

Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Stability, and Policy Change in China: The Case of Birth Control Policy, 1980–2015

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This study used the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) to explain stability and change in China's national birth control policy from 1980 to 2015. We found that policy remained stable, despite internal and external changes to the relevant subsystem, from 1980 to 2013. The stability was explained by the dominant advocacy coalition's mobilization of considerable resources to defend its policy core beliefs. Policy changes in 2013 and 2015 were caused by a combination of external and internal perturbations, in addition to policy-oriented learning and advocacy by two expert-led minority advocacy coalitions. The case showed that the openness and plurality of China's policy processes had increased over time but were still limited in comparison with those in Western democracies. The case analysis confirmed two policy change hypotheses and suggested a mechanism for policy change: a hierarchically superior jurisdiction is more likely to impose a major policy change when it learns that the change is an adaptation to internal and external perturbations and that adopting the change will serve the jurisdiction's political interests.

KEY WORDS: advocacy coalition framework, authoritarian regime, Chinese birth control policy, dominant advocacy coalition, minority advocacy coalition

本研究通过倡导联盟框架（ACF）解释了中国计划生育政策在1980年至2015年间的稳定和变化。我们发现，自1980年至2013年，尽管相关政策子系统的内部和外部发生了变化，但是在此之间政策仍保持稳定。占主导地位的倡导联盟会调动大量资源来守卫其政策核心信念，政策的稳定性正来源于此。然而，自2013年至2015年，以下三个因素带来了政策变化：内外部扰动因素的共同作用，以政策为导向的学习，以及由专家主导的两个少数群体倡导联盟。本文的案例表明，中国政策进程的开放性和多元性随着时间的推移而得到了提高，但与西方民主国家相比仍然有限。通过案例分析，本文证实了关于政策变化的两个假设，并提出一种机制来解释政策变化：当具有更高管辖权的上级决策者认为政策变化是对内外扰动因素的必要适应，且政策变化将有利于其政治利益时，该决策者更有可能实施重大的政策变化。

Introduction

China's one-child policy, first adopted in 1980, was relaxed in November 2013 to allow couples to have two children in cases where one of the parents was an only child ("Dandu Er'tai" in Chinese). Although this change affected a relatively

small portion of the national population, it was significant in that it marked the first time the policy had been relaxed at the national level since its adoption.¹ In October 2015, the Communist Party of China Central Committee (CPCCC) announced that all couples would henceforth be allowed to have two children (CPCCC, 2015). The National People's Congress (NPC) legalized this decision with an amendment to the Population and Family Planning Law (NPC Standing Committee, 2015).

Why did China's national birth control policy remain more or less stable from 1980 to 2013, despite slow population growth and a rapidly aging population during the period (Guo, 2013)? What explains the major policy changes of 2013 and 2015? China's total fertility rate (TFR) declined in the 1990s (see supporting information Appendix IV), prompting scholars to inquire and debate whether and when the birth control policy should be relaxed.² Why did it take two decades—much longer than comparable processes in other countries—for policymakers to relax the policy (Wang, Cai, & Gu, 2012)?³

In this paper, we use the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) to answer these questions. The ACF was chosen for two reasons. First, it was developed and mainly tested in Western democracies (Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Ingold, 2017). It has over 240 applications across policy areas worldwide but only has a few applications in China (Pierce, Peterson, Jones, Garrard, & Vu, 2017). It provides shared concepts and vocabulary along with explicit hypotheses for comparison across political systems (Cairney & Heikkila, 2014). The enactment of China's one-child policy in the early 1980s was a centralized and closed process typical of authoritarian regimes (Greenhalgh, 2008). Studying why rapid and major policy changes were made after a long period of policy stability enables us to test the applicability of the ACF in an authoritarian context.

Second, applying the ACF helps us better understand China's policy processes. Chinese research on three of the major phenomena studied by the ACF—namely the nature of coalitions, policy learning, and policy change—has been inconclusive. Opposition coalitions probably do not exist in China because of the Party's dominance over policy change and its suppression of dissenting views (Cai, 2008; Lowry, 2006; Ngok & Huang, 2014). Other studies, however, have concluded that opposition coalitions are sometimes in influencing policymaking (Han, Swedlow, & Unger, 2014; Teets, 2017; Zhan & Tang, 2016). Some scholars believe that China's policy processes have been more open and required a higher degree of consensus among diverse actors since the economic reforms of the 1980s (Ma & Lin, 2012; Mertha, 2009). Nevertheless, a recent comparative analysis of advocacy coalitions concerned with shale oil and gas development found that coalition actors were less diverse in China than in the United States and Argentina (Heikkila, Berardo, Weible, & Yi, 2018). Some scholars have argued that China's policymaking is change-oriented (Heilmann & Perry, 2011), and there have been cases where learning through expert knowledge, policy debates, experimentation, and practices drove policy change (Heilmann, 2011; Shi, 2012; Wang, 1995; Zhu & Xue, 2007). Others have highlighted cases in which learning by policymakers has been blocked by China's fragmented and centralized state structure, which has tended to result in policy inertia (Chan & Zhao, 2016).

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the assumptions and policy change hypotheses of the ACF and discuss their applicability to China. Second, we discuss the research design and data collection methods. Third, we explain the policy stasis and changes from 1980 to 2015 by identifying three advocacy coalitions and analyzing their role in China's birth control policy subsystem. Last, we relate our findings to the ACF literature and China policy studies. We find that external and internal changes did not lead to major policy changes before 2013, largely because of the dominant coalition's advocacy. The policy changes of 2013 and 2015 were imposed by the superior Party leaders. They learned from the advocacy and policy evaluation of minority coalitions that policy change was an adaptation to external and internal perturbations and would serve the Party's political interests.

Revisiting the ACF and its Applicability to China

The ACF assumes that individuals have bounded rationality and rely on belief systems that bias their processing of stimuli. The policy subsystem is the primary unit of analysis and comprises components that interact in nontrivial ways to produce policy outputs or outcomes. Policy subsystem actors are aggregated into one or more coalitions, sharing beliefs and coordinating in nontrivial ways to influence a policy subsystem (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017; Schlager, 1995). Coalitions are also marked by various types of resources such as information, accessible venues, leadership, and public opinion (Nohrstedt, 2011; Weible, 2007). Policies and programs are translations of the beliefs of one or more coalitions (Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009). Beliefs have a three-tiered structure: deep core policy beliefs, policy core beliefs, and secondary beliefs.⁴ Major policy changes reflect changes in policy core beliefs, whereas minor policy changes reflect changes in secondary beliefs (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). In addition to belief systems, the ACF recognizes the role of material and political self-interests as drivers of coalition coordination and advocacy (Dudley & Richardson, 1999; Nohrstedt, 2010; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993, 1999; Szarka, 2010).

