

China's one child family policy Handbook

China's One Child Family Policy

China's One Child Family Policy: A Complex Legacy of Social Engineering

China's one child family policy was one of the most significant social experiments of

the 20th century, shaping the demographic and cultural landscape of the world's most populous nation for over three decades. Instituted in 1979, this policy aimed to curb China's rapidly growing population, which officials feared could hinder economic progress and strain limited resources. While the policy achieved considerable success in slowing population growth, it also sparked widespread debate, controversy, and unintended consequences that continue to affect Chinese society today.

The Origins and Objectives of China's One Child Family Policy

In the decades following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the country experienced a population boom. By the late 1970s, China's population had surpassed 900 million, and projections warned of even more explosive growth. The government's solution was to implement a strict population control policy: each family would be limited to having only one child.

The policy's primary goal was to alleviate poverty, reduce the burden on the state's resources, and accelerate economic development. China's leadership believed that slowing population growth would improve living standards, increase educational

opportunities, and facilitate modernization efforts.

How the Policy Was Enforced

Enforcement of the one child policy varied across regions and over time, but it generally involved a mix of incentives and penalties. Families who complied were often rewarded with benefits like better access to healthcare, education, and housing. Those who violated the policy faced fines, social ostracism, and in some cases, forced abortions or sterilizations.

Local officials were responsible for monitoring births, and community committees played a role in ensuring compliance. The policy was especially strict in urban areas, while rural families sometimes received exceptions, particularly if their first child was a girl.

Social and Demographic Impacts of the One Child Family Policy

The one child family policy dramatically altered China's demographic profile. It is estimated that the policy prevented approximately 400 million births, a staggering figure that undoubtedly slowed the nation's population growth rate.

Gender Imbalance and Its Consequences

One of the most discussed side effects was the skewed sex ratio at birth. A cultural preference for sons, combined with the policy's restrictions, led to widespread sex-selective abortions and underreporting of female births. This created a gender imbalance with millions more males than females in the population.

This imbalance has had ripple effects, including difficulties for men finding spouses, increased social tensions, and challenges related to aging populations without enough

younger women to support family structures.

The Aging Population Dilemma

While the policy slowed population growth, it also accelerated the aging of China's population. With fewer children born each year, the proportion of elderly citizens has increased rapidly. This demographic shift poses serious challenges for China's social welfare system, healthcare infrastructure, and labor market.

The '4-2-1' family structure emerged from this demographic trend: one child supporting two parents and four grandparents. This has placed enormous financial and emotional pressure on the younger generation.

Economic and Cultural Repercussions

Beyond demographics, the one child family policy influenced China's economy and cultural fabric in profound ways.

Labor Force and Economic Growth

Initially, the policy helped to create a demographic dividend—a period when the working-age population grows larger relative to dependents. This contributed to China's rapid economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, as the population aged and birth rates remained low, concerns arose about labor shortages and reduced consumer demand. The shrinking workforce threatens to slow China's economic momentum in the coming decades.

Changing Family Dynamics

The policy also reshaped family structures and traditional values. With many families having only one child, the emphasis on that child's success intensified. The single-child generation often faced high parental expectations and pressure.

Additionally, the traditional Chinese value of large, multigenerational families was challenged, with fewer siblings and relatives around to share responsibilities and provide support.

The Gradual Relaxation and End of the Policy

Recognizing the mounting social and economic problems, the Chinese government began to relax the policy in the 2010s. In 2013, couples were allowed to have two children if one parent was an only child, and by 2016, the policy officially shifted to allow all families to have two children.

Despite these changes, the birth rate did not increase as much as expected, partly due to the high cost of living, urbanization, and changing social attitudes toward family size.

In 2021, China further loosened restrictions, allowing families to have up to three children.

This marked a significant policy reversal and reflected the urgency with which the government is addressing demographic challenges.

What This Means for China's Future

The legacy of the one child family policy continues to influence China's development trajectory. Policymakers are now focusing on supporting families through improved childcare, education reforms, and financial incentives to encourage higher birth rates.

The experience of this policy offers important lessons about the complexities of population

control and the unintended consequences that can arise from even well-intentioned social engineering.

Understanding China's One Child Family Policy in a Global

Context

China's approach to population control has been closely studied worldwide. It stands as one of the most extensive attempts to manage population growth through government intervention and has sparked debates on human rights, reproductive freedom, and state authority.

