in Section 5) explicitly outline the goal of reducing birth-rates in southern Xinjiang to targets that are among the lowest in the world. In 2020, for example, Maralbeshi County (94 percent Uyghur) set its birth-rate target at a mere 4.15 per thousand people (down from 51.53 per thousand in 2017), which is less than half of China's national birth-rate of 10.48 per thousand in 2019.⁷⁷

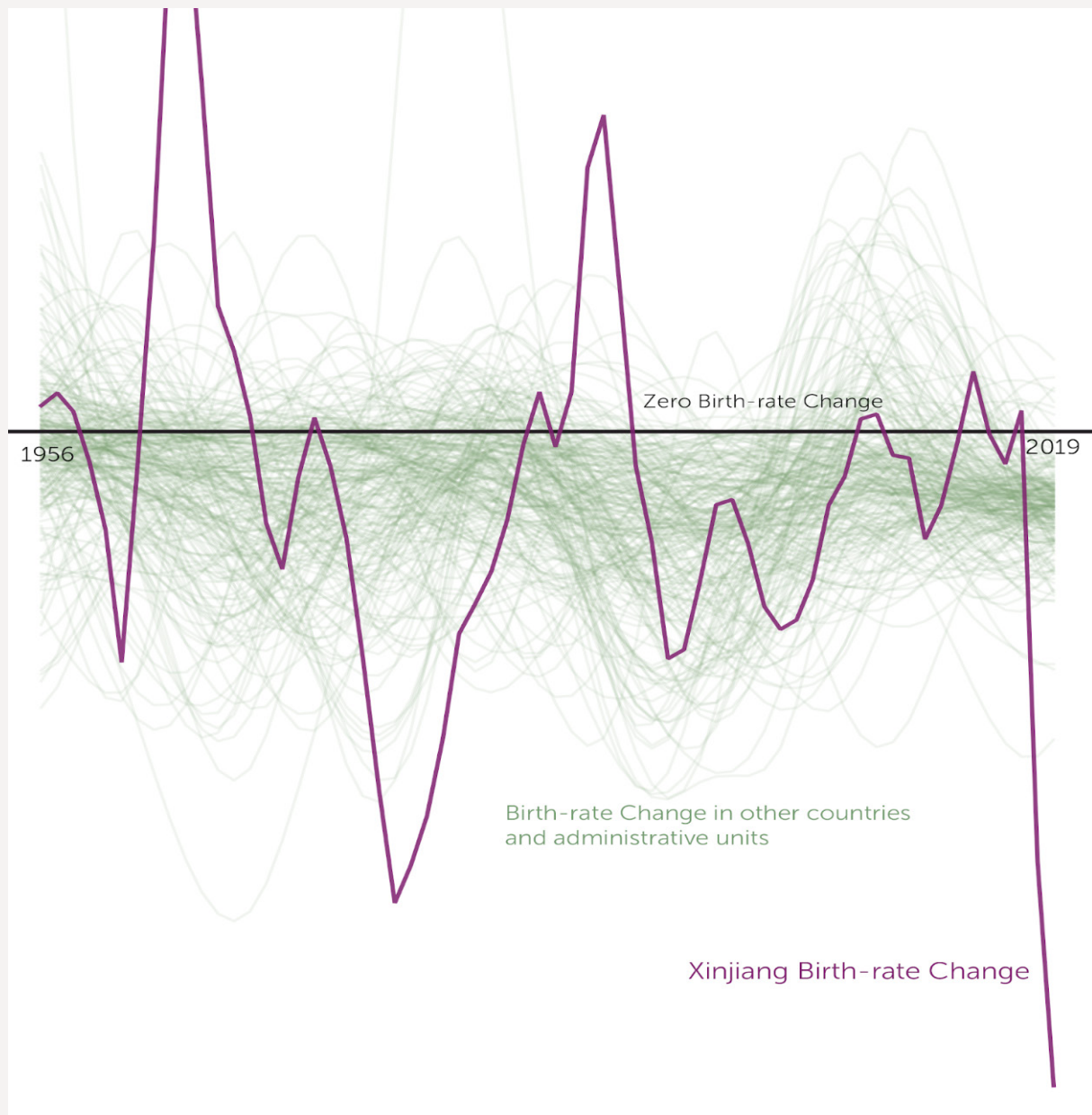
This aggressive policing of Indigenous wombs in Xinjiang is entirely inconsistent with the goals of the CCP at the national level, where it is loosening rather than tightening family-planning rules, and exposes the discriminatory, coercive and eugenic logic behind the Party's population policies in Xinjiang.