To apply the ACF in different political systems, two variables that shape the long-term coalition opportunity structure—namely the degree of consensus required for policy change and the openness of political system—were added to the framework (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). Application of the ACF to cases in Vietnam, Mozambique, and Poland revealed that such authoritarian political systems had a low degree of openness and that policy change in them could be achieved at a low threshold of consensus (Andersson, 1999; Dang, 2013; Kingiri, 2014). In China, the policymaking process is in many cases no longer controlled solely by state actors but does involve non-state actors (Hammond, 2013; Mertha, 2009; Ngok & Huang, 2014; Wong, 2016). A few applications of the ACF to China found that both non-state actors and government actors formed advocacy coalitions (Aamodt & Stensdal, 2017; Francesch-Huidobro & Mai, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stensdal, 2014; Wong, 2016). However, scholars have also found cases where the advocacy of non-state actors must operate within state-sanctioned political and legal frameworks (Cai, 2008; Dickson, 2016; Francesch-Huidobro & Mai, 2012; Teets, 2017). We expect that China's political

system has a higher degree of openness and that policy change requires a higher degree of consensus than was the case in the pre-economic reform era but the degree of openness and the plurality of policy processes is still limited in comparison with Western democracies.

There are two policy change hypotheses in the ACF literature.

Policy Change Hypothesis 1: Significant perturbations external to the subsystem, a significant perturbation internal to the subsystem, policy-oriented learning, negotiated agreement, or some combination thereof are necessary, but not sufficient, causes of change in the policy core attributes of a governmental program.

This hypothesis identifies four pathways to policy change (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, p. 147). The change mechanisms revealed by applications of the ACF to cases in Western democracies include heightened public and political attention, agenda change, redistribution of coalition resources, the opening and closing of policy venues, learning and defection by a dominant coalition, exploitation by a minority coalition, and so on (Nohrstedt, 2008; Nohrstedt & Weible, 2010; Sabatier & Weible, 2007, pp. 198–99). Some of these mechanisms may not apply in the Chinese context. First, external perturbations (e.g., crisis) may not heighten political and public attention because of media censorship (Zhang & Fleming, 2005). Second, as a result of state suppression, minority coalitions are less likely to mobilize disruptive popular resistance (Li, Liu, & O'Brien, 2012). Third, venue options for advocacy are limited by the Party's control over both the legislative and the executive branches (Li, 2014).

Notwithstanding these contextual differences, we expect that Policy Change Hypothesis 1 will be supported in China. Four pathways to policy change have been identified by previous applications to China. Some have found that external changes (e.g., socioeconomic development) contribute to policy change (Francesch-Huidobro & Mai, 2012; Han et al., 2014; Stensdal, 2014). Others have argued that policy-oriented learning driven by experts leads to policy change (Francesch-Huidobro & Mai, 2012; Stensdal, 2014). Wong (2016) concluded that failure of implementation (internal change) triggers a policy change. Policy changes might also be driven by negotiated agreement fostered by hurting stalemate (Wang & Li, 2016), policy brokers' conflict mediation (Fang, 2011), consensus decision rules, and empirical demonstrations (Wang & Weichun, 2014).

Policy Change Hypothesis 2: The policy core attributes of a government program in a specific jurisdiction will not be significantly revised as long as the subsystem advocacy coalition that instated the program remains in power within that jurisdiction, except when the change is imposed by a hierarchically superior jurisdiction.

This hypothesis has only been studied and confirmed in a few cases (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, p. 147). It assumes that a policy subsystem is semi-autonomous and that decisions by the hierarchically superior jurisdiction are external shocks (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). In the context of Western democracies, scholars have found that hierarchically superior jurisdictions tend to impose policy changes

when public opinion changes or governing coalitions are changed through popular elections (Elliot & Schlaepfer, 2001; Kubler, 2001). We expect this hypothesis to be confirmed in China but through mechanisms different from those in Western democracies. In China's single-party regime, the Party Center is the decision-making sovereignty that both enacts policies and imposes policy change. Why would the Party overrule its own decisions? One explanation is that the Party learns from practice to adapt to environmental changes (Heilmann, 2011; Wang, 2009). Another explanation is that different coalitions within the Party hold competing policy views and will introduce alternative policies upon assuming power. The various coalitions nevertheless share goals to ensure the Party's survival (Burns & Rosen, 2015; Li, 2016). Therefore, we propose a mechanism for Policy Change Hypothesis 2 in the Chinese context: superior Party leaders will impose a major policy change when they learn that the change is an adaptation to external and internal perturbations and will serve the Party's political interest (i.e., to survive).

Data and Methods

We adopted the single case study design, which uses within-case comparison and congruence procedures (George & Bennett, 2005), to trace the beliefs and coordinating strategies of competing coalitions within China's birth control policy subsystem over three and a half decades.

To identify coalition beliefs, we developed a coding framework based on Sabatier's (1998) belief system structure and the coding materials (Table 1). The coding results are listed in the supporting information Appendix II in accordance with the coding categories listed in Table 1.

Two postgraduate students and one research assistant were trained to identify statements in the coding materials according to the coding frame. Similar statements were grouped and counted. These statements are listed in simplified form

Table 1. Belief System Structure and Coding Frame

	Components of Beliefs
Deep core beliefs	1. Priorities of values and interests
Policy core beliefs	1. Priorities of values and interests in the birth control policy subsystem
	2. Seriousness of problems
	3. Causes of problems
	4. Effectiveness of the birth control policy
	5. Feasibility and benefits of relaxing the policy
Secondary aspects of policy	1. Information about the total fertility rate
	2. Measures to solve policy problems
	3. Timing and steps to relax the policy

Sources for coding materials: Policy recommendations by advocacy coalitions (e.g., Gu et al., 2009; Zhan et al., 2012), collaborative research reports (e.g., NPDS Research Team, 2007), professional forum articles (e.g., Mu & Chen, 1995; Song, 2010), and other government documents (e.g., State Council Information Office, 2014). The complete reference list of coding materials can be found in supporting information Appendix II.

in supporting information Appendix II. For example, the statement “long term and sustainable policies are desirable” appears 22 times in four edited books and in a book chapter by demographers of minority advocacy coalition 1. To ensure inter-coder reliability, discrepancies between coders were discussed and reconciled by the first author (Ryan, 1999). For example, when statements mentioned not only the seriousness of population problems but also the causes of these problems, we agreed that the statements should be categorized as “causes of problems.”

We conducted in-depth interviews to identify coordination actions and verify coalition beliefs. In July 2014, June–July 2015, and April–August 2017, we adopted a purposeful sampling strategy to identify 33 experts and officials who either supported or opposed policy relaxation between the 1980s and the 2010s (Seidman, 2013, pp. 55–57). We used a snowballing strategy to reach 7 of them and interviewed another 11 of them through direct contact.⁵ The response rate was 54.5 percent. We interviewed one informant demographer in August 2018 to verify the information provided by other interviewees (Table 2).

