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# Chinese Public's Responses to Three-Child Policy on Social Media

## Expectations Don't Match Reality

By Jiayu Fang

After the 30-year-long one-child policy and the 6-year-long two-child policy, China announced on May 2021, that Chinese couples are recommended to have three children. To understand the Chinese public's responses to the new family planning policy, this research analyzed data from reposts and comments on thirty-five relevant policy posts published by verified news media accounts on social media platform Sina Weibo between May 31, 2021, and June 30, 2021, the first month after the new policy was announced and on which the public's attention was most focused. The results showed that Sina Weibo users found the policy disrespectful and difficult to fulfill in multiple realms. First, many complained that the new policy disregarded the one-child policy's influence while promoting a similarly fixed reproduction goal. They believed that the three-child policy mainly came from the nation's need for a larger labor force. Meanwhile, other users justified compliance of the policy based on patriotism. Second, without more governmental support, raising three children would be hard financially for many Sina Weibo users, as high expenses in housing, education, healthcare, and elderly

care overwhelmed many who had to work hard despite stressful work conditions. An underlying suspicion was that the three-child policy would widen the wealth gap. Third, women suffered from workplace discrimination and low status in family life, and lots of users argued that the new policy would make it worse. The overall responses on Sina Weibo reposts and comments were negative, accompanied by sarcastic emoticons, homophones, and acronyms. As a result, the three-child policy would likely have a limited, if any, impact on China's demographic patterns without strong policy support addressing social issues in other realms.

## Introduction

On May 31, 2021, China announced that couples are permitted and recommended to have three children, ending the previous 6-year-long two-child policy. Before that, the famous one-child policy lasted a much longer time – three decades. The apparent shift in pacing and direction of China's family planning policies draws the attention of the country's media and public alike.

China first started to have its eyes on family planning policies in 1962 when the number of newborns dramatically increased right after a tragic famine. The birth quota became stricter in the 1970s. In 1980, China launched its famous one-child policy that lasted for 35 years. This policy restricted families to only having one child, which “finds no equal in the world.”<sup>1</sup> China's leadership at that time was more than eager to use population control to increase the country's GDP per capita and prove itself after the disastrous Cultural Revolution and the death of Chairman Mao Zedong. Interestingly, the one-child policy was never an official order or an explicit law but announced in an Open Letter.<sup>2</sup> The Open Letter recognized families' potential sacrifices in following the one-child policy and addressed potential side-effects of the policy, such as population aging, lack of support for the elderly, imbalanced sex ratios, and labor shortages. It also promised to change the family planning policy in 25 to 30 years. Notably, variations and exemptions in rules existed for people of an ethnic minority or living in specific regions. Starting in the mid-1980s, couples living in rural areas whose first child was a daughter or with both partners being the only children could have a second child.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Wang Feng, Yong Cai, and Baochang Gu, “Population, Policy, and Politics: How Will History Judge China's One-Child Policy,” *Population and Development Review* 38 (2012): 115.

2 “An Open Letter to All Communist Party Members and Communist Youth League Members on Controlling Our Country's Population Growth.”

3 Fei Wang, Liqiu Zhao, and Zhong Zhao, “China's Family Planning Policies and Their Labor Market Consequences,” *Journal of Population Economics* 30, no. 1 (2017): 31–68.

To ensure the effectiveness of the one-child policy, China put in place benefits for families following the quota and penalties for those who did not. Local authorities utilized subsidies and fines in variation to enforce the one-child policy, generally using more disincentives than incentives.<sup>4</sup> The disincentives tended to be more extreme than fines. Grass-roots birth planning workers were assigned to track every woman of child-bearing age and women who got pregnant without permission would be routinely harassed to conduct an abortion.<sup>5</sup> Contraception, IUDs, or even sterilization were deemed common practice, and the government may deny over-quota babies household registration and subsequently ration coupons, schooling, and other basic benefits.<sup>6</sup>

In October 2015, 35 years after the Open Letter was published, the Chinese government launched a nationwide two-child policy in response to the decline in the Chinese labor force. The government expected the two-child policy to improve the nation's economic gains by creating a bigger share of working-age people.<sup>7</sup> However, the birth rate in the past several years did not meet that expectation well. On May 31, 2021, the three-child policy came.

According to the policy plan published by the State Council of the People's Republic of China, the three-child policy would improve the population structure, maintain the country's advantage in human resource endowment, and slow down the downward trend of fertility rate in the nation.<sup>8</sup> To implement the three-child policy, the state decided to amend the "Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China" by removing penalties associated with old birth quota restrictions and providing additional resources for pregnant women, children, and the elderly.<sup>9</sup> There would be standardized human-assisted reproductive technology as well as comprehensive prevention and treatment of birth defects.<sup>10</sup> Qualified employers would receive support to provide childcare services for workers, and the maternity leave and insurance system would

4 Short and Zhai, "Looking Locally," 373–87.

5 Martin K. Whyte, Wang Feng, and Yong Cai, "Challenging Myths About China's One-Child Policy," *The China Journal* 74, no. 1 (2015): 144–59.

6 Whyte, Feng, and Cai, "Challenging Myths," 144–59.

7 Yanyan Li, "浅析当前社会形势下'二胎政策'遇冷 (Brief Analysis of the Two-Child Policy's Unpopularity in the Current Social Situation)," *现代营销 (Modern Marketing)* 03 (2020): 228.

8 "中共中央 国务院关于优化生育政策促进人口长期均衡发展的决定 (Decision of the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Optimizing Fertility Policy and Promoting the Long-term Balanced Development of the Population)," The State Council of The People's Republic of China, Xinhuanet, accessed November 4, 2021, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/20/content\\_5626190.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/20/content_5626190.htm).

9 Xinhuanet, "中共中央."

10 Xinhuanet, "中共中央."

be better developed.<sup>11</sup> The state also planned to construct more nursery facilities and support kindergartens to recruit children between the ages of two and three.<sup>12</sup> New parents would receive a special additional deduction for personal income tax to cover the cost of care for infants and children.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, couples with more minor children might have an advantage in receiving public rental housing.<sup>14</sup> In response to the commonplace “4-2-1” structure (four grandparents, two parents, and one child) that had placed huge elderly care responsibilities on the child when they grew up, the State Council announced the new slogan of “one elderly, one child” and aimed to enhance the community’s function of not only raising children but also providing for the aged.<sup>15</sup>

Overall, the new three-child policy represents a new blueprint that further encourages and incentivizes people to give more births. The question is how are people in China responding to this new policy? This research attempts to answer this question by studying the Chinese public’s reactions to relevant media posts on Sina Weibo, considering that social media have become important news outlets and platforms of expression for most Chinese people, and Sina Weibo has been one of the biggest social media platforms in China.

This research has value in several aspects. For one, it looks into the current discourse of the Chinese public on family planning, which helps understand the potential effects of the three-child policy and predicts outcomes of the policy implementation. If Chinese people on social media expressed passion and readiness for raising three children, the policy would probably be a success. Secondly, when talking about family planning, people usually bring up other aspects of their lives as well, like culture and finance. By analyzing these aspects of Chinese people’s responses to the three-child policy, this research offers a holistic view of day-to-day life in China. Thirdly, this research provided a lens into the current relationship between everyday netizens, social media, and the government of China since its data came from social media. Overall, this research provides a unique perspective on China’s current family planning policy and its media dynamics.