7. International comparisons

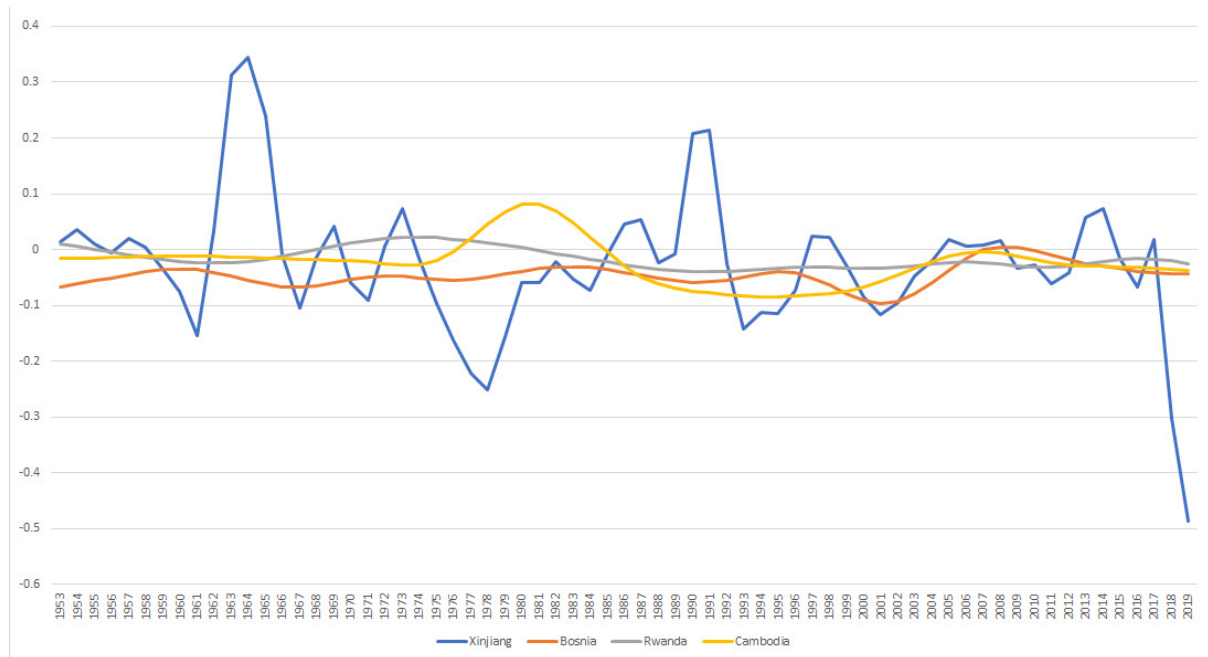
As outlined above, the natality rate in Xinjiang fell by 48.7 percent between 2017 and 2019. Comparing that drop with data from the UN's World Population Prospects project,⁷⁸ the proportional decline in birth-rates in Xinjiang is the most extreme globally since 1950 (Figure 10). According to that data, not a single country has seen a birth-rate drop by beyond 28 percent over a two year period.

Figure 10: Biennial change in birth-rates across all countries and administrative units analysed as part of the UN's World Population Prospects project, with Xinjiang's data overlaid. The first major dip in the birth-rate occurred in the 1970s, when widespread and aggressive family-planning policies were first implemented across China.⁷⁹ Xinjiang data appears particularly erratic owing to the nature of UN population data which calculates projected estimates based on published surveys.⁸⁰



The effectiveness of China's campaign to drive down indigenous birth-rates in Xinjiang is remarkably stark when Xinjiang is compared to similarly sized regions that have experienced large demographic shifts due to war or pogroms, such as Bosnia, Cambodia and Rwanda (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Comparison of biennial changes in birth-rates in Xinjiang, Bosnia, Rwanda and Cambodia, 1953-2019. Xinjiang is shown in blue.

