

Excess Males as a Threat to China's Military Readiness

A Look at Their Effects on Domestic Unrest and Crime

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INTRODUCTION

As the world's population changes at an increasingly rapid pace, there has been renewed attention on the field of political demography and the effects on security and international relations. Population is often used as an indicator in assessing a country's military strength and economic productivity, both of which greatly influence nations' standing on the global stage. While China straddles the line as both a developing and developed country, China is recognized as a global military power fueled by its teeming population.

China is the most populous nation in the world at 1.379 billion people. China also suffers a heavy gender imbalance as a result of cultural factors and policies that have spanned several decades. The natural at birth male to female ratio is 105 males per 100 females, but China has significantly exceeded that since the 1980s. Estimates list the current sex ratio at 113.5, which translates roughly into an excess of 33.59 million men. For Chinese policymakers, the challenge lies in the consequences that manifest from having a skewed sex ratio. Many of these men are young, single, unemployed, and unable to find a [female] partner. Studies have found that these factors combined increases the likelihood of domestic unrest and crime. Leaving the sex ratio and key socioeconomic elements unaddressed will cause China to divert resources and energy away from other sectors to handle the internal strife that arises to such an extent that it degrades their military readiness.

Given the effects of unemployment and excess males combined, the aim of this project is twofold: to determine the Chinese provinces vulnerable to domestic unrest and crime; and the risk of these areas falling victim to domestic unrest and crime. Addressing these issues enables the Chinese government to conduct macro, strategic policy planning that supports their military's long-term dominance.

METHODS

The models that best answer the issues at hand are a vulnerability model and a risk model. Both have specific demographic indicators associated with each; there are three for vulnerability and three for risk. These indicators were scored using a combination of natural and manual breaks in the data on a scale of 1 (low vulnerability or risk) to 4 (high vulnerability or risk). Once the scores for each variable were calculated, they were summed up to determine the overall vulnerability and risk for each province. The range for vulnerability and risk sums is 3 to 12. The range of the sums combined is 6 to 24.

Three demographic indicators were chosen to identify the vulnerability level of each province: illiteracy rate, education level, and 15-29 year old proportion. These factors heavily influence employment prospects.

Three demographic indicators were chosen to identify the risk level of each province: sex ratio, marital status, and unemployment. These factors heavily influence Chinese males' ability to find a partner.

PROJECT RESULTS

The scores for vulnerability, risk, and combined vulnerability and risk were classified on a five-point scale of very low to very high. Using the high and very high ratings, spatial analysis revealed the provinces most vulnerable and at most risk to domestic unrest and crime. Out of the 31 provinces: five are highly vulnerable, 15 are highly risky, and six are both risky and vulnerable.

The provinces most vulnerable have high percentages of male 15-to-29 year olds. Most also have illiteracy rates above China's benchmark of five percent. However, the most influential variable in their vulnerability scores is education level. These provinces have relatively high fulfillment rates in primary school, but the number of students who complete secondary school precipitously decrease. Tibet falls on the extreme side of the spectrum with an illiteracy rate of 24%, which correlates with its low education levels.

The provinces with the highest risk have half of or close to half of their working-age males are unemployed. They also have high percentages of single males and almost all have sex ratios exceeding 105, which greatly affected their risk score. Current sex ratios are slowly inching toward 105 with the exception of Tianjin's at 123.

For the aggregate, none of the provinces attained a high score based on their vulnerability total alone, but rather due to their risk and/or their combined score. Although there is some divergence within the variables, overall their data is relatively consistent with each other.

CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

Many of these provinces are home to major military bases and cannot afford to operate with intense crime and domestic disturbance, as this would distract and divert resources from their mission set. China needs to prioritize investment in educational resources, infrastructure, and gender-equal employment opportunities in the six most vulnerable and risky areas identified given that these are the factors that impacted the vulnerability and risk calculations the most. Although not by much, there are areas where women outnumber men; it is worthwhile exploring what opportunities will encourage female migration to male-dominated regions. Ultimately, China must be proactive and adopt a whole-of-government approach in its efforts to curb the potential negative consequences that its excess males bring. Otherwise, it will find itself with the bodies to maintain its military in the short term, but not the skill, morale, or resources to fuel it the long run to remain a global military power.

While these maps provide a useful spatial analysis, they have many limitations. Most significant of them is the lack of data available in English. This made it difficult to procure data from the same time frame and to discern which data accurately represented the variable for the purposes of this analysis. The bulk of this data came from the 2010 Census and 2016 Statistical Yearbook, with some data from the 2000 Census. All data was sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics of China. While this provided some consistency, the lack of transparency in Chinese data raises concerns of accuracy and validity.