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11 Xinhuanet, “中共中央.”

12 Xinhuanet, “中共中央.”

13 Xinhuanet, “中共中央.”

14 Xinhuanet, “中共中央.”

15 Ann Buchanan and Anna Rotkirch, ed., *Fertility Rates and Population Decline: No Time for Children?* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Xinhuanet, “中共中央.”

## Literature Review

### *Raising More Than One Child in China*

In 2016, Liu et al. looked at top news websites in China for responses to the ending of the one-child policy and found cost, generation, and time as the most popular concepts.<sup>16</sup> First, raising a second child involved high expenses, exacerbated by the difficulty in earning money for many.<sup>17</sup> Second, netizens identified with the generations they were born in to emphasize their experience with the one-child policy, implying that this family planning regulation largely shaped their life.<sup>18</sup> Third, online responses discussed reproductive timing and the end of the one-child policy, demonstrating enthusiasm for the upcoming two-child policy.<sup>19</sup>

Surprisingly, the number of newborns did not increase significantly in the first year after the government announced the two-child policy.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, 2018 and 2019 witnessed the fertility rate declining.<sup>21</sup> Many studies discussed the reasons behind this phenomenon. Some scholars argued that couples of reproductive age had gotten used to smaller families because of the one-child policy.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Li believed that fewer families held a strong son preference which would push them to bear more children just to get a son, while Mu and Yuan believed that women were still more likely to have a second child if the first child was a girl.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the skyrocketing living costs and fierce competition in the job market scared Chinese people away from raising more children, as they could not guarantee a good future for their kids with the high costs of time,

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16 Fuqin Liu et al., “Online Responses to the Ending of the One-Child Policy in China: Implications for Preconception Care,” *Upsala Journal of Medical Sciences* 121, no. 4 (2016): 227–234.

17 Liu et al., “Online Responses,” 227–234.

18 Liu et al., “Online Responses,” 227–234.

19 Liu et al., “Online Responses,” 227–234.

20 Li, “浅析,” 228.

21 Yingchun Ji et al., “Young Women’s Fertility Intentions and the Emerging Bilateral Family System under China’s Two-Child Family Planning Policy,” *China Review* 20, no. 2 (2020): 113–42.

22 Xiao-tian Feng, “为什么不生二孩: 对城市一孩育龄人群的调查与分析 (Why Not Have a Second Child: A Survey and Analysis of Urban One-Child Population at Childbearing Age),” *Hebei Academic Journal* 38, no. 6 (2018): 180–7; Li, “浅析,” 228.

23 Li, “浅析,” 228; Yingtan Mu and Xin Yuan, “Having the Second Child: Family Resources, Cultural Values or Child Gender?” *Population Research* 2018, no. 01 (2018): 90–103.

childcare, and education.<sup>24</sup> In 2016, two adults raising two children would spend 69.64% – 75% more than two adults with one child.<sup>25</sup> In fact, a study found the probability of having a second child went down as household income increased when the income was less than 8,000 yuan per month, but if the household income was more than 8,000 yuan per month, the family was more likely to have a second child as the income went up.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, another study found those with college degrees or above reported more difficulties in raising young children, while farmers reported fewer difficulties.<sup>27</sup> Since people who received higher education are often considered to have more income, the findings from these two studies seem hard to reconcile.

Additionally, women of reproductive age often find themselves struggling to balance work and family life. Apart from financial factors, a woman was less likely to have a second child as her education level went up.<sup>28</sup> Among women of reproductive age, those under thirty-four years old would be more concerned about their family's financial situation compared to those between thirty-five and forty-nine when thinking about raising a second child.<sup>29</sup> Such differences may be because employers were not always friendly to women who planned to have two children, going as far as to replace them during their maternity leave.<sup>30</sup> Companies would hire men, in general, to avoid financially supporting and paying reproductive insurance for their female workers as the law required.<sup>31</sup> Without governmental support and wealth, many women who keep their jobs relied heavily on childcare support from their parents and parents-in-law.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, relying on parents for childcare can

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24 Feng, “为什么,” 180–7; Hong Liang, “From Fertility Desire To Fertility Behavior: An Analysis of the Determinants of the Second Child-Bearing Decision-Making Under the Background of Nationwide Two-Children Policy,” *South China Population* 02, no. 3 (2018): 1–14; Li, “浅析,” 228; Liangyu Kang et al., “The Prevalence of Barriers to Rearing Children Aged 0-3 Years Following China's New Three-Child Policy: A National Cross-Sectional Study,” *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (2022): 489; Ji et al., “Young Women's Fertility Intentions,” 113–42; Mu and Yuan, “Having the Second Child,” 90–103.

25 Na Liu, Xiaoying Li, and Lu Yan, “The Child Costs in Chinese Family: A Welfare Estimate Using Equivalence Scale,” *Population & Economics* 2021, no. 01 (2021): 50–67.

26 Wang, Zhao, and Zhao, “China's Family Planning Policies,” 31–68.

27 Kang et al., “The Prevalence,” 489.

28 Wang, Zhao, and Zhao, “China's Family Planning Policies,” 31–68.

29 Liang, “From Fertility Desire,” 1–14.

30 Li, “浅析,” 228; Kang et al., “The Prevalence,” 489.

31 Li, “浅析,” 228.

32 The Chinese government had not established a new comprehensive system after the danwei (单位) system collapsed along with the privatization of the economy. Danwei was a unique type of community in the social development of China. Its institutional characteristics included strong resource allocation, social management, and welfare support. See Ji et al., “Young Women's Fertility Intentions,” 113–42.

stimulate intergenerational conflicts between family members, examples including when elders who also need care have to look after a child or when grandparents and parents disagree over child rearing.<sup>33</sup>

*People, Social Media, and the Government of China*

Notably, most existing studies on China's family planning policies did not focus on social media responses. They looked at public demographic data, conducted surveys, used focus groups, or proposed theories.<sup>34</sup> Analyzing responses on news websites is similar to social media to some extent, but in recent years, more and more Chinese people consider social media as their go-to news site instead.<sup>35</sup> Social media has also become a crucial platform of expression for Chinese citizens. Therefore, studying family policies through social media is meaningful.

While social media creates new possibilities for expression, the complicated relationship between social media and the government prevents people from absolute freedom of speech in China. The Chinese government supervises and runs accounts on major media platforms in the country. Some state-run media accounts would engage in hot social topics and use accessible language to attract citizens and spread the government's ideology.<sup>36</sup> In the last two decades, as microblogging (posting online with a small amount of content) became popular, the government has been increasingly monitoring public opinion and maintaining its control, especially for higher-level systemic issues.<sup>37</sup> For instance, the state demanded Tianya, one of the most popular online forums in the country at that time, to censor certain messages during the 2008 Sanlu Milk Scandal, a significant food safety incident involving political corruption in China.<sup>38</sup> The government usually frames this kind of

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33 Ji et al., "Young Women's Fertility Intentions," 113–42.