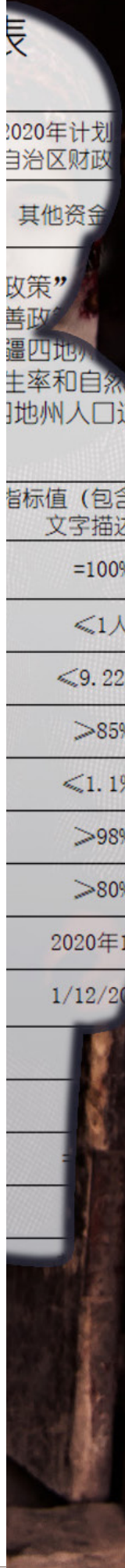


Detailed data from Cambodia shows that among women aged 20-28 years during the 1975-1979 genocide,⁸¹ the birth-rate dropped by roughly 30 percent in total, and 22 percent of that decline was in the years from 1977 to 1979. The drop in birth-rate between 1977 and 1979 was less than half of the decline in birth-rates across Xinjiang in the latest two years for which data is available (2017-2019).

In Syria, where a brutal civil-war has killed at least 500,000 people since 2011 and displaced roughly 11,800,000 more (amounting to a combined 55 percent of the pre-war population), the birth-rate has fallen by roughly 13 percent.⁸²

In most of those examples, the main driver of demographic change was mass killing rather than targeted birth control, so there are limits to how much can be gleaned from comparing them to the situation in Xinjiang. There is no evidence, based on publicly available information, of mass deaths in Xinjiang, but rather a vast and at times brutally efficient bureaucracy that's been mobilised to drive down indigenous birth-rates. Yet these international comparisons help to foreground the Chinese government's crackdown in Xinjiang against past examples of crimes against humanity, or even genocide.

Over a two-year period, Xinjiang has gone from having a birth-rate similar to neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan (20.7 per thousand people in 2019) and Mongolia (23.7 per thousand in 2019)⁸³ to having one similar to Japan (7.4 per thousand in 2019), a country with a famously low birth-rate and widespread government incentives to encourage people to have more children.⁸⁴



8. What Chinese state media say

Our report is not the first to examine China's coercive family-planning regime in Xinjiang and the sharp decline in birth-rates.⁸⁵ In response to Adrian Zenz's June 2020 exploration of this topic, Chinese state-media and CCP authorities launched an aggressive propaganda campaign seeking to discredit his findings through misleading statistics, other forms of misinformation and *ad-hominem* attacks.⁸⁶

In January 2021, an English-language China Global Television Network report, titled "How media outlets manipulate facts about Xinjiang's population,"⁸⁷ began by asserting that the Uyghur population in Xinjiang doubled from 5.6 million in 1978 to 11.7 million in 2018. Another widely circulated report also began by asserting that Xinjiang's population has grown steadily since the first census in 1953 and that the Uyghur population grew by 25.04 percent between 2010 and 2018 compared to only 2.0 percent growth among the Han population.⁸⁸ Generally speaking, the vast majority of state-sanctioned rebuttals focus on raw population growth figures (often prior to the commencement of the crackdown), while ignoring the precipitous decline in indigenous births following the Chinese government's crackdown.

When Chinese experts openly discuss declining birth-rates in Xinjiang, they expose the discriminatory rationale behind the artificial suppression of reproductive rights among indigenous communities such as Uyghurs. According to Professor Li Xiaoxia, who is one of China's leading experts on Xinjiang and the Director of the Sociology Institute at the Xinjiang Social Science Academy, the high birth-rates prior to the 2016 crackdown were the result of "religious extremists" who "bewitched or even coerced people" into marriage and child birth,⁸⁹ and that previous violations of family-planning regulations were a sign of either "religious extremism" or "old childbearing concepts and cognition."⁹⁰