One interviewee was an economist and representative of the 18th National Congress of the CPC; 18 were demographers, including one former member of the National People’s Political Consultative Conference (NPPCC).⁶ These respondents were located in Beijing, Nanjing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Hebei provinces.

The interview questions included queries on the formation and beliefs of advocacy coalitions, major disputes between the competing coalitions, the motives for their advocacy and their opponents’ advocacy, their advocacy strategies and their perceived impacts on policy decisions, and how they explained the policy stability before 2013 and the policy changes of 2013 and 2015. All interviews were conducted in Chinese and lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. Notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews. When necessary, clarifications or supplementary details were sought from the respondents after the interviews.

To verify which coalitions the respondents belonged to, we triangulated the self-reported beliefs and strategies of coordination of the respondents with their publications. We used the same coding frame used for the belief systems to code 128 Chinese articles about birth control policy published by the 18 interviewees from 2000 to 2013 in high-impact Chinese journals, including *Population Research*, *Population and Development*, and *Population Studies*. We found that 17 interviewees

Table 2. Background of Interviewees

	Expert Committee Member of the National Family Planning Agency		Total
	Yes	No	
University researchers	6	7	13
Researchers in government-subsidized research institutes	3	1	4
Former officials of the National Family Planning Commission	0	2	2
Total	9	10	19

had supported policy relaxation in the mid-2000s. Their beliefs were largely consistent with the minority advocacy coalition led by demographers. One interviewee was involved in the enactment of the one-child policy and did not support policy relaxation until 2009. His beliefs were consistent with those of the dominant advocacy coalition (supporting information Appendix I).

Analysis: China's Birth Control Policy Subsystem

Background: China's Birth Control Policy (1980–2015)

China's one-child-per-couple policy was adopted in 1980 to control population growth (CPCCC, 1980). In 1981, the National Family Planning Commission (NFPC) was established under the State Council to enforce the policy and monitor the implementation of the population control target through its local branches (Office of the State Council, 1983).

From 1980 to 2013, the one-child policy remained unchanged at the national level but was relaxed in some localities. For example, in 1984, national Party leaders decided to allow some couples in rural areas and some ethnic minorities to have two children (CPCCC, 1984). In 1985, Zhejiang province allowed couples who were both only-children to have two children (Zhejiang Provincial Government, 1984). In 1991, 2000, and 2007, the CPC and the State Council announced that the one-child policy should remain unchanged (CPCCC & State Council, 1991, 2000, 2007). The one-child policy was written into the Population and Family Planning Law in 2001. A national policy change occurred in 2013 when the CPCCC announced the adoption of the Dandu Er'tai policy (Xinhua News Agency, 2013). In 2015, the Party decided to adopt the two-children-per-couple policy (two-child policy) across the country (CPCCC, 2015). Since then, the Chinese government has ceased setting any population control targets (State Council, 2015a).

The Birth Control Policy Subsystem and Decision-Making Authority

Although many actors are affected by policy decisions, the term "policy subsystem actor" refers only to those who possess and invest resources to influence policy outcomes or outputs (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2017, p. 139).

China's birth control policy subsystem includes government agencies that are empowered to use their formal legal authority, expertise and information, and access to decision makers to influence policy decisions. Such agencies include the State Council and local governments, national and local family planning agencies, and government agencies responsible for formulating economic and social development plans.⁷ While the State Council is formally responsible for formulating population control plans and implementing population control measures across the country (National People's Congress, 2001), these tasks are delegated to the national and local family planning agencies (CPFPY Editorial Committee, 2007). Provincial governments have discretion in formulating local birth control policy and have shown varied policy preferences (Gu, Wang, Guo, & Zhang, 2007). Our analysis excluded

government agencies that showed no attempt to influence the core elements of the birth control policy, such as the public security bureaus.⁸

Scholars are important actors in China's birth control policy subsystem. Their population growth projections provided evidence to support the one-child policy in the 1980s (Greenhalgh, 2008). The research and advocacy of later scholars provided reasons for the one-child policy to be phased out (Wang et al., 2012). Other actors include retired government officials, representatives of the People's Congress, and members of the Political Consultative Conference at the national and local levels, in addition to ordinary citizens affected by the birth control policy.

As discussed in the literature (Greenhalgh, 2008; Wang et al., 2012), top Party leaders comprise the superior jurisdiction that possesses the authority to make national birth control policy decisions.

The Dominant Advocacy Coalition

We identified advocacy coalitions according to members' shared beliefs and coordination in influencing policy (Diaz-Kope, Lombard, & Miller-Stevens, 2013; Han et al., 2014; Nohrstedt, 2010). We found that one dominant advocacy coalition (DAC) played an important role in preserving the one-child policy until 2013.

The DAC's coordination network included actors that organized and participated in policy research and professional forums, lobbied Party leaders, submitted policy recommendations to the NPC and NPPCC, and influenced public opinion through the media.⁹ The DAC's members included the national family planning agency,¹⁰ local governments in poor and populous areas (Caijing, 2011), government agencies responsible for formulating social and economic plans,¹¹ and retired and current government officials and scholars (Chen, 2010; Greenhalgh, 2008).

The DAC's members shared the deep core belief that individual interests should be sacrificed for national interests. They also shared the policy core belief that fast population growth would cause socioeconomic problems and needed to be contained by the one-child policy. They objected to relaxation of the policy on the grounds that it would cause the TFR to rebound. The DAC's members agreed on some secondary beliefs, such as the policy target of the TFR, the actual level of the TFR, and measures by which to enforce the policy. They differed with regard to the timing of and steps involved in relaxing the policy (supporting information Appendix II).

The Minority Advocacy Coalitions

Given the closed and centralized policymaking environment of the 1980s and 1990s, there were few actors at the time challenging the one-child policy.¹² This study focused on two expert-led minority coalitions (MAC1 and MAC2) because these groups shaped the beliefs of the opposition. The coalitions' coordination networks included actors who organized and participated in collaborative policy research and professional forums, signed and submitted policy recommendation letters to the central government or Party authorities, and influenced public opinion through

the media and publications.¹³ MAC1's advocacy persisted throughout the 1990s and 2010s. MAC2 was formed in 2012. Process-tracing analysis of their advocacy enabled us to explain the one-child policy changes of 2013 and 2015.

We categorized MAC1 and MAC2 as two distinct coalitions on the grounds that they differed from each other in some areas of deep core and policy core beliefs, expert information, access venues, and advocacy strategies. Direct coordination between the two coalitions was also limited.¹⁴

In respect of deep core beliefs, although MAC1 and MAC2 agreed that people's rights must be respected and protected, MAC2 stressed "governing the country in accordance with laws" (supporting information Appendix II). In terms of policy core beliefs, both coalitions believed that the one-child policy caused many socio-economic problems and that it needed to be relaxed by 2010. However, they differed in relative priority of values and basic strategies for achieving policy core beliefs. Such differences are related to the different expertise to be found in the two coalitions. MAC1, led by demographers, possessed scientific information on the feasibility of policy relaxation and its members accepted the need for gradual policy change. MAC1's collective policy recommendations focused on analyzing the costs and benefits of policy relaxation. MAC2, led by legal scholars, was concerned with the freedoms enjoyed by citizens, in particular the legal right to give birth, and its members focused on legal analysis in their policy recommendations. They suggested removing the regulatory system that controlled population size and that licensed the number of children couples could have. They believed that reproductive rights were fundamental human rights and that the current system violated the constitution and the Administrative License Law that protected such rights (Zhan et al., 2015).