34 Wang, Zhao, and Zhao, "China's Family Planning Policies," 31–68; Mu and Yuan, "Having the Second Child," 90–103; Liu, Li, and Yan, "The Child Costs," 50–67; Feng, "为什么," 180–7; Liang, "From Fertility Desire," 1–14; Kang et al., "The Prevalence," 489; Ji et al., "Young Women's Fertility Intentions," 113–42; Li, "浅析," 228.

35 Liu et al., "Online Responses," 227–234.

36 Lan Meng, "官方微博舆论引导方式探究——以@共青团中央为例(Research on the Guidance Method of Official Weibo Public Opinion——Take @CommunistYouthLeagueCentralCommittee as an example)," *Today's Mass Media* 2016, no. 10 (2016): 46–7.

37 Jonathan Sullivan, "China's Weibo: Is Faster Different?" *New Media & Society* 16, no. 1 (2014): 24–37.

38 Ya-Wen Lei and Daniel Xiaodan Zhou, "Contesting Legality in Authoritarian Contexts: Food Safety, Rule of Law and China's Networked Public Sphere," *Law & Society Rev.* 49, no. 3 (2015): 557–93.



monitoring and cleansing of dissent and criticism as “web civilizing” and promoting “positive energy only.”<sup>39</sup>

Adapting to this dynamic, political expression in China becomes a compromise between individuals' ideas and what the state allows.<sup>40</sup> Social media users in China conduct self-censorship and are generally reluctant to speak up on sensitive political issues.<sup>41</sup> However, the Chinese public does not just passively receive information and viewpoints.<sup>42</sup> Overall, they take a freer and more active participation role on microblogs compared to on traditional media platforms.<sup>43</sup> Many Chinese netizens have publicized their dissatisfaction with the negative consequences of policies in microblogs, which have forced the central government to intervene in lower-level malfeasance from time to time. Some netizens also use satire, humor, and implicit language to express their discontent on higher-level systemic issues without facing harsh repression.<sup>44</sup>

Sina Weibo, the social media platform from which this study gathered data, has its unique dynamics. In December 2021, Sina Weibo had 573 million active users.<sup>45</sup> Such a grand user population means all sorts of ideologies exist on this platform regardless of state and platform censorship.<sup>46</sup> Sina Weibo users increasingly participate in discussions on trendy social issues on the platform, hoping to engage in public affairs and push social issues in directions that make sense to them.<sup>47</sup> Commenting on trendy social issues is also a means for

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39 Guobing Yang and Wei Wang, eds., *Engaging Social Media in China: Platforms, Publics, and Production* (Michigan State University Press, 2021).

40 Ashley Esarey and Qiang Xiao, “Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere: Below the Radar,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 5 (2008): 752–72.

41 Maria Repnikova, *Media Politics in China: Improvising Power under Authoritarianism* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

42 Lei and Zhou, “Contesting Legality,” 557–93.

43 Ran Wei, “Texting, Tweeting, and Talking: Effects of Smartphone Use on Engagement in Civic Discourse in China,” *Mobile Media & Communication* 2, no. 1 (2014): 3–19.

44 Esarey and Xiao, “Political Expression,” 752–72; Repnikova, *Media Politics*.

45 “微博发布2021年第四季度及全年财报 (Weibo Announced 2021's Fourth Quarter and Full Year Financial Report),” Sina Finance, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://finance.sina.com.cn/stock/usstock/c/2022-03-03/doc-imcwiwss3985845.shtml>.

46 Yinxian Zhang, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen, “Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism,” *The China Quarterly* 235, (2018): 758–83.

47 Ming Bai, “From Analysis of Micro Blog comments to Control of Micro Blog Public Opinion – Taking the Hot Topic ‘Wuhan Commerce Bureau Admits Selling Donated Vegetables at Low Prices’ as an Example,” *Journal of Wuhan Engineering Institute* 32, no. 4 (2020): 61–65; Jiali Yuan, “表达与窥视: 微博评论心理动因的分析与思考 (Expression and Peeping: Analysis and Reflection on the Psychological Motives of Weibo Comments),” *今传媒 (Media Today)* 2 (2021): 34–7.

people to express their emotions, especially extreme emotions like anger, towards current social problems.<sup>48</sup> Many users also utilize emoticons to add expression and convey meanings that text cannot fully present.<sup>49</sup>

For political discussions in particular, a study found that anti-regime views were more popular than nationalistic ones on Sina Weibo, while nationalists were not always illiberal or supporting the government's actions.<sup>50</sup> The authors explained that restraints on certain civil rights and the lack of transparency in governance prevented Chinese citizens from fully embracing their nationhood, as they felt more like “subjects” than citizens who own their country (p. 778). Some citizens also differentiated between loving the country and loving the regime and therefore justified their anti-regime views by arguing that what they pursued would be good for the country.

Most news outlets have Sina Weibo accounts to publish the latest information and interact with the audience. However, sometimes news media accounts use the “selective comments” function on Sina Weibo to hide the public's comments on politically sensitive issues. This function limits users from expressing their views freely and discourages them from engaging with news media accounts.<sup>51</sup>

## Methods

This research gathered data from reposts and comments on posts published by verified news media accounts on Sina Weibo within the first month after the three-child policy was announced. The public was more focused on the policy during the first month than other time periods – in fact, news reports on the policy dramatically decreased after the fourth day of the month (see Appendix A). Sina Weibo's Advanced Search function located posts from verified news media accounts between (local time) 00:00 May 31, 2021, and (local time) 23:59 June 30, 2021, containing the keywords “three-child policy (sān hái shēng yù zhèng cè/三孩生育政策, or sān tāi shēng yù zhèng cè/三胎生育政策),” as well as “maternity optimization policy (yōu huà shēng yù zhèng cè/优化生育政策),” the official name of the three-child policy, on the social media platform. All reposts and

48 Rui Fan et al., “Anger Is More Influential than Joy: Sentiment Correlation in Weibo,” *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 10 (2014): e110184; Yuan, “表达,” 34-7.

49 Daantje Derks, Agneta H. Fischer, and Arjan E. R. Bos, “The Role of Emotion in Computer-Mediated Communication: A Review.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 24, no. 3 (2008): 766–85.

50 Yinxian Zhang, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen, “Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism,” *The China Quarterly* 235 (2018): 758–83.

51 Xiaolan Lu and Jirui Li, “基于主成分分析和聚类分析的新闻媒体微博影响力研究 (Research on the Influence of Microblog of News Media Based on Principal Component Analysis and Cluster Analysis),” *Journal of Wuhan Business University* 35, no.06 (2021): 86–92.

comments that received “likes” and/or responses from other users under these news media posts were collected into an Excel sheet. This research then used Python coding to find words that were most frequently mentioned in the reposts and comments. Further coding of the reposts and comments containing the top twenty-four most frequently used words was done to develop a more holistic understanding of their context and meaning.