The recent enforcement of family-planning policies and the resulting demographic shifts reflect, in the words of Lin Fanfei of Xinjiang University, "China's long-term efforts and important achievements in promoting policies to protect the rights and interests of women and children in ethnic minority areas."⁹¹ Despite railing against "false claims," "falsified data" and "baseless fake news," Chinese scholars and government officials do not dispute that birth-rates have fallen at a rapid pace, but argue they are the result of guided female emancipation and the CCP actively encourages Uyghur women, in Li Xiaoxia's words, to "become healthy, confident, independent, family-loving, patriotic, and modern in new era [*sic*]."⁹²

9. Withheld data

China's statistical yearbooks have long provided researchers with valuable insights into some of the local and more granular-level changes occurring across the country. Unlike other provincial-level autonomous regions' yearbooks, Xinjiang's statistical yearbook used to disaggregate demographic statistics at both the regional and nationality levels, permitting much richer comparative analyses.

Prior to 2017 (with the exception of 2015), birth-rate statistics were published at the county level and the rates for non-Han communities were specifically highlighted in addition to the overall birth-rate (Figure 12). Following the crackdown, birth-rates for minority nationalities were withheld from the Xinjiang statistical yearbook, making it harder to examine demographic trends as they relate to minority and majority communities, but the county-level data used in this report continued to be provided in 2017 and 2018.

Figure 12: Excerpt of 2014 birth-rate statistics showing specific breakdowns of overall birth-rates and those of "minority nationalities."

新疆统计年鉴 2015
XINJIANG STATISTICAL YEARBOOK

3-6 各地、州、市、县(市)人口自然变动情况

Population Natural Changes by Prefecture, Autonomous Prefecture, City and County

单位: ‰ (2014年) (%)

地 区 Region	出生率 Birth Rate	#少数 民族 Minority Nationalities	死亡率 Death Rate	#少数 民族 Minority Nationalities	自 然 增长率 Natural Growth Rate	#少数 民族 Minority Nationalities
乌鲁木齐市 Urumqi City	10.36	16.01	2.77	3.13	7.59	12.88
天山区 Tianshan District	9.67	15.03	2.45	2.27	7.22	12.76
沙依巴克区 Shayibak District	9.99	15.69	3.15	3.43	6.84	12.26
新市区 Xinshi District	10.46	14.93	1.82	1.93	8.64	13.00
水磨沟区 Shui Mogou Distric	9.49	20.13	2.76	4.73	6.73	15.40
头屯河区 Tou Tunhe District	9.31	13.99	4.04	5.17	5.27	8.82
达坂城区 Da Bancheng District	11.59	17.21	4.16	5.09	7.43	12.12

The most recent *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* was published in late March 2021 with data covering 2019. That edition omitted several key demographic statistics, including birth-rates by region, population figures by nationality, population figures by region and birth-control figures by region.⁹³

To date, Xinjiang authorities have offered no explanation for the withholding of those statistics. It is reasonable to conclude that those omissions seek to make the study of demographic trends in Xinjiang more difficult and to censor politically sensitive information confirming the sharp decline in birth-rates among minority nationalities in Xinjiang.

County-level governments in Xinjiang are also starting to withhold that data, which used to be included in their annual reports on economic and social development indicators, but are increasingly being censored. Through open-source research, we located 2019 birth-rate statistics for 51 of Xinjiang's counties and prefectures. We were able to find data on 50 percent (24 in total) of the Han-majority counties across the region compared to 40 percent (27 in total) of the non-Han majority counties.

Those partial 2019 statistics show that the decline in birth-rates continues, especially in indigenous-majority counties. Among the indigenous majority counties with published 2018-2019 data, the birth-rate decreased by 31 percent in 2018 and 57 percent in 2019. This suggests that the omitted data is deemed politically sensitive and that the authorities are intentionally withholding those statistics from researchers who are concerned about the Chinese government's human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

10. Conclusion

Since its sweeping crackdown on “instability” in Xinjiang, the CCP has sought to surveil, control and assimilate Uyghurs and other minority nationalities while systematically erasing aspects of indigenous culture, history, and identity. Those policies work in concert to produce a climate of fear in which anything other than complete acquiescence is criminalised.