The differences between MAC1 and MAC2 in belief and expertise were decisive for determining the limits of coalition coordination. The two coalitions chose different access venues for influencing policy decisions. MAC1's core members were policy advisors to the national family planning agency¹⁵ and in most cases submitted policy recommendations to the Party Center through retired officials of the agency.¹⁶ By contrast, MAC2 deliberately chose to submit recommendations to the NPC Standing Committee Legislative Affairs Committee and the State Council Legislative Affairs Office. MAC2 members believed that these venues, rather than the Party Center, were legitimated by the constitution for the proposing and enactment of laws and therefore should receive and respond to their recommendations.¹⁷

The limited coordination between MAC1 and MAC2 was also related to their differences in belief and expertise in other ways. Only one MAC1 demographer signed both recommendation letters submitted by MAC2 in 2012 and 2015. He was involved not because of his expertise but because of his efforts to form MAC2. He recognized that MAC2's core members were legal scholars and therefore had different outlooks from members of MAC1. He explained that MAC2 formed much later than MAC1 because legal scholars used to pay little attention to the birth control policy and felt the policy was unrelated to their areas of expertise.¹⁸ In fact, unlike legal scholars, most demographers did not define the problem of birth control policy as one of violations of people's reproductive rights.¹⁹

Analysis: Policy Stability and Policy Change

Advocacy and Policy Stability: 1980–2013

In this section, we explain the policy stability from 1980 to 2013 in spite of external changes to the subsystem—such as fast economic growth, women’s increasing level of education, labor shortages, and changes of Party leadership—and the internal change of a declining TFR (supporting information Appendix III). We argue that the one-child policy remained stable largely because the DAC controlled considerable resources (e.g., access venues, expert information, TFR information, formal legal authority) by the late 2000s. In the early 2010s, the DAC’s resources declined but it managed to delay changes to the one-child policy.

The DAC had access to superior Party leaders and expert information during the enactment of the one-child policy. The one-child policy was proposed by Chen Muhua, then Vice Premier and Chair of the State Council Family Planning Leadership Group, as a means of realizing the GDP per capita target for the year 2000 that was set by Party leader Deng Xiaoping (Chen, 2015, pp. 29–33; Vogel, 2011, pp. 359–62). Policymakers used technical analysis by the system engineer Song Jian²⁰ and demographer Tian Xueyuan²¹ to formulate the one-child policy (Greenhalgh, 2003).

The DAC faced few challenges despite people’s resistance to the one-child policy in the early 1980s (O’Brien & Li, 1999). At the time, few experts had sufficient knowledge and information to challenge the DAC’s belief that China’s having a large population would tend to harm its socioeconomic development.²² Top Party leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang approved a less stringent birth control policy for rural areas in 1984 (Chen, 2015, p. 86). After Zhao Ziyang’s fall in 1989 (supporting information Appendix III), this policy relaxation was preserved only after the director of the NFPC, Peng Peiyun, rebutted criticisms of it levelled by some government officials (CFPY Editorial Committee, 1990, p. 67). Open discussion of policy relaxation was forbidden in the early 1990s.²³

The DAC interpreted the new TFR information as supporting its policy core beliefs. In the early 1990s, NFPC surveys revealed a rapid decline in the TFR from around 2.5 in 1986 to around 1.5 (Guo, 2004). Certain members of the DAC (e.g., Song Jian) also admitted that the TFR had declined to a level below the replacement level.²⁴ However, they interpreted this as a demonstration that the one-child policy had been effective in controlling population growth. They argued that the actual TFR was still too high and that the birth control policy should therefore remain unchanged (Song, 1997; Zhang, 1998). The NFPC claimed that actual births had been underreported and adopted an estimated TFR of 1.8 for the purposes of forecasting population growth. As a result, the population was expected to exceed the control target set for 2000.²⁵ The central government accepted this view and maintained the one-child policy (CPCCC & State Council, 2000).

The DAC manipulated TFR information to defend its policy core beliefs after MAC1 researchers challenged the accuracy of the official TFR in the 2000s. The NFPC fixed the official TFR at 1.8 throughout the 2000s and overestimated population growth during the period by over 50 percent (Guo, 2009; Zuo, 2010). With

the NPFPC, Jiang Zhenghua²⁶ and Song Jian initiated the National Population Development Strategy (NPDS) study in 2004, which involved over 300 experts and cost the government 30 million CNY.²⁷ Several MAC1 demographers participated in the study and were instructed to use higher TFRs to predict population growth.²⁸ When the experts involved could not reach a consensus on policy goals, the NPFPC reported that its national survey showed the TFR rebounding to 1.87 (Guo, 2009). The NPFPC released the survey results to the public and recommended to top Party leaders that the birth control policy should remain unchanged.²⁹ The NPDS made similar recommendations, which were accepted by the CPCCC (CPCCC & State Council, 2007; NPDS Research Team, 2007). In early 2007, when three MAC1 demographers found that a biased sample in the NPFPC survey might have caused the TFR to be overestimated, the NPFPC instructed them to destroy the original data, survey analysis, and research reports (Guo, 2012, p. 15).

In the early 2010s, the DAC forestalled changes to the one-child policy despite internal changes (e.g., a declining TFR) and external perturbations (e.g., a labor shortage in the economic policy subsystem). First, the NPFPC believed that policy relaxation would cause a sharp and rapid rise in the TFR and planned to roll out the Dandu Er'tai policy across the country gradually from 2010 to 2015.³⁰ Second, Jiang Zhenghua and Song Jian openly advocated not relaxing the policy (China Stock Net, 2009; Song, 2010). The China Peasants and Workers' Democratic Party, formerly chaired by Jiang Zhenghua, proposed to the NPPCC that the one-child policy be maintained (Xie, 2011). Song Jian lobbied top Party leaders not to relax the policy in 2012 (Reuters, 2013). Third, central government agencies with economic portfolios and some of the provincial governments objected to policy relaxation (Da Zhong Net, 2013). Fourth, a Marxist economist, Chen En'fu, submitted a policy recommendation to the NPC suggesting a reduction in China's population (Chen, 2010).³¹ The NPFPC shelved the plan of experimenting with the Dandu Er'tai policy (Southern Weekly, 2013).