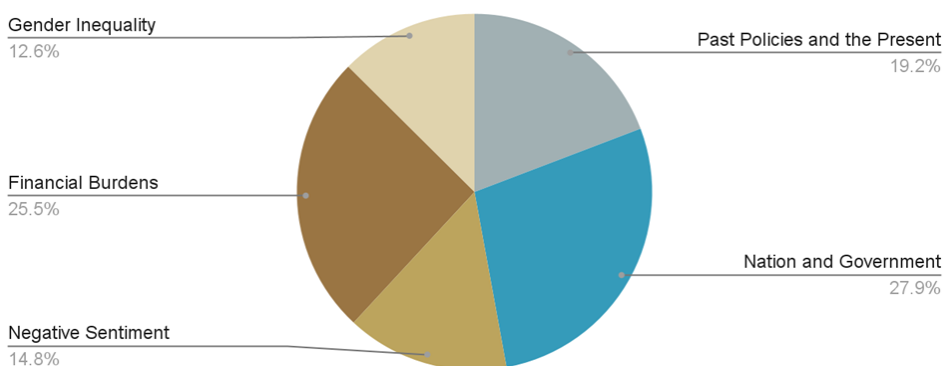
## Findings

Thirty-five news media posts between May 31 and June 30, 2021, contained the keywords “three-child policy” or “maternity optimization policy” on Sina Weibo. Specifically, the date of publication ranged from May 31 to June 17, 2021, with fourteen posts on the first day and ten on the second day of the policy launch. Twelve of these posts used “sān hái shēng yù zhèng cè,” eight used “sān tāi shēng yù zhèng cè,” and the other fifteen used “yōu huà shēng yù zhèng cè.” Among them, seven posts show the number of comments but not their content, stating “Sorry, this content is temporarily unavailable” on the web page and “the blogger has turned on comment selection” on the Sina Weibo app. Two other posts displayed comments but noted on the app that “Inappropriate comments have been filtered, some comments are not displayed for the time being.”

Sina Weibo users left 1,009 reposts and comments in total that received “likes” and/or responses from other users. The number of comments was overwhelmingly greater than the number of reposts, with 66 reposts and 943 comments, an approximate ratio of 1:14. Twenty-four words appeared in the reposts and comments nineteen times or more. Twenty of those words formed five themes surrounding the Weibo discussion of the three-child policy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

### Percentages of Each Sub-Theme



## Political Expectations

### *Past Policies and the Present*

Many Sina Weibo users felt that the new three-child policy was a complete disregard for the historical one-child policy. To start with, the government's encouragement for more kids contradicted most of the Sina Weibo users' long-held beliefs on both the benefits of having only one child in each family and the terrible consequences of overpopulation, confirming previous findings.<sup>52</sup> The beliefs primarily came from what the government stated in news reports, on hospital bulletin boards, and across village walls. While not often emphasized, the subjective belief of "one child is good enough" was the main reason why many did not want a second child.<sup>53</sup> "Do they [the Chinese government] think they are raising pigs?" questioned one Sina Weibo user, implying that the U-turn in family planning policies, regardless of citizens' wills, was inhumane and disrespectful. Those born in the 1980s and 1990s felt especially strongly against the change. Many had previously received their "Certificate of Honor for One-Child Couples" but now face the pressure to have more children in their thirties and forties. They felt that all the family planning policies were targeting them, and as a result requested to have the fines they paid for breaking the one-child-only rule back. Many users also pointed out that the government did not follow through with its promises during the one-child policy era. One broken promise was the slogan "It's good to only give birth to one child, the state will take care of you when you get old." Traditional Chinese culture considers children to be responsible for taking care of their parents at old age in return for their parents' sacrifices in raising them, and more children mean more care.<sup>54</sup> The government's slogan of elderly care suggested that parents would have enough governmental support even with only one child, but in reality, Sina Weibo users did not sense that support. Further, the Chinese government appeared to have moved on from the one-child policy without acknowledging the harm and trauma it created. During the one-child policy era, birth planning workers used extreme birth control measures like forced abortion and forced ligation on pregnant women, which was no fond memory for Sina Weibo users.<sup>55</sup> One user described:

During the one-child policy period, as soon as they heard that you are pregnant again [with a second child], the village head would take the lead in tying [the woman] up for forced abortion, now [I] really

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52 Feng, "为什么," 180–7; Li, "浅析," 228.

53 Feng, "为什么," 180–7.

54 Ji et al., "Young Women's Fertility Intentions," 113–42.

55 Whyte, Feng, and Cai, "Challenging Myths," 144–59.

dare not to give birth.

At the same time, Sina Weibo users found the logic behind all family planning policies in China similar, no matter how many children a specific policy allows. In their eyes, the government has always been trying to set a fixed reproduction goal for citizens to meet instead of allowing reproductive freedom. Specifically, one comment criticized China's consistent control of reproduction as dehumanizing women:

What on earth does China treat women as? It was you [the Chinese government] that asked [women] to give birth to [only] one child, it is now also you that ask [women] to give birth to more children, at least show respect, okay? Women are not machines.

Based on the similarity in policy goals, some Sina Weibo users also believed that the implementation of the new policy would be as forceful as the one-child policy used to be. Notably, the Chinese government framed the one-child policy as an “encouragement” instead of mandatory in the Open Letter in 1980, in contrast to the reality. This past hypocrisy convinced some Sina Weibo users that the new three-child policy would not be as open as it seemed. A Sina Weibo user predicted:

[I] don't know if this will be the case one day in the future, families with only one child need to pay fines like our families did for having more children than allowed in our childhood, having two children will be rewarded, having three children will be double rewarded.

### *Nation and Government*

Not enthusiastic about the new policy, Sina Weibo users saw the new policy as coming from political needs rather than from people's will. They observed that the Chinese government seemingly rushed to launch the three-child policy, considering that the two-child policy started only six years ago. They also suspected the latest census data affected this policy decision. Thus, they interpreted the three-child policy as a government- and expert-proposed solution to demographic problems that the one-child policy caused and the two-child policy failed to solve, like the large aging population. Wordings like “human resources” in the policy plan made Sina Weibo users feel like they were solely production and reproduction tools instead of human beings. This sentiment echoed previous scholars' findings that lacking certain human rights (in this case, reproductive freedom) made Chinese citizens feel like “subjects” rather than owners of their country. Many Sina Weibo users also implied that the government simply wanted to continuously exploit ordinary Chinese people like

themselves through the three-child policy. The phrase “Chinese chives” (jiǔ cài/韭菜) appeared in their arguments repeatedly. Chinese chives are easy to grow and indiscriminate to most soil types, and cutting their stalks off encourages them to grow new shoots. Chinese netizens refer to themselves as Chinese chives, feeling that they survive poor living conditions, serve as resources for the government, and regenerate constantly, just like the plant. In their words, the government did not have enough “Chinese chives” to “cut,” so it launched the three-child policy to get more.

