

AN UNPRODUCTIVE IDEA: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON U.P.'S NEW POPULATION POLICY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

Incentives and penalties form an integral component of the measures to control population growth, [announced by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath](#) on Sunday. These steps are aimed at reducing U.P.'s total fertility rate (TFR), recorded as 2.7 by the National Family Health Survey-4 in 2016, a figure only lower than that of neighbouring Bihar (3.1 as of 2020 in NFHS-5). Aims in this direction — increasing the rate of modern contraceptive prevalence, male contraception, decreasing maternal mortality and infant mortality rates significantly by 2026 — are, on the face of it, in line with what was stressed at the [Cairo International Conference on Population and Development](#) in 1994. The Cairo Consensus called for a promotion of reproductive rights, empowering women, universal education, maternal and infant health to untangle the knotty issue of poverty and high fertility. But rather than taking steps in this direction, the Government seems to have taken the beaten path of a mixture of incentives and penalties to tackle what is a socio-economic issue as a demographic one. In a [draft Uttar Pradesh Population \(Control, Stabilisation and Welfare\) Bill, 2021](#), the Government aims to incentivise one-child families and reward those with two children with perks in government schemes, rebates in taxes and loans, and cash awards if family planning is done among other sops. Disincentives for those with more than two children include denial of subsidies and welfare benefits, a bar on applying for government jobs and taking part in local elections. Assam, also led by the BJP, is mulling a similar policy.

The incentives/disincentives approach has been denounced in the past by the National Human Rights Commission after such measures were introduced by several States in the 1990s and 2000s, i.e., Haryana, undivided Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The [Supreme Court, in 2003, upheld a Haryana government law](#) barring persons with more than two children from contesting local body polls, but the legal grounding of the moves impinging upon the informed choice of the individual remained questionable. Empirical studies of coercive measures have shown their discrimination against marginalised people in particular and with no discernible effect on population control, while more substantive poverty reduction schemes and economic reforms have raised labour productivity and employment opportunities, allowed families to empower women, and reduced fertility rates as rational choices. India's TFRs have been reducing substantially across most States, even in U.P. and Bihar with the highest TFRs. To hasten the drop to replacement levels of fertility, States should tackle the socio-economic issues confronting India's largely youthful demography rather than seeking neo-Malthusian approaches on population control.

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