In conclusion, we confirmed Policy Change Hypothesis 2. Before the intervention by top Party leaders in 2013, the DAC used its access to decision-making authorities and manipulated TFR information to maintain the policy status quo. It mobilized expert analysis not for policy-oriented learning but to protect its own material interests. If the policy remained unchanged, experts and officials involved in its enactment could continue to serve as advisors to Party leaders. Maintaining a stringent birth control policy helped to secure resources for family planning agencies.³² In fact, reshuffling the state council following the policy change of 2015 removed the family planning portfolio from the relevant government agency (State Council, 2018). Given the importance of achieving GDP per capita targets for cadres' career advancement and the senior status of DAC officials throughout the 1990s and 2000s, many government officials supported the one-child policy.³³

Advocacy and Policy Change: 1990s–2015

In this section, we explain why the Dandu Er'tai policy was adopted in 2013 and then was quickly changed to the two-child policy in 2015. We argue that these policy

changes can be explained by a combination of factors. First, there were external changes. Changes of economic structure and sociocultural values affected people's childbearing preferences. Labor shortages caused by an aging population affected economic development in the economic policy subsystem. A new Party leadership was open-minded about policy relaxation. Second, there were internal changes, including new information about the TFR; media exposure and public criticism of the problems involved in policy implementation; and information about policy relaxation's probable consequences. Third, minority coalitions had both policy-oriented learning and political learning about effective advocacy strategies. A relatively open policy process in China enabled minority coalitions to exploit the opportunities brought about by internal and external changes, mobilize resources (e.g., expert information, public support, access venues), and facilitate learning among top Party leaders. We elaborate these points in the following paragraphs.

As a result of over three decades of rapid industrialization and urbanization in China, people's fertility preferences declined to fewer than two children (Basten & Jiang, 2015). In 2012, the size of the labor force (i.e., that portion of the population between 15 and 64 years of age) declined for the first time since the 1980s (Chinanews Net, 2013). Members of the economic policy subsystem worried that the rapidly aging population would imperil the sustainability of economic growth and lead to a fiscal imbalance in pension expenditure.³⁴

New information reinforced MAC1's belief that policy relaxation was needed to reverse the slowdown in population growth. The TFR declined quickly in the 1990s and 2000s. The 2011 National Census revealed a very low TFR (1.18) (Guo, 2013). Media exposure of forced abortion and unlawful collection and misappropriation of the "social rearing fee" drew public attention to the problems of policy implementation (Caixin, 2012; Fazhi Zhoumo, 2011).³⁵ Over 2,000 couples that lost an only child demanded that the NHFPC compensate them for their loss (Wenwei Newspaper, 2014).

MAC1 emerged after a period of research undertaken and policy-oriented learning undergone by NFPC expert advisors. In the early 1990s, with a sharp decline in the TFR and under the influence of international communities, demographers started to question whether containing population growth should be a primary policy goal (Mu & Chen, 1995). Despite some minor policy changes,³⁶ however, public discussion about relaxing the birth control policy remained taboo. In the late 1990s, the NFPC commissioned four experts (Gu Baochang, Zhang Er'li, Guo Zhigang, and Wang Feng) to study the impact of birth control policy on the TFR.³⁷ When this research team found that the TFR permitted by the one-child policy was only 1.47 and that 63 percent of families across the country could only have one child, they worried that such a stringent policy would cause population problems in the long run.³⁸ In 2001, the four experts expanded their research team, organizing 16 demographers to evaluate the feasibility of policy relaxation. Their research concluded that the one-child policy caused many socioeconomic problems and suggested adopting both the Dandu Er'tai policy in 2005 and the two-child policy in 2010 (Gu, 2010). To convince policymakers and other experts, MAC1 studied the localities where the two-child policy had been in effect since the mid-1980s and demonstrated that policy relaxation would not cause the TFR to rebound (Gu, Song, Liu, Wang, & Jiang,

2008). A survey by MAC1 scholars in 2006–07 also showed that both women's average childbearing preference and the actual birth rate were lower than two, even where couples were permitted to have two children (Jiangsu Fertility Research Group, 2008). In other words, the one-child policy was no longer the sole cause of TFR decline (supporting information Appendix II).

MAC1 learned which advocacy strategy was more effective over time. MAC1 tried to persuade NFPC officials in a closed-door conference in 2004 but was unsuccessful.³⁹ A retired NFPC official who was a member of MAC1 then submitted policy recommendations, using personal ties, to the chair of the NPC Standing Committee in 2004 and to President Hu Jintao in 2007 but neither entreaty received a response.⁴⁰

MAC1 changed strategy and mobilized the support of other subsystem actors. This was possible because of the increasingly open policy process in China. The commercialization of the media and wider Internet use provided non-state actors with more open platforms on which to influence public opinion (Gang & Bandurski, 2011; Wang, 2008; Zhu, 2008). The Chinese government was under pressure to respond to societal voices channeled through existing and new access venues.⁴¹

MAC1 held three professional forums in Beijing in 2005, 2008, and 2012, promoting its policy positions among economists, sociologists, law scholars, and central government officials.⁴² Under the influence of MAC1, experts who were NPPCC and NPC representatives recommended policy relaxation to the NPC and NPPCC (Rujia Net, 2012).⁴³

MAC1 influenced public opinion through non-academic publications and media interviews. MAC1 members believed that public advocacy could indirectly influence superior Party leaders.⁴⁴ For instance, Liang Jianzhang and Huang Wenzheng wrote extensively on the Internet about problems with the birth control policy.⁴⁵ A MAC1 demographer wrote a popular book with Liang Jianzhang to educate the public about China's population problems (Liang & Li, 2012). To attract wider attention, MAC1 also published in the mass media the policy recommendation submitted to the central government in 2009.⁴⁶

In light of the DAC's resistance, MAC1 learned that effective advocacy should appeal to the interests of the Party and those of the NPFPC. MAC1 members argued that the policy had been politically and administratively costly, threatened the country's social and economic development, and contradicted the people-oriented governance ideals of the CPC (Gu et al., 2009). They suggested that family planning agencies could provide reproductive health services after policy relaxation (Chen, 2008). MAC1 even invited the DAC members Jiang Zhenghua and Wu Cangping to attend its professional forums (Zeng et al., 2010).

A critical moment came in 2009, when external and internal changes reinforced MAC1's position and increased their resources. In early 2009, enterprises across China found it hard to hire workers as a result of a labor shortage (Southern Weekly, 2011). The phenomenon confirmed MAC1's analysis that the actual TFR was much lower than the official TFR used by the NPFPC. As one MAC1 member put it, "in China's system, both Party leaders and the general public will not attend to policy problems until they become visible."⁴⁷ Influential economists also advocated policy relaxation.⁴⁸ The secondary beliefs (i.e., the timing of policy relaxation) of a core

DAC member, Tian Xueyuan, converged with those of MAC1. He suggested policy relaxation in a Party newspaper in 2009, on the grounds that the Party had held in 1980 that the one-child policy should only last for one generation (CPCCC, 1980; Tian, 2009).