At the same time, Sina Weibo users discerned a need to respond to the nation’s “call.” They linked that need to patriotism and loyalty to the nation. One example signaling the emphasis on patriotism and loyalty is the increased usage of the phrase “foreign forces (境外势力)”. “Foreign forces” originally referred to organizations that are hostile and threatening to the Chinese government.<sup>56</sup> However, in recent years, the phrase has become a common attack against people opposing the government’s actions in China’s online world. “Can’t believe you don’t comply with national policies, you must be foreign forces,” a user replied to another comment “[The three-child policy] is not forcing you to reproduce.” Here, the reply used “foreign forces” sarcastically, implying that people would face suspicion of disloyalty if they did not passionately comply with the three-child policy regardless of their will. Even those who personally did not want three children were thinking of ways to make the three-child policy work—good or bad. Experts who came up with this policy and the CCP members should do it first, users said, pushing that responsibility to others who they deemed closer to the government.

Hoping to struggle less while complying with the new policy, many Sina Weibo users demanded the nation offer more policy support to make having three kids feasible for the general public. Not seeing much governmental support addressing problematic issues, users implied that it did not make sense for the country to launch the three-child policy at the moment. “The country urges me to give birth but the society does not let me,” wrote a comment summarizing the conflict between the country’s expectations and the society’s reality. Users looked at countries that offered a high level of welfare and found China still has a long way to go. “[Singapore] at least offers money, China straight up makes empty promises,” said a comment under a news media post. The post tried to normalize China’s three-child policy by showing a video of Singapore’s former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew asking female PhDs to have kids. “The costs of childbirth (and raising) are our own, the demographic dividend is the country’s,” said another Sina Weibo user. Notably, the State Council had promised policy support in some of the areas in its policy plan.<sup>57</sup> Some users might not have learned that

56 “境外势力 (Foreign forces),” China Digital Space, accessed May 7, 2022, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/space/%E5%A2%83%E5%A4%96%E5%8A%BF%E5%8A%9B>.

57 Xinhuanet, “中共中央.”

from reading merely social media posts. Others complained because they were pessimistic about the likelihood of this support happening, considering how China broke its promise to care for the elders who obeyed the one-child policy and other issues the country had to deal with. Some Sina Weibo users believed that Chinese officials worked closely with capitalists in China and this connection limited the country from offering more governmental support.

## **Socioeconomic Reality**

### *Financial Burdens*

Among all demands for governmental support, financial support was one of the most common. These users wanted to give their children a good upbringing with sufficient financial support but could not afford to do so at the moment. This belief already existed during the two-child policy years.<sup>58</sup> Sina Weibo users felt sour upon seeing babies in a news media post using diapers that were ten yuan each and drinking liquid milk, saying that the babies' families must be very well off unlike themselves and most other people. "This [the babies' living conditions] is also called deprived living? Am I living on another earth 🌍?" One questioned the wording in the post, arguing that ten-yuan diapers and liquid milk were too luxurious for the average person. Some argued that only the rich could afford three kids. Indeed, scholars have argued that high income led to more desire for multiple children.<sup>59</sup> Being unable to afford childcare expenses, a popular demand among Sina Weibo users was for the government to provide free support for their children.

Economic pressure from other areas in life makes raising multiple children a further financial burden for many Weibo users. Among all of the issues that stressed Sina Weibo users out financially, high housing prices came up the most. Housing stress had existed since the two-child-policy years and was particularly high for people in the bigger cities.<sup>60</sup> The unaffordability of housing discouraged many from giving birth, as all users seemed to think buying a house was almost necessary for raising children. Education for kids also contributed to the financial burden of many Sina Weibo users, which, again, had not changed since the two-child policy.<sup>61</sup> Even though China offers free public education at primary and junior secondary schools, parents constantly worry

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58 Feng, "为什么," 180–7; Liang, "From Fertility Desire," 1–14; Li, "浅析," 228; Kang et al., "The Prevalence," 489.

59 Mu and Yuan, "Having the Second Child," 90–103.

60 Feng, "为什么" 180–7; Liang, "From Fertility Desire," 1–14; Li, "浅析," 228; Kang et al., "The Prevalence," 489.

61 Feng, "为什么," 180–7; Ji et al., "Young Women's Fertility Intentions," 113–42; Mu and Yuan, "Having the Second Child," 90–103; Kang et al., "The Prevalence," 489.

that solely receiving public education is no longer enough for their children to earn a promising future. More and more Chinese people are getting college degrees, but the job market is overly competitive. As a result, many believed that those without a proper education would end up with factory jobs or other blue-collar positions that they deemed undesirable in the current era. They aggressively criticized a user who planned to let their children get an education only enough to do blue-collar jobs for a living for holding an “outdated” belief and restricting their children from moving socially upwards. Additionally, many users called for more affordable healthcare for mothers and children, stating that Chinese women’s low maternity benefits could not even cover the high costs of antenatal examinations at the moment. Elderly care costs money as well. On one hand, some believed that those three kids would be able to better take care of their parents and grandparents, as three people can earn more income. “[Buy] one house for [children’s] grandparents on mother’s side, one house for grandparents on father’s side, one house for parents, three children are just right.” A user planned out each of the three children’s tasks to provide housing for their grandparents. On the other hand, some considered that the traditional idea of children being responsible for taking care of their parents at old age in return would not apply to future generations.<sup>62</sup> The lack of elderly care from children made parents lose another incentive to raise multiple kids, matching a previous finding.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, many people opposed to having three children saw themselves taking care of four elders (parents and parents-in-law) and three children, which can be overwhelming.

To survive financial stress, most Chinese people have to work hard in stressful work conditions, since taking loans was not popular. Some users expressed confusion and resentment towards a news media post reporting a new loan facing couples with three children, as they preferred to earn all their money from work. Meanwhile, many Sina Weibo users mentioned the “996” work hour system and the extended retirement age when discussing their work. The “996” work hour system is an infamous work schedule in China. It requires employees to work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 6 days a week. While not all Chinese employers adopt this exact schedule, it represents the excessive hours people generally have to spend at work. Meanwhile, the government had announced that it would gradually extend the retirement age starting in 2022. This extension could make raising multiple children harder, as couples have to devote more time to work and less time for their kids. They will also struggle to care for their grandchildren once they retire at an older age. At the same time, a handful of users argued that hard work was all it took to earn a good life, implying that people should just bear with the stressful work conditions.

62 Yingchun Ji, “A Mosaic Temporality: New Dynamics of the Gender and Marriage System in Contemporary Urban China,” *Temporalités* 26 (2017); Ji et al., “Young Women’s Fertility Intentions,” 113–42.

63 Mu and Yuan, “Having the Second Child,” 90–103.



The financial pressure on most Chinese people made Sina Weibo users recognize a wide socioeconomic division that may expand alongside the three-child policy. Users observed that the poorest people in rural areas do not have high living standards or good education and mostly do manual labor jobs. Most wealth belongs to a small population in China. Scholars have found that both the poorest and the wealthiest have the highest probability of having more than one child.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, many in cities graduate from universities but struggle with purchasing a house, raising children, or supporting their elderly parents. Sina Weibo users foresaw that raising three children would give the middle socioeconomic class a harder time supporting their children to move upwards on the ladder.