While the policy brought short-term demographic benefits, it also raised ethical questions about coercion and individual rights. Many countries now emphasize voluntary family planning and education rather than strict mandates.

Lessons for Other Nations

For countries grappling with population growth or decline, China's experience highlights the importance of balancing demographic goals with respect for human rights. It underscores how cultural preferences, economic factors, and social support systems play critical roles in shaping family planning outcomes.

Moreover, China's policy demonstrates that population control is not a one-size-fits-all solution and that long-term consequences must be carefully considered.

China's one child family policy remains a powerful example of how government policy can profoundly reshape a nation's demographic trajectory, economy, and society. Its complex

legacy offers insights not only into China's past but also into the broader challenges of managing population dynamics in an ever-changing world.

Question

Answer

What was the main goal of

China's One-Child Policy?

The main goal of China's One-Child Policy, implemented in 1979, was to control population growth and alleviate social, economic, and environmental problems caused by overpopulation.

How long was the One-Child

Policy in effect in China?

China's One-Child Policy was officially in effect from 1979 until it was relaxed in 2015 and replaced by the Two-Child Policy.

What were some of the

consequences of the One-

Child Policy?

Consequences included a skewed gender ratio due to a cultural preference for sons, an aging population, labor shortages, and human rights issues such as forced

abortions and sterilizations.

Why did China end the One-

Child Policy?

China ended the One-Child Policy due to concerns about the shrinking workforce, aging population, and the need to sustain economic growth and social welfare systems.

What policies replaced the

One-Child Policy in China?

After ending the One-Child Policy, China introduced the Two-Child Policy in 2016, and later the Three-Child Policy in 2021 to encourage higher birth rates.

How did the One-Child

Policy affect family

structures in China?

The policy led to many families having only one child, resulting in the '4-2-1' family structure, where one child supports two parents and four grandparents, creating economic and social pressures.

Were there any exceptions

to China's One-Child Policy?

Yes, exceptions included ethnic minorities, rural families whose first child was a girl, and in some cases, if both parents were only children themselves, allowing a second child.

What impact did the One-Child Policy have on gender imbalance in China?

The policy exacerbated gender imbalance due to a cultural preference for male children, leading to millions more males than females and social challenges related to marriage and demographics.

China's One Child Family Policy: A Comprehensive Analysis

china's one child family policy stands as one of the most significant social engineering

experiments of the 20th century. Introduced by the Chinese government in 1979, this policy aimed to curb the country's rapid population growth to alleviate economic and environmental pressures. Over its decades-long enforcement, the policy has generated extensive debate regarding its social, economic, and demographic impacts. This article delves into the background, implementation, consequences, and eventual relaxation of china's one child family policy, providing a critical examination of its legacy.

Historical Context and Implementation

The roots of China's one child family policy lie in the population boom following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. By the late 1970s, China's population had surged past 900 million, sparking concerns over resource scarcity, unemployment, and poverty. In response, the Chinese Communist Party introduced the one child policy as a means to control population growth and accelerate economic development.

The policy mandated that most urban couples were allowed to have only one child, while rural families sometimes received exceptions, such as permission for a second child if the first was a girl. Ethnic minorities were often exempted from the one-child restriction altogether. Enforcement mechanisms varied by region and included incentives such as financial rewards and social benefits for compliance, alongside penalties including fines and employment consequences for violations.

Key Features and Enforcement Methods

China's one child family policy was characterized by a combination of strict regulations and localized implementation strategies:

Birth Quotas: Local governments were tasked with imposing birth limits, with

1. Officials held accountable for meeting targets.

Incentives for Compliance: Families adhering to the policy could receive

2. monetary bonuses, priority in housing, education, and healthcare services.

Penalties for Non-Compliance: These ranged from hefty fines, often called

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social maintenance fees, to job loss and restricted access to public services.

Mandatory Birth Control Measures: In certain cases, forced abortions and

4.

sterilizations were reported, especially during the policy's early years.

These enforcement practices were not uniform and depended heavily on local authorities'

interpretation and willingness to implement the policy rigorously.

Demographic and Social Impacts

The demographic effects of China's one child family policy are profound and multifaceted.