Faced with new pressure, the NPFPC planned to experiment with the Dandu Er'tai policy in some localities in 2010 but shelved the plan out of concern that the TFR would rebound.⁴⁹ In 2011, the sixth national census revealed that the TFR had declined to 1.18. The NPFPC was under pressure to lower the official TFR to 1.64, for the first time since the national census TFR had continuously declined in the 1990s (Chen, 2015, p. 143). MAC1 continued to advocate through various venues. Members participated in a research project sponsored by an influential think tank affiliated with the State Council (China Development Research Foundation, 2012). Also in 2011, Peng Peiyun, an ally of MAC1, wrote to top Party leaders to recommend policy relaxation (Chen, 2015, pp. 259–63).

A MAC1 demographer persuaded the legal scholar Zhan Zhongle to join the advocacy campaign.⁵⁰ Zhan collected the signatures of 15 scholars and submitted a policy recommendation to the NPC Standing Committee and the State Council in 2012.⁵¹ They suggested removing the birth control policy on the grounds that it constrained citizens' right to give birth and violated the constitution. Appealing to the Party's political interests, they argued that policy relaxation would help to achieve the Party's goal of establishing rule of law (Zhan et al., 2012). A new Party leadership took power in late 2012 and adopted the Dandu Er'tai policy in 2013—a development not foreseen by the NHFPC.⁵² The policy change was implemented across the country within nine months in 2014 (Xinhua Net, 2015). Party General Secretary Xi Jinping was said to be aware of the feasibility and benefits of policy relaxation because of his governing experience in Zhejiang province from 2002 to 2007.⁵³ However, Party leaders were unsure about the consequence of policy relaxation and the official document cautiously announced a plan to “kick off the implementation of Dandu Er'tai policy and gradually improve the birth policy” (Xinhua News Agency, 2013).

The policy change in 2013 encouraged bottom-up advocacy by ordinary citizens. In November 2014, 5,000 parents who were excluded by the Dandu Er'tai policy signed letters to the NPC, the State Council, and the NHFPC, suggesting the adoption of the two-child policy so that all couples could equally enjoy the right to reproduction (Yicai Net, 2014).

The policy change of 2013 provided an opportunity for Party leaders to evaluate the effects of relaxation. MAC1 experts participated in evaluation research commissioned by the NHFPC and correctly predicted a small number of qualified couples applying to bear second children, which reinforced MAC1's belief that policy relaxation would not cause the TFR to rebound (Zhang & Wang, 2014). However, during the NHFPC's press conference, its expert advisor objected to further relaxing the policy immediately, citing the risk of a TFR rebound (NHFPC, 2014).

MAC1 advocated further policy change in light of the feedback on policy relaxation in 2013. MAC1 members held a forum in Shanghai in 2014 and collected 39 signatures from demographers and other experts in support of their policy recommendations. They suggested that, in light of the limited impact of the Dandu Er'tai

policy on the TFR, the central government should adopt the two-child policy immediately and overhaul the birth control regime in a timely manner. They argued that further policy relaxation would not only benefit the economy but also win public support for the Party Center (Gu et al., 2015). In January 2015, through Peng Peiyun's personal ties, MAC1 submitted the policy recommendations to Xi Jinping and Politburo Standing Committee members of the CPCCC, urging the Party to adopt the two-child policy as soon as possible (Gu et al., 2015).⁵⁴ For the first time, their recommendations received a reply. Xi Jinping wrote that importance should be attached to MAC1's recommendations, that the feasibility of adopting the two-child policy should be studied, and that objective advice should be provided for policy decisions. He instructed a think tank affiliated with the Xinhua News Agency, a ministerial agency under the State Council, to carry out an evaluation.⁵⁵

In March 2015, MAC2 wrote to the NPC and the State Council and again suggested eliminating the birth control policy, arguing that doing so would benefit economic development and social stability. The recommendation did not receive a response, but was published on popular Internet media (Zhan et al., 2015).⁵⁶

The Party was aware of the political benefits of further relaxing the birth control policy. In July 2015, Party official media reported that 48 percent of surveyed netizens supported the two-child policy (People Net, 2015). In November 2015, the Party decided to adopt the two-child policy across the country in spite of the NHFPC's resistance (CPCCC, 2015; Xinhua Net, 2014). Policy core beliefs of minority coalitions (mainly MAC1) influenced the decision. Xi Jinping explained that only 15.4 percent of qualified couples applied to bear a second child after the adoption of the Dandu Er'tai policy. He noted that people's childbearing preferences had changed significantly and that the TFR was significantly lower than the replacement level. He opined that adoption of the two-child policy could ameliorate labor shortages and population aging and serve the long-term development of the Chinese people (Xi, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

We partially confirmed Policy Change Hypothesis 1 and found that a combination of three pathways to policy change were operative in this case: external perturbations, internal perturbations, and policy-oriented learning by minority coalitions. A negotiated agreement between the dominant and minority coalitions was not observed in this case. Minority coalitions exploited opportunities brought about by internal and external perturbations to advocate policy changes, mobilize resources, and facilitate learning by top Party leaders.

We confirmed Policy Change Hypothesis 2. In this case, MAC1 identified internal and external changes (e.g., TFR decline and changes to people's childbearing preferences) and brought them to Party leaders' attention in the mid-2000s. However, the Party did not revise the core attributes of the birth control policy at that time. Minority coalitions continued to mobilize public support and lobby Party leaders. The major policy changes of 2013 and 2015 were imposed by new Party leaders. They learned—both from MAC1's advocacy and from feedback generated by the policy change of 2013—that further policy relaxation was an adaptation to internal and external changes and would serve the Party's political interests.

This study identified both a dominant coalition and minority coalitions and dynamics between the two in the birth control policy subsystem over three and a half decades in China, phenomena which have scarcely been studied. Under the lens of the ACF, the case produced findings comparable to those produced by applications of the framework to cases in Western democracies. Having observed a typical case of centralized policymaking, the study draws generalizable conclusions about policy processes in China and provides theoretical and empirical insights for policy studies in other authoritarian regimes.

Similar to those in democratic systems (Nohrstedt & Weible, 2010; Sato, 1999; Zafont & Sabatier, 2004), the dominant coalition in this case defended policy core beliefs when external perturbations occurred. Unlike in democratic systems where a moderate level of conflict facilitates cross-coalition learning and belief convergence (Meijerink, 2005; Weible & Sabatier, 2009), little policy-oriented learning between opposing coalitions took place in this case, as was also found in the politics of dam-building in China (Han et al., 2014). In addition, despite MAC1's efforts to accommodate DAC's interests, there was no negotiated agreement between the opposing coalitions. This partly demonstrated the resourcefulness of the DAC and partly reflected the lack of transparency and public scrutiny of government operations in authoritarian China. The DAC protected its material interests in this case, a finding similar to the study of the state sector's ownership reform (Fan, 1994).