### *Gender Inequality*

Aside from financial burdens, Chinese women also face gender inequality. In particular, workplace discrimination concerns them. Most Sina Weibo users worried that companies would stop hiring women, as employers might think women workers would leave their jobs to give birth three times, which does not seem to benefit the company. The fear was reasonable, as employers had previously discriminated against women considering having two children.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Sina Weibo users opposed the maternity leave extension and implied that the delegate to the National People's Congress who proposed it was unrealistic or stupid. They thought the extension would further discourage companies from hiring women and put women workers at a disadvantage even more – unless the nation could offer compensation for women workers and make sure the companies keep their jobs during maternity leave. The only way to ensure good employment opportunities while complying with the family planning laws would be to get the babies out of the way, according to some Sina Weibo users. One said:

In the future, women will have to give birth to three children in a row when they are young, so that they may be on the same track as men in the workplace. [For] men [to impregnate women is] just a matter of seconds.

Unfortunately, many others suspected that women could not get “on the same track as men” at work even after having three children. The popular belief in China is still that women need to spend a lot of time taking care of their children. Many Sina Weibo users called for paternity leave with the same level of support so

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64 Wang, Zhao, and Zhao, “China’s Family Planning Policies,” 31–68.

65 Li, “浅析,” 228; Kang et al., “The Prevalence,” 489.

that women workers could share with their husbands the childcare responsibilities and face less gender-based discrimination at work. Unfortunately, not many companies offer paternity leave, so the husbands can hardly help much even if they want to do so. “Easier said than done,” several users who identified as women criticized some users who identified as men for commenting without knowing about real-life work discrimination. Some others pointed out that men would become the sole income source if women could no longer secure jobs, which would be a stressful position for men to be in as well.

Aside from work, Chinese women are at a disadvantage in family life. They commonly detach from society when bearing and raising children, which leads to a higher risk of unstable couple and family relationships according to many Sina Weibo users. Some users also worried that the three-child policy would further pressure women to marry and bear children because Chinese society at large still looked down upon children out of wedlock and childless women. Indeed, the gendered pressure to marry early, raise more than one child, and act as the main caretaker in the family remained prominent in China’s society.<sup>66</sup> Even worse, women in some Chinese families still have no say in when and how many children they want to give birth to up till today, and the new policy encouraging more children would not help.

Overall, discrimination against women remains a dominant concern in China, which makes the nation’s emphasis on reproduction inappropriate for many Sina Weibo users. Several suggested that Chinese women generally do not have a strong will to bear multiple children. Others satirized the three-child policy for turning women into “fertility machines” whose only role is to reproduce. Words Sina Weibo users chose to describe the situation of Chinese women included “sad,” “miserable,” and “difficult.” One of the users gave a good summative argument calling for better support of women’s rights:

Without prioritizing the protection of the rights and interests and improving the status of women, the main subject of childbearing, it is impossible to increase the fertility rate. ...After all, only after giving birth, compared to before giving birth, women have a higher status and live a better life, will women voluntarily give birth to children.

## **Overall Sentiment**

### *Negative Emotions*

The Sina Weibo responses to the three-child policy seemed negative in general since the majority of Sina

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66 Ji, “A Mosaic Temporality.”

Weibo users responding thought the current socioeconomic reality was not suitable for raising children despite the government's expectations. Stress was a sentiment Sina Weibo users constantly brought up, since raising a kid came with many obligations for Chinese people. "Think carefully before you raise a child. You cannot just throw them away once you start," a Sina Weibo user said. Another comment from the media account @Lifeweek said:

We often say that those born in the 80s and 90s are the generation that suffer the most, high housing prices, "996," delayed retirement, etc. all caught up with this generation. The crueler reality is that, if this generation chooses to have three children, in the future the[ir] children will face more pressure to survive than they do.

### *Sarcastic Expressions*

To demonstrate their negative emotions in responding to the three-child policy, Sina Weibo users used a variety of sarcastic expressions. This preference could be to avoid censorship and repression against direct criticism of the government.<sup>67</sup> In particular, sarcastic emoticons were overwhelmingly popular (see Figure 2).

### Figure 2

Top 10 Emoticons Used (Sizes Based on Frequency)



The most popular emoticon was named "yǔn bēi (允悲)," short for "please allow me to make a sad face." It depicts a crying face with a bitter laugh and a hand covering its eyes, expressing an optionless sorrow. One user added this emoticon to the end of their comment "My facial mask is not even ten yuan each," expressing

67 Esarey and Xiao, "Political Expression," 752–72; Repnikova, *Media Politics*.

their discontentment with the large wealth gap between them and the family using expensive masks in the news. The second most popular emoticon was “doge,” a yellow Shiba dog with a side-looking expression and a closed mouth. A comment began with a “doge” emoticon and then went, “three children [mean staying home for] nine years. It is better to directly ask all work units not to hire female employees and fire all current female employees...” By seemingly suggesting against hiring female employees, the comment indirectly criticized how the expectation of having three kids works against women’s job opportunities. The third, fifth, and eighth most popular emoticons, “silly husky (èr hā/二哈),” “meow meow (miāo miāo/喵喵),” “nose picking (wā bí/挖鼻),” served a similar role as “doge,” as they also were faces with a look that Sina Weibo users commonly interpreted as sneering. Emoticons that looked very positive at first glance, including “laughing into tears (xiào cry/笑cry),” “haha (hāhā/哈哈),” “smiling (wēi xiào/微笑),” and “clapping (gǔ zhǎng/鼓掌),” also appeared a lot in arguments with irony. For instance, one user said, “[I] cannot even afford to raise one [child], and three” and then used the emoticon “laughing into tears.” On the surface, “laughing into tears” seemed like extreme happiness, but judging from the text, it conveyed a sense of “this is so ridiculous and sad, it is laughable.”

Another way to be shady about social issues on Sina Weibo was to use homophones and acronyms. Many users avoid directly addressing the government or the nation in this way. They might be afraid of censorship or accusation of being unpatriotic. Other times, homophones and acronyms were to add irony to statements as well. For example, “female fist (nǚ quán/女拳)” sounds the same as “feminism (nǚ quán/女权),” but some people used the former to imply that feminists were aggressive in a negative way.

## Conclusion

Comparing political expectations and socioeconomic realities, this research found an obvious mismatch between the two. The Chinese government expected citizens to move on from the previous one-child policy and create more labor forces for the nation, but Sina Weibo users found the expectations disrespectful and difficult to fulfill due to existing financial burdens and gender inequality.

Political expectations included the sub-themes of (a) past policies and the present as well as (b) nation and government. Comparing the historical one-child policy with the new three-child policy, many Sina Weibo users complained that the new policy completely disregarded what the one-child policy made them believe in, what the government promised in compensation for having only one child, and what families went through under extreme birth control. At the same time, many pointed out that all the family planning policies in China shared a similar logic: always promoting a fixed reproduction goal instead of reproductive freedom. The new

policy would probably be as forceful as the old one too, some suspected. They also saw the new policy coming mostly from the nation's need for more labor forces. Despite all the negative impressions they held, Sina Weibo users sensed a necessity to comply with the policy to avoid suspicion of disloyalty. They hoped the government could offer more policy support so that compliance would be easier.