Most immediately, the policy contributed to a marked decline in China's birth rate.

According to the World Bank, China's fertility rate dropped from approximately 2.75

children per woman in 1979 to around 1.6 by the mid-1990s, well below the replacement

rate of 2.1.

Population Aging and Gender Imbalance

One of the unintended consequences of the policy has been the acceleration of population

aging. With fewer children born each year, the proportion of elderly citizens in China's

population has risen sharply. This demographic shift poses significant challenges for social

welfare systems, labor markets, and economic growth.

Equally concerning has been the skewed sex ratio at birth. Traditional cultural preferences

for male offspring, combined with the one-child restriction, led to widespread sex-

selective abortions and infanticide. At its peak, the sex ratio in some regions reached as high as 120 boys for every 100 girls, compared to the natural global average of approximately 105 boys to 100 girls. This imbalance has long-term social repercussions, potentially increasing social instability due to a surplus of unmarried men.

Psychological and Family Dynamics

China's one child family policy also restructured family dynamics. The phenomenon of '4-2-1' families—four grandparents, two parents, and one child—became commonplace, placing significant caregiving burdens on the only child. This dynamic has raised concerns about mental health, social pressure, and the sustainability of traditional family support systems.

Economic Considerations and Policy Revisions

Economically, the policy played a role in China's rapid development by reducing dependency ratios during the initial implementation period. However, as the population aged and the labor force shrank, the policy began to be seen as a constraint on sustained economic growth.

Labor Force and Productivity

As the number of working-age individuals declined, some economists warned of a looming 'demographic dividend' turning into a demographic burden. Fewer young workers translating to a smaller labor pool could hamper China's competitiveness and innovation potential. In response, the government gradually relaxed the policy.

From One Child to Two and Beyond

By 2013, the Chinese government allowed couples where at least one partner was an only child to have two children. This was further expanded in 2015 with the official introduction of the "two-child policy," permitting all families to have two children. Despite these relaxations, birth rates have not surged dramatically, suggesting deeper societal shifts such as urbanization, rising living costs, and changing attitudes toward family size.

Legacy and Ethical Debates

The legacy of China's one child family policy remains controversial. While it arguably contributed to economic modernization and poverty reduction, it also involved significant human rights controversies. Forced abortions, sterilizations, and the suppression of reproductive freedoms have been widely criticized by international human rights organizations.

Ethical Concerns and International Perspectives

The policy's enforcement methods have been condemned for infringing on personal liberties. Moreover, the social engineering aspect of controlling family size at the state level raises complex ethical questions about the balance between collective welfare and individual rights.

Long-Term Societal Effects

As China navigates the demographic challenges wrought by the policy, questions persist about its long-term societal effects. The gender imbalance has led to concerns about human trafficking and social unrest, while the aging population threatens to overwhelm

pension systems and healthcare infrastructure.

Conclusion

China's one child family policy represents a landmark in demographic policy, showcasing both the capacity and limits of governmental intervention in population control. Its impacts continue to shape Chinese society, economy, and policy decisions decades after its inception. As the nation adapts to a post-one-child policy era, the lessons learned from this period remain critical for understanding the complex interplay between population regulation and social development.

one-child policy, China population control, family planning China, birth restrictions China, demographic impact China, Chinese fertility policy, population regulation China, social effects one-child policy, Chinese government family policy, two-child policy China

studying public policy policy cycles and policy subsystems

studying public policy policy cycles and policy subsystems is essential for understanding how governments and organizations develop, implement, and evaluate policies that affect societies. These concepts are fundamental in the field of public administration and political science, providing frameworks to analyze the complex processes involved in policymaking. By examining policy cycles and subsystems, scholars and practitioners can better grasp the dynamic nature of policy development, identify key actors and stages, and improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of policies.

Understanding Policy Cycles

Policy cycles serve as a conceptual model that describes the sequential stages through which public policies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated. This cyclical view emphasizes that policymaking is a continuous process, with feedback loops that influence future decisions.