Similar to cases in democratic systems, the exploitation of external perturbations by minority coalitions was a mechanism for major policy changes in this case (Albright, 2011; Nohrstedt, 2008; Zafont & Sabatier, 2004). Economic structural changes in China provided resources and opportunities for minority coalitions to adopt the strategies found in democratic systems, such as using expert-based information to convince coalition allies and influence public opinion (Weible, 2008). This case revealed that a higher degree of openness and consensus was required for policy change than would have been the case in pre-economic-reform China.

We found that MAC1 began as a group assisting a government agency in carrying out policy research but later formed alternative policy core beliefs that challenged the agency's positions. This phenomenon may not be unique to China, in light of the fact that a previous study suggested coalition groups sought information from resourceful government actors of the opposing coalitions (Weible & Sabatier, 2005). This case confirms that there is more public space for discussing policy alternatives in China today than three decades ago (Gu & Goldman, 2004; Hao, 2003).

We identified two minority coalitions that both supported policy relaxation but differed in areas of deep core and policy core belief, access venues, and advocacy strategies. Such differences were related to the differing areas of expertise of their members. Our findings confirm that it is possible to identify subcoalitions or more than one coalition within opposing coalitions based on differences in areas of policy core belief (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Weible, 2005). Future research may verify to what extent coalitions' differing areas of expertise affect their beliefs, expert information, access venues, and advocacy strategies.

Similar to those in Western democracies (Nohrstedt, 2011; Sabatier & Weible, 2007), minority coalitions in this case sought to access alternative policy venues to

influence decision makers. What is interesting is that they persistently sought access decision-making sovereignty through both formal and informal channels.⁵⁷

In Western democracies, it is quite common for different political parties to belong to opposing coalitions (Ingold & Varone, 2011; Nohrstedt, 2011). In the one-party regime of China, minority coalitions refrained from attacking the Party's leadership but appealed to the Party's political interests when advocating policy change. They sought to ally themselves with Party leaders who were sympathetic to their core beliefs. Such strategies were identified by previous applications of the ACF to China as well (Han et al., 2014).

Consistent with the literature (Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 201), the present case showed that the openness and plurality of China's policy processes were still limited in comparison with those of democratic countries. For nearly a decade, minority coalitions were led by experts. This finding is consistent with cases of shale oil and gas development insofar as coalition actors were less diverse in China than they tend to be in democratic countries (Heikkila et al., 2018). Even for these well-connected experts, access venues were limited. Only after the policy change of 2013 did any citizen-led coalition advocate policy relaxation. Minority coalitions also refrained from using guidance instruments that are common in democratic systems, such as civil litigation, fiscal maneuvering and the exertion of legal authority over administrative agencies by influencing legislatures, placing supporters in positions of formal legal authority, and organizing public demonstrations and electoral campaigns (Sabatier, 1998; Sabatier & Weible, 2007).

Scholars who are interested in applying the ACF to cases involving China's policy processes may consider using elite interviews and archival analysis to collect data. These methods are particularly suitable for studying closed policymaking processes that involve senior Party leaders. Triangulation among different interviews and archival data is essential in ensuring the validity of the data.

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Notes

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1. The target population of the Dandu Er'tai policy change was 11 million women of childbearing age. The target population of the two-children-per-couple policy change was 69 million women of childbearing age (Liu & Tang, 2006).

2. TFR refers to the average number of children that would be born per woman if all women lived to the end of their childbearing years.
3. "Policy relaxation" throughout the paper refers to "the relaxation of the one-child policy to allow a couple to have two children."
4. Deep core beliefs are fundamental, normative, and ontological axioms that are found across policy subsystems; policy core beliefs are fundamental policy positions concerning the basic strategies for achieving core values within the subsystem; secondary aspects of policy are the instrumental decisions and information searches necessary to implement the policy core (Sabatier, 1998).
5. Snowballing strategy is a way of accessing potential respondents through the contacts of interviewees (Richards, 1996). In this study, seven respondents accepted our interview invitation after they were introduced to us by other interviewees. Another eleven interviewees accepted our invitation without being introduced by other interviewees.
6. The NPPCC is a consultative forum in which policy debates are staged and policy proposals are submitted for government consideration. The NPPCC has no formal legal authority to enact policy (Saich, 2011).
7. At the national level, they include the National Planning Commission (before 1998), National Development Planning Commission (1998–2003), and the National Development and Reform Commission (2003–present).
8. The public security bureaus are responsible for registering newborns. Without registration, these babies are unable to enjoy basic public services such as education and health care. Before 2016, couples needed to pay a sanction fee before registering babies whose births violated the policy. The practice was abolished after the policy relaxation of 2015 and all babies are now able to register with the government (State Council, 2015b).
9. More details can be found in the section "Advocacy and Policy Stability: 1980s–2013."
10. The national family planning agency has been restructured and renamed a few times, as the NFPC (1981–2003), the NPFPC (2003–13), and the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) (2013–18) (State Council, 2018; Xinhua News, 2013).
11. Interview with a former NFPC official, 11EL, May 7, 2017.
12. According to a senior demographer, it was difficult to publish academic papers about birth control policy in the 1980s. Even in the late 1990s, the National Population Family Planning Director instructed the China Population Study Association that no papers on birth control policy should be published in its journal. Interview 12GZ, April 29, 2017. See also Greenhalgh (2001).
13. More details can be found in the section "Advocacy and Policy Change: 1990s–2015."
14. The ACF literature is yet to see consensus on how to mark such coalitions. In some cases, such coalitions were defined as subcoalitions of one coalition (Weible & Sabatier, 2005). In other cases, they were categorized as separate coalitions (Matti & Sandrom, 2011).
15. For example, Gu Baochang was a researcher at the China population research center and China family planning association, which were sponsored by the NFPC. Zeng Yi and Guo Zhigang were researchers at Peking University. Zuo Xuejin was a demographer at the Shanghai Social Science Academy. All of them were appointed to the NFPC and NPFPC expert committees (CFPY Editorial Committee, 1999, 2006).
16. For example, NPFC Director (1988–98) and State Councilor (1993–98) Peng Peiyun was an ally of MAC1 and submitted its policy recommendations to top Party leaders. See the section "Advocacy and Policy Change: 1990s–2015."
17. Interview 10LJ, July 26, 2015. See also Zhan et al. (2012) and Zhan et al. (2015).
18. Interview 10LJ, July 26, 2015. Guo Daohui, a legal scholar who worked in the research office of the first NPC lawmaking work committee (1979–87), and signatory to MAC2's policy recommendation in 2015, stressed that the Party should not have superior authority over the NPC in lawmaking processes according to the constitution (Guo, 2017).
19. Interview 9LZ, July 21, 2015.
20. Song Jian was a State Councilor from 1986 to 1993 and Vice-Chair of the NPPCC from 1998 to 2003 (People Net, 2002).