Without more governmental support, raising three children was hard for many Sina Weibo users given their socioeconomic reality, both in terms of financial burdens and gender inequality. Most users wished to provide their children with sufficient financial support but struggled to do so. Heavy economic pressure came from high housing prices, education costs, healthcare expenses, and elderly care responsibilities. To pay for all these expenses, the majority of Chinese people worked hard despite stressful working conditions. Seeing that only the poorest and the richest were not concerned about supporting their kids financially (for different reasons), Sina Weibo users believed that the three-child policy may further widen the socioeconomic division. Aside from financial burdens, gender discrimination was dominant in China as well. Most Sina Weibo users feared that the three-child policy would put women in an even more inferior place in the job market because companies would worry that they need to take three maternity leaves. At home, the expectation to raise more children may make Chinese women lose touch with society and have less say in when and how many children they might have. Seeing gender inequality both at work and at home, many Sina Weibo users argued that emphasizing reproduction would not help the status of Chinese women.

Overall, judging from Sina Weibo reposts and comments, the Chinese public's responses to the three-child policy seemed overwhelmingly negative. Stress was a common sentiment that many users displayed. Most users chose sarcastic emoticons to express their feelings about the policy. Some also used homophones and acronyms to avoid directly addressing the government or to add irony to their statements.

Despite certain restraints in freedom of expression, all these findings indicate that the Chinese public was not generally passionate about the new three-child policy and found it hard to comply with. As a result, the three-child policy would likely have a limited, if any, impact on China's demographic patterns without strong policy support addressing social issues in other realms.

As of May 2022, financial burdens and gender inequality in China remained, or, in some aspects intensified. In February 2022, a 28-year-old employee at ByteDance died from a sudden death allegedly due to overworking.<sup>68</sup> In early March 2022, COVID-19 cases surged again after a year of nearly no cases reported across the nation, resulting in major losses in finance and nearly all other aspects of citizens' lives. The Xuzhou chained

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68 A Chinese multinational internet technology company.

woman incident was censored on major Chinese social media platforms like Sina Weibo.<sup>69</sup> On April 12, 2022, Communist Youth League Central Committee criticized people who see feminism as “related to everything for no reason” on Sina Weibo, calling them “female fists.”<sup>70</sup> If this trend continues, Chinese people’s interest in the three-child policy is not likely to increase.

Notably, this research has several limitations that may inspire future studies. First, the overall negative sentiment might be partly due to Sina Weibo users being used to expressing anger and other extreme emotions towards social issues through comments.<sup>71</sup> Users who were more positive about the policy might prefer liking the posts as a way to show approval, but the methodology of this research did not fully address that.<sup>72</sup> Second, this research looked at only responses from the first month after the policy launch. As time goes on, the Chinese public’s responses to the three-child policy might change. Future research could be done to track this trend. Third, this research did not analyze demographic information like age and general location of the subjects. Before, Liang found that financial conditions weighed more when deciding whether to raise a second child for women under thirty-five compared to older women.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, comparing responses from different demographics in future research may lead to new findings. Fourth, focusing on Sina Weibo users, the sample of this research did not represent the entire Chinese population. Users who hold different beliefs from the popular discourse might have refrained from expressing their thoughts on Sina Weibo, in fear of negative and extreme reactions.<sup>74</sup> Certain communities also do not have access to Sina Weibo or prefer other social media platforms. Therefore, future studies capturing those populations would be helpful. Finally, while this research focuses on China’s three-child policy, family planning is a relevant topic worldwide. Comparative studies across nations could be a direction for future research as well.

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69 In late January 2022, a video of a woman with mental illnesses being chained to a wall in Feng County, Xuzhou, Jiangsu, China went viral on Chinese internet. Investigations primarily done by netizens found that she was trafficked there, suffered severe abuse, and has eight children, seven of whom are boys.

70 Communist Youth League Central Committee (@共青团中央), “声音: #极端女权已成网络毒瘤#! (Voice: #Extreme Feminism Has Become Cancer on the Internet#!” Sina Weibo, April 12, 2022, <https://m.weibo.cn/3937348351/4757566724249051>.

71 Fan et al., “Anger,” e110184; Yuan, “表达,” 34-7.

72 Liu et al., “Online Responses,” 227–234.

73 Liang, “From Fertility Desire,” 1–14.

74 Yuan, “表达,” 34-7.

## APPENDIX A. NEWS MEDIA POSTS COLLECTED

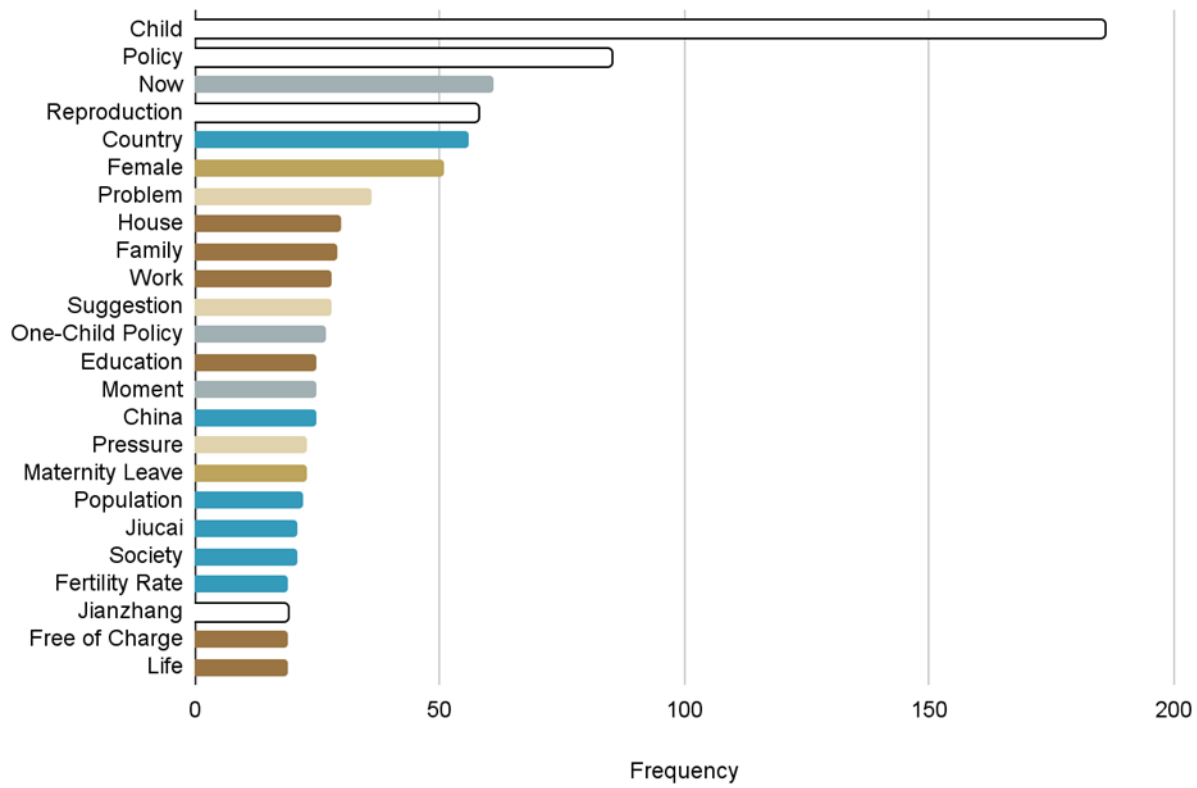
Publish Date	Publisher	Link	Total Number of Reposts	Total Number of Comments	Total Number of Likes
5/31/2021	Sina Auto (@新浪汽车)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1644088831/4643041769952169">https://m.weibo.cn/1644088831/4643041769952169</a>	43	91	394
5/31/2021	Sohu TV (@搜狐视频)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/2230913455/4643028416074184">https://m.weibo.cn/2230913455/4643028416074184</a>	62	76	244
5/31/2021	Chengdu News (@红星新闻)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/6105713761/4643017342852139">https://m.weibo.cn/6105713761/4643017342852139</a>	14	30	51
5/31/2021	Takungpao (@大公報-大公網)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1895431523/4642964234832481">https://m.weibo.cn/1895431523/4642964234832481</a>	11	37	75
5/31/2021	Forbes China (@福布斯中文网)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1765373140/4643008690002074">https://m.weibo.cn/1765373140/4643008690002074</a>	7	18	20
5/31/2021	Sina News (@新浪新闻客户端)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/2318910945/4643019888530653">https://m.weibo.cn/2318910945/4643019888530653</a>	8	76	197
5/31/2021	Jiemian News (@界面新闻)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/5182171545/4642960903244063">https://m.weibo.cn/5182171545/4642960903244063</a>	7	23	56
5/31/2021	IFeng Weekly (@凤凰周刊)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1267454277/4643019414309778">https://m.weibo.cn/1267454277/4643019414309778</a>	14	189	767
5/31/2021	Beijing News (@新京报-北京知道)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/5907979589/4643030911681413">https://m.weibo.cn/5907979589/4643030911681413</a>	13	11	48
5/31/2021	Yangcheng Evening News (@羊城晚报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1497087080/4642950834028974">https://m.weibo.cn/1497087080/4642950834028974</a>	4	15	17
5/31/2021	Sohu News (@搜狐新闻)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/5890672121/4642940598882616">https://m.weibo.cn/5890672121/4642940598882616</a>	139	271	4594
5/31/2021	China Business Journal (@中国经营报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1650111241/4643011232011017">https://m.weibo.cn/1650111241/4643011232011017</a>	9	13	17
5/31/2021	Xiaoxiang Morning Herald (@潇湘晨报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1655444627/4643006718939947">https://m.weibo.cn/1655444627/4643006718939947</a>	4	12	9
5/31/2021	CLS APP (@财联社APP)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/2868676035/4643024137879634">https://m.weibo.cn/2868676035/4643024137879634</a>	10	9	11
6/1/2021	Singapore Eye (@新加坡眼)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/2317862447/4643348427571241">https://m.weibo.cn/2317862447/4643348427571241</a>	24	19	84

