

# India's Population Has Surpassed China's. What Now?

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*According to a study conducted by the World Population Review statistical organization, the population of India has surpassed that of China. The United Nations has not confirmed the announcement and instead expects India to reach the milestone later this year. None-the-less, what is universally agreed is that India's population will surpass China's this year. What does this mean?*

India's population was 1.417 billion at the end 2022, five million more than the 1.412 billion reported by China's National Bureau of Statistics. The bureau announced on January 17 a decrease of 850,000 people compared to the previous year, the first decline in China's population since 1961.

Chinese leaders identified in the 1960s and 1970s that because population growth was outpacing food production capabilities, poverty was a constant factor in hindering the development of the People's Republic of China. At first, ideological campaigns were launched to limit births, and then in 1980 the one-child policy was announced, accompanied by abortion and mass sterilisation. As a result, the birth rate plummeted, a trend that experts anticipate will continue.

Declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy will mean a reduction in the number of young workers in China. Currently, 62% of the working-age population in China is between 16 and 59 years old, but their share is inexplicably declining. That means that it will be necessary to allocate more money to pensioners from the state budget.

Meanwhile, although there has been no official confirmation from New Delhi, experts believe that India's population will certainly overtake China this year. The population difference is only a matter of a few million, miniscule when discussing two countries with well over a billion people.

For India, this is an important moral and psychological milestone. By becoming the world's most populated country, India strengthens its quest to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a distinction only held by China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

It also ensures that India maintains a young and vibrant population which will contribute to the country's rapid development and treasury. With quick development and enriched coffers, India can continue building its military capabilities, an especially important matter considering its border issues and tense relations with China and Pakistan.

Just as importantly, Indian soft power is growing as expatriate communities around the world continue to expand. It cannot be overlooked that US Vice President Kamala Harris and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak are of Indian descent. Although Harris and Sunak are undoubtedly servants of their countries of birth, it does signify that Indians can sit at the highest level of any democratic government. This will inevitably lead to these countries having friendlier relations with India, as seen now in the US, UK and Canada.

As for the military, the general consensus is that a war in the 21st century is not just won because of troop numbers, but also because of modern technology and weapons. Compared to China, the process of modernising the Indian military is much slower. For example, while the Indians are assembling their second aircraft carrier, China already has four.

According to the Global Fire Power (GFP) 2023 Military Strength Ranking, China and India maintain third and fourth spot respectively, and in consecutive years. However, the GFP index indicates that it is more likely for China to take second spot from Russia than it is for India to move into third place. In this way, India's population explosion will have little impact on its military capabilities, and rather the effects will be felt as secondary outcomes because of the country's brain gain and continuing technological advancements.

A [Morning Consult poll](#), published on January 17, revealed that Indians see China as their country's "greatest military threat." Forty-three percent of respondents named China as India's greatest military threat, while only 13% cited Pakistan. Surprisingly though, 22% of respondents said that the US was India's greatest threat, a massive nine percentage points difference with historic rival Pakistan. Therefore, Indians do not only view neighbouring and global power China as a major threat, but even the far-off US.

What is seemingly apparent though is that India's global importance and stature is growing. Although one would traditionally view a large population as being synonymous with poverty and underdevelopment, China broke that stereotype and India too is quickly providing another example. India is now exhuming more confidence in its own development, progress and power, and this will contribute to a greater division of global power away from complete US hegemony. None-the-less, issues with China remain unresolved and will continue being a plight in bilateral relations in the foreseeable future.

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