21. Tian Xueyuan was a demographer in China's Social Science Academy and a member of the NFPC and NPFPC expert committees (CFPY Editorial Committee, 1996; CFPFY Editorial Committee, 2006).
22. Interview 7GB, June 30, 2015; interview 5ZX, June 21, 2015. Even experts such as Liang Zhongtang and Ma Yingtong, both of whom advocated a more relaxed birth control policy, believed that China's population growth should be curbed then (Greenhalgh, 2008; Liang, 1980; Ma, 1988).
23. Interview 12GZ, April 28, 2017.
24. A TFR of about 2.1 children per woman is the replacement-level fertility rate. World Health Organization. http://www.searo.who.int/entity/health_situation_trends/data/chi/TFR/en/.
25. Interview 13ZG, May 25, 2017; interview 5ZX, June 21, 2015.
26. Jiang Zhenghua was a system engineer and former Deputy Director of the NFPC (1991–99) and Deputy Chair of the NPC Standing Committee (1999–2007) (People Net, 2016).
27. Interview 7GB, June 30, 2015.
28. Interview 13ZG, May 25, 2017.
29. Interview 13ZG, May 25, 2017.
30. Interview 12GZ, April 28, 2017.
31. Chen En'fu was also a representative of the NPC (2008–12). http://mag.cnyes.com/Content/20090323/c298c5eb0d9b4407b5302ff713941118_4.shtml.
32. The number of employees in family planning agencies across the country grew from 93,447 in 1985 to 508,713 in 2005 (CFPY Editorial Committee, 1986; CFPFY Editorial Committee, 2007). The family planning program's expenditures grew from 3.19 billion CNY in 1995 to 18.11 billion CNY in 2005 (CFPY Editorial Committee, 1996; CFPFY Editorial Committee, 2006). In Hebei province, from 1990 to 1995, sanction fees for violating the policy contributed to over 80 percent of the total revenue for family planning programs (Gao & Du, 2002).
33. Interview 5ZX, June 4, 2017; interview 11EL, May 7, 2017.
34. See media interviews with Director General of the China Social Security Fund, Dai Xianglong, and the labor economist and NPC Standing Committee member Caifang (Dai, 2013; Yangzi Daily, 2012).
35. The "social rearing fee" was collected by the family planning agencies from couples who gave birth to children not permitted by the birth control policy. However, the amount to be collected and its appropriation varied in different localities and was not transparent (China Youth Daily, 2013). In 2012, for the first time, the National Audit Office audited the collection and appropriation of the social rearing fee in 45 counties and nine provinces and found pervasive practices of forging birth figures, misappropriation, and unlawful fee collection (People Net, 2013).
36. For example, the NFPC reformed the provision of birth control methods to be more service oriented (Gu, 2002).
37. Peng Peiyun was then Director of the NFPC and became an ally of MAC1 in the 2000s. Gu Baochang was then a researcher in the research institute affiliated with the NFPC. He led the advocacy of MAC1.
38. However, the NFPC regarded the findings as politically sensitive and did not allow them to be published. The research results were allowed to be published in 2003 when the NFPC aimed to respond to foreign criticism that China's one-child policy was not stringently implemented. Interview 13ZG, May 25, 2017. See Guo, Zhang, Gu, and Wang (2004).
39. Interview 7GB, June 30, 2015.
40. Interview 11EL 7 May, 2017.
41. As examples of new access venues: government officials anticipated more public demand for government information after the Regulations on Open Government Information were passed in 2007 (Piotrowski, Zhang, Lin, & Wenxuan, 2009); statistics bureaus at all levels of governments conducted regular surveys to gauge public opinion on policy problems and government performance; and People's Congresses consulted experts and citizens when crafting legislation and regulations in accordance with the Legislation Law of 2000 (He & Thøgersen, 2010).
42. MAC1 invited current and retired officials from the NPFPC, the National Old Age Working Commission, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, the NPC Standing Committee, the NPPC Standing Committee, the State Council Policy Research Office, and the National Statistics Bureau, among others, to attend the forums (Zeng, Gu, & Guo, 2010; Zeng, Gu, Liang, & Guo, 2013).

43. Interview 19LJ, July 26, 2015; interview 13ZG, May 25, 2017.
44. Interview 11EL, May 7, 2017; interview 15WF, May 4, 2017.
45. See Liang Jianzhang and Huang Wenzheng's columns at <http://www.cnpop.org/column/ljz/> and <http://opinion.caixin.com/2017-04-17/101079405.html>. Accessed February 28, 2018.
46. Interview 2CY, June 16, 2015.
47. Interview 5ZX, June 21, 2015.
48. For example, the director of Qinghua University's national condition research center, Hu Angang, advocated for policy change in an official newspaper (Hu, 2009). Hu Angang participated in MAC1's Beijing forums held in 2005 and 2008 (Zeng, Li, Gu, & Lin, 2006; Zeng et al., 2010).
49. Interview 2CY, June 16, 2015; interview 13GZ, May 25, 2017.
50. Zhan Zhongle was appointed to the NPFPC population and family planning legislation expert committee in 1998 and the NPFPC comprehensive reform expert committee in 2008 (Zhan, 2013).
51. Zhan Zhongle was involved in drafting the *Population and Family Planning Law*, passed in 2000, and participated in MAC1's Beijing forum held in 2012 (Zeng et al., 2013). Interview 10LJ, July 26, 2015.
52. Interview 8LJ, July 18, 2015; interview 5ZX, June 21, 2015; interview 7GB, June 30, 2015.
53. When Xi Jinping was Party Secretary of the Zhejiang provincial Party committee, the highest ranking official in Zhejiang, Zhejiang's government supported studying the feasibility of policy relaxation and favored the proposal of the Dandu Er'tai policy in 2010 (Caijing, 2010). A demographer involved in the study invited two MAC1 demographers to make suggestions for improving the study. Zhejiang province's proposal, however, was rejected by the NPFPC. Later, Zhejiang was the first province to implement the Dandu Er'tai policy after its announcement. Interview 13ZG, May 25, 2017; interview 11EL, May 7, 2017; interview 19WY, August 28, 2018.
54. According to a MAC1 member, their recommendation letter was initially filtered out by the Office of the State Council. The letter was informally delivered to Xi Jinping through his father, Xi Zhongxun, a retired senior Party leader. Xi Zhongxun obtained the letter from Peng Peiyun, whose spouse Wang Hanbing was a close friend of Xi Zhongxun. Interview 11EL, May 7, 2017.
55. Interview 7GB, June 22, 2016.
56. Interview 10LJ, July 26, 2015.
57. Peng Peiyun's personal connections to top Party leaders provided an informal channel for MAC1's policy recommendations to reach decision makers. By contrast, MAC2 sought to access decision makers through formal channels such as the State Council and NPC.

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