6/1/2021	Real Story Initiative (@真实故事计划)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/5892736543/4643240395410933">https://m.weibo.cn/5892736543/4643240395410933</a>	24	37	357
6/1/2021	NetEast Finance (@网易财经)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1974561081/4643255042184097">https://m.weibo.cn/1974561081/4643255042184097</a>	46	71	114
6/1/2021	Shanghai Morning Post (@新闻晨报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1314608344/4643374638043922">https://m.weibo.cn/1314608344/4643374638043922</a>	14	25	324
6/1/2021	Zaobao.com (早报网)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1654134123/4643265532397485">https://m.weibo.cn/1654134123/4643265532397485</a>	92	323	1243
6/1/2021	Sina Finance (@新浪财经)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1638782947/4643362152125466">https://m.weibo.cn/1638782947/4643362152125466</a>	16	28	57
6/1/2021	National Business Daily (@每日经济新闻)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1649173367/4643372742216278">https://m.weibo.cn/1649173367/4643372742216278</a>	11	11	26
6/1/2021	Huxiu APP (@虎嗅APP)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/2357213493/4643250134062478">https://m.weibo.cn/2357213493/4643250134062478</a>	55	32	193
6/1/2021	Sspai (@少数派sspai)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1914010467/4643319513352410">https://m.weibo.cn/1914010467/4643319513352410</a>	4	3	14
6/1/2021	National Business Daily (@每日经济新闻)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1649173367/4643239576998636">https://m.weibo.cn/1649173367/4643239576998636</a>	7	13	31
6/2/2021	Lifeweek (@三联生活周刊)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1191965271/4643589381948928">https://m.weibo.cn/1191965271/4643589381948928</a>	254	207	1609
6/2/2021	IFeng Weekly (@凤凰周刊)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1267454277/4643669456455523">https://m.weibo.cn/1267454277/4643669456455523</a>	18	72	361
6/2/2021	The European Times (@欧洲时报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1763351504/4643579978585074">https://m.weibo.cn/1763351504/4643579978585074</a>	10	14	45
6/2/2021	N TV (@N视频)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/6217683074/4643702993062435">https://m.weibo.cn/6217683074/4643702993062435</a>	2	37	239
6/3/2021	Wenzhou City News (@温州都市报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1926641510/4643923039094378">https://m.weibo.cn/1926641510/4643923039094378</a>	123	418	1546



6/3/2021	Beijing News Weekly Book Review (@新京报书评 周刊)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1047467705/4644063212471703">https://m.weibo. cn/1047467705/4644063212471703</a>	11	1	17
6/3/2021	Yike Talks (@一刻talks)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1760586325/4644319446698169">https://m.weibo. cn/1760586325/4644319446698169</a>	28	40	141
6/4/2021	Toutiao News (头条新闻)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1618051664/4644484179298074">https://m.weibo. cn/1618051664/4644484179298074</a>	37	71	233
6/11/2021	3qhouse.com (@三秦房产 网)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1708239021/4646870464336953">https://m.weibo. cn/1708239021/4646870464336953</a>	6	8	6
6/12/2021	China Business Journal (@中国经营 报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1650111241/4647192638524235">https://m.weibo. cn/1650111241/4647192638524235</a>	5	12	15
6/17/2021	Xinan Evening News (@新安晚报)	<a href="https://m.weibo.cn/1751714412/4649104380267041">https://m.weibo. cn/1751714412/4649104380267041</a>	13	27	71

APPENDIX B. TOP TWENTY-FOUR HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS



## APPENDIX C. MAJOR THEMES BASED ON TWENTY HIGH FREQUENCY WORDS

High Frequency Words	Frequency	Sub-Themes	Themes
Now, One-Child Policy, Moment	61+27+25=113	Past Policies and the Present	Political Expectations
Country, China, Population, <i>jiucai</i> , Society, Fertility Rate	56+25+22+21+21 +19=164	Nation and Government	
House, Family, Work, Education, Free of Charge, Life	30+29+28+25+19 +19=150	Financial Burdens	Socioeconomic Reality
Female, Maternity Leave	51+23=74	Gender Inequality	
Problem, Suggestion, Pressure	36+28+23=87	Sentiment	Overall Sentiment

*Note.* The table omitted four high frequency words. Three were included in the original keywords for search and the other one was frequently mentioned only because one news media account repeatedly reposted its own message containing that word.

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