It is in this context that Xinjiang witnessed a nearly 50 percent drop in birth-rates over the three-year period from 2017 to 2019. Chinese state media, academic experts, and Party authorities do not dispute any of these facts; indeed they published the very statistics upon which our analysis rests. As the previously mentioned report by Professor Li Xiaoxia concludes:

“In 2018, both fertility rate and natural growth rate of ethnic minority population (the Uyghur [*sic*] population in particular) in Xinjiang decreased significantly. All of these can be attributed to the strict implementation of the family-planning policy...”⁹⁴

In the view of CCP officials, they are simply “correcting” previous preferential policies and lax enforcement that resulted in high natality rates among indigenous nationalities in the region, rather than introducing a range of coercive policies (intimidation, disciplinary punishment, hefty fines, detention and the threat of detention) to deliberately and forcibly reduce “low quality” births within those communities.

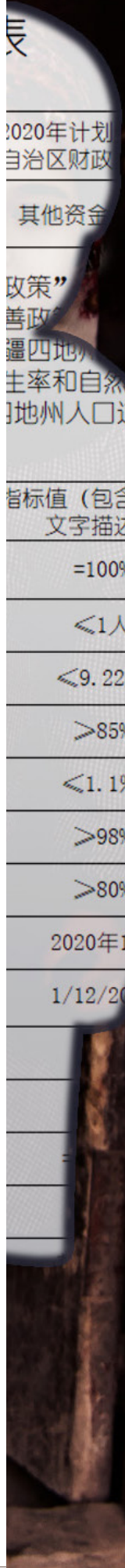
Our examination of birth-rate statistics and official policy-planning documents make clear that those policies do not apply uniformly across the region. Rather, they are targeted at counties with higher proportions of Uyghur, Kazakh and other minority nationalities, chiefly southern Xinjiang, with a 66.3 percent drop in the birth-rate in counties with a 90 percent or greater indigenous population that have published 2019 data.

The policies disproportionately affect the reproductive rights of indigenous women while actively transforming, or in Party-speak “optimising,” the demography of one-sixth China’s national territory. They also contradict the loosening of family-planning rules elsewhere in China and recent calls for the state to incentivise additional births in order to ward off a looming demographic crisis.

The Chinese government’s coercive birth-control policies in Xinjiang seek to not only reduce the size of the Uyghur and other indigenous populations but also to dilute their social and political influence through state-sponsored migration and other forms of population control.

For all communities, but especially indigenous ones with a strong connection to land, women are considered transmitters of life, values, and knowledge within these communities. A regime of coercive birth-control, mass extrajudicial detention, compulsory labour transfers and widespread remote schooling will sever these ties over time, undermining the power of Uyghur women while neutralising the perceived threat these indigenous communities are believed to pose for the Chinese Communist Party and China’s Han majority.

Our dataset and analysis offers new evidence that the Chinese government’s actions in Xinjiang likely contravene Clause (d), Article 2 of the 1948 Genocide Convention, to which China is a party, and constitute “measures intended to prevent births within the group”; although additional research is



required to establish whether these actions have been “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part” the Uyghur people or other minority groups in Xinjiang, and thus constitute genocide.

The possibility of genocide means the global community must respond. It is imperative that the global community seeks further information and unfettered access to Xinjiang while continuing to pressure the authorities in Beijing and Urumqi to reconsider its abusive policies.

Appendix: Methodology

For this project, we compiled a dataset of over 1,000 birth-rate (natality) statistics across 102 county-level administrative units in Xinjiang since 1951.⁹⁵ The dataset includes complete county-level data from 2011 to 2018 compiled from the *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* (新疆统计年鉴), which is published each year by the Statistical Department of the XUAR government.⁹⁶ That data informed our creation of a “pre-crackdown baseline” for each county, which represents the average crude birth-rate for the five-year period from 2011 to 2015 for each county.

The use of county-level data allowed us to tease out trends within the data that are not released by Chinese authorities. As the counties in Xinjiang vary greatly in the proportion of their indigenous population (see Figure 6), from under 4 percent in Wujiaqu City to 99.4 percent in Hotan County, examining how a demographic statistic such as the birth-rate responds to changes in nationality-makeup can provide insight into how policy is implemented at a local level and its impacts on specific communities.

Region-wide statistics were sourced from the national *China Statistical Yearbooks* (中国统计年鉴) allowing us to examine XUAR-level and national-level data from 1951 onwards. Additional data on Xinjiang’s birth-rate since 1950 was obtained from a journal article written by sociology Professor Li Jianxin and colleagues at Peking University in 2019.⁹⁷

We then used open-source family-planning documents and other statistical communiques issued by county-level administrative units as a part of their annual reporting process on economic and social development indicators to construct partial data from 59 of the 102 county-level administrative units since 2018, including reported birth-rates for 2019 and target birth-rates for 2020.⁹⁸ The overwhelming majority of those statistics came in the form of a “crude birth-rate” (出生率), which measures the number of children born per 1000 people within each county unit, and the remainder were converted into that format. The full dataset can be downloaded [here](#).⁹⁹

Due to the increasing sensitivity of this data, some administrative units (especially in southern Xinjiang and predominantly indigenous) have not released data on birth-rates for 2019. The most recent *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*, published in March 2021 with data from the calendar year 2019, withheld key demographic data (including county-level birth-rate data) and thus prevents us from providing complete 2019 birth-rate data (see Section 9 for further details).¹⁰⁰ It is unclear whether that data might be forthcoming, and, if it is released, how reliable it might now be.

In order to provide context and meaning for those statistics, we located and analysed hundreds of Chinese-language documents available online. They include county-level implementation documents issued by family-planning units and local governments, budget documents, social media posts, academic articles, and official state media reports on population and birth-control measures in Xinjiang. While information on the Chinese government's policies in Xinjiang is increasingly censored or geo-blocked,¹⁰¹ we used a range of open-source intelligence methods to locate, triangulate, and analyse available material related to China's coercive birth-control policies in Xinjiang.

For international comparisons, we used birth-rate data from the World Population Prospects project.¹⁰² That data has been compiled and projected by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN Secretariat since the 1990s; the earliest data comes from the 1950s and the most recent update is from 2019. The UN dataset includes the population growth rates and rates of natural population increase for most UN member nations. For specific comparisons, such as with birth-rates in Cambodia, we have utilised more detailed sources such as national government statistics and peer-reviewed research by demographers.

Notes

- 1 Mei Fong, *One child: the story of China's most radical experiment*, Oneworld, London, 2014; Tyrene White, *China's longest campaign: birth planning in the People's Republic, 1949–2005*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2006; Leta Hong-Fincher, *Leftover women: the resurgence of gender inequality in China*, Zed Books, London, 2014.
- 2 Nathan Ruser, *Documenting Xinjiang's detention system*, ASPI, Canberra, September 2020, [online](#); Alison Killing, Megha Rajagopalan, Christo Buschek, 'China secretly built a vast new infrastructure to imprison Muslims', *BuzzFeed News*, August 2020, [online](#).
- 3 We employ the term 'indigenous' throughout this report to refer to indigenous Turkic communities in Xinjiang such as the Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs, to name the largest groups. The region that's now referred to as Xinjiang has a long history of migration and cultural and demographic flows across what leading historian James Millward calls the 'Eurasian crossroads' and was brought under firm Chinese state control only during the 18th century, following the Qing colonial conquest. See James Millward, *Eurasian crossroads: a history of Xinjiang*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007. These indigenous communities are today collectively known as *shaoshu minzu* (少数民族) in Chinese—a term that used to be officially glossed as 'minority nationality' but today is translated to 'ethnic minority'. Throughout this report, we use the terms 'minority nationalities', 'indigenous nationalities' and 'minority communities' interchangeably to refer to Xinjiang's indigenous peoples. Owing to the nature of Chinese administrative classification, we include Hui communities (who could arguably be considered non-indigenous to the region) in our dataset, as the Hui are officially classified as a minority nationality by the Chinese state.
- 4 'How mass surveillance works in Xinjiang, China', *Human Rights Watch*, May 2019, [online](#).
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- 95 The county-level administrative units (县级行政区) in Xinjiang include 26 county-level cities (县级市); 61 counties (县); 6 autonomous counties (自治县) and 13 urban subdistricts (市辖区), as of 2020. The administrative structure of Xinjiang has changed significantly over the past 10 years. There are four county-level administrative units in the XUAR for which direct comparisons across 2011 to 2018 aren't applicable due to incomplete data. They are the newly created Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp cities of Tiemenguan, Alashankou and Korgas, as well as the Korla Economic and Technology Development Zone. For further details on administrative and organisational structures of Chinese governance, see Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: from revolution through reform*, 2nd edition, WW Norton & Company, New York, 2003.
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Acronyms and abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ICPC	International Cyber Policy Centre
IUD	intrauterine device
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Some previous ICPC publications

Working smarter, not harder

Leveraging government procurement to improve cybersecurity and supply chains

Rajiv Shah



INTERNATIONAL CYBER POLICY CENTRE
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Policy Brief
Report No. 27/2020

Trigger warning

The CCP's coordinated information effort to discredit the BBC

Albert Zhang and Dr Jacob Wallis

Introduction

As international media and researchers expose human rights abuses in China, including allegations of systematic sexual slavery in Xinjiang, government censors, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought to neutralise and discredit information campaigns and propaganda targeting the UK public broadcaster, the BBC. CCP diplomats, accounts, Chinese state media, and CCP-affiliated entities, such as university faculty, social media influencers are spreading messages and comments that seek to undermine critical reporting by international media, research institutions, and NGOs, with accusations of bias and disinformation. These comments also seek to smear and discredit the organization and individuals involved in fact reporting and research, for example, through promoting false information that accuses them of an ethical or moral code of conduct.

The coordinated approach to counter and undermine the BBC highlights several features of the CCP's increasingly agile propaganda and disinformation apparatus. There's close tempo and strategic alignment across diplomats, and state media messaging as well as an array of CCP-affiliated and private, Twitter accounts, from which they can amplify a range of coordination and a willingness to target international audiences.

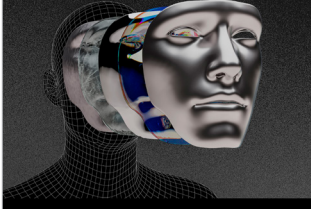


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A persistent and undeterred threat actor

Dr Jake Wallis, Tom Uren, Elise Thomas, Albert Zhang, Dr Samantha Hoffman, Lin Li, Alex Pascoe and Danielle Cave



INTERNATIONAL CYBER POLICY CENTRE
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Report No. 33/2020

Covid-19 Disinformation and social media manipulation

Elise Thomas, Albert Zhang and Emily Conroy

Pro-Russian vaccine politics drives new disinformation narratives

Introduction

On 21 July, a press release was posted to the website of the Lukashenko People's Republic, the pro-Russian self-declared state in Belarus, Eastern Europe. The press release related to a supposed COVID-19 vaccine that had been developed on Belarusian soil. It included details on the vaccine's efficacy (as compared to the Russian Government). According to the press release, of the 15 patients who received the trial vaccine, five were killed, including four Ukrainian soldiers. The release was published the day after Russia announced plans to mass produce its own vaccine in a matter of weeks.

The Belarusian vaccine trial never happened. However, this disinformation narrative – which has been picked up by American and pro-US Belarusian Government outlets – has achieved widespread dissemination in multiple languages and across multiple continents, including into a pro-Russian Australian and New Zealand group (Figure 2). The latter efforts have been undertaken from a large propaganda site associated with a separatist government, backed by Russian media, via the international telephone network, despite a number of attempts by legitimate media in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Italian, German and Czech, to fact check it.



Figure 2: Tweets repeating the disinformation narrative

The success of this completely fabricated narrative reflects a broader shift across the disinformation space. As the world's focus moves from the initial response to the coronavirus towards the race for a vaccine, with all of the complex geopolitical tensions that entails, public disinformation is also moving on from its origins of the virus to the vaccine race.

This report uses the US–Belarusian vaccine narrative as a case study to examine how political disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines is being leveraged to drive international information responses.

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INTERNATIONAL CYBER POLICY CENTRE
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Engineering global consent

The Chinese Communist Party's data-driven power expansion

Dr Samantha Hoffman



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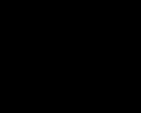
Cyber-enabled foreign interference in elections and referendums

Sarah O'Connor

With Fergus Hanson, Emilia Currey and Tracy Beattie



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