Stages of the Policy Cycle

Most models of the policy cycle include the following stages:

- **Agenda Setting:** Identifying issues that require government attention. This stage involves problem recognition, public opinion, media influence, and political priorities.
- **Policy Formulation:** Developing options and proposals to address the identified issues. This involves research, advocacy, debates, and the drafting of policy proposals.
- **Decision-Making:** Selecting a specific policy option through political processes such as voting, negotiations, or executive orders.
- **Implementation:** Putting the chosen policy into action through administrative agencies, regulations, and programs.
- **Evaluation:** Assessing the policy's effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. Feedback from this stage can lead to policy revision or termination.
- **Termination or Revision:** Modifying or ending policies based on evaluation outcomes or changing circumstances, thus restarting the cycle.

This cyclical process highlights that policy development is not linear but iterative, with each stage influencing the others.

Importance of the Policy Cycle Model

Understanding the policy cycle allows policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders to:

- Identify critical points where influence can be exerted.
- Recognize the role of various actors at different stages.
- Design more effective policy interventions.
- Improve accountability by clarifying responsibilities within each stage.
- Anticipate potential obstacles and delays in policy development.

Policy Subsystems: The Microcosm of Policymaking

While the policy cycle provides a macro-level understanding, policy subsystems focus on the more localized, specialized networks of actors involved in specific policy areas. These subsystems are the arenas where policy actors—such as government agencies, interest groups, media, and experts—interact, negotiate, and influence policy outcomes.

Defining Policy Subsystems

A policy subsystem is a relatively stable network of individuals and organizations that share an interest in a particular policy area. These subsystems operate within a defined issue or set of issues, often with dedicated resources, routines, and norms that shape policymaking.

Components of Policy Subsystems

Key elements that make up policy subsystems include:

- **Policy Actors:** Individuals and organizations such as government officials, interest groups, advocacy organizations, media representatives, and experts.
- **Institutions and Rules:** Formal and informal norms that guide interactions and decision-making within the subsystem.
- **Resources:** Information, funding, expertise, and political support that actors exchange or compete for.
- **Issues and Agenda:** The specific policy problems that the subsystem addresses and prioritizes.

The Role of Policy Subsystems in Policymaking

Policy subsystems play a critical role by:

- Shaping the agenda through advocacy and lobbying.
- Providing technical expertise and information to policymakers.
- Negotiating compromises among diverse interests.
- Influencing the content of policies and the implementation process.
- Acting as gatekeepers that filter issues into the broader policy agenda.

The Relationship Between Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems

Though distinct concepts, policy cycles and policy subsystems are interconnected. The policy cycle provides the overarching framework for understanding the stages of policymaking, while policy subsystems represent the micro-level arenas where specific actors interact throughout these stages.

How Policy Subsystems Influence the Policy Cycle

Interest groups and other actors within a subsystem can:

- Push issues onto the policy agenda.

- Shape policy options during formulation.
- Mobilize resources during decision-making.
- Monitor and influence implementation.
- Conduct evaluations and suggest revisions based on feedback.

Feedback Between the Two Concepts

The dynamic interplay between policy cycles and subsystems can be summarized as:

- Subsystems are active during each stage of the cycle, influencing outcomes.
- The policy cycle provides the structure within which subsystems operate.
- Changes in the subsystem, such as the emergence of new interest groups, can alter the course of the policy cycle.
- Conversely, the outcomes from the cycle, like policy success or failure, can reshape the subsystem's composition and priorities.

Applications and Significance of Studying Policy Cycles and Subsystems

Understanding these concepts is vital for effective policy analysis and development. It allows stakeholders to:

- Identify key actors and their interests.
- Develop strategies for influencing policy outcomes.
- Anticipate resistance or support at different stages.
- Design more participatory and inclusive policymaking processes.
- Improve the adaptability and resilience of policies in changing political landscapes.

Practical Implications for Policymakers and Advocates

Those engaged in policymaking can leverage insights from policy cycles and subsystems by:

- Mapping relevant actors and their influence.
- Timing advocacy efforts to coincide with critical stages.
- Building coalitions within subsystems.
- Employing tailored communication strategies.
- Monitoring feedback to refine policies iteratively.

Conclusion

Studying public policy through the lenses of policy cycles and policy subsystems provides a comprehensive understanding of how policies are crafted, implemented, and refined. Recognizing the stages of the policy cycle helps clarify the process, while analyzing policy subsystems reveals the complex networks of actors and interests that shape outcomes. Together, these frameworks empower policymakers, scholars, and advocates to navigate the policymaking environment more effectively, ultimately leading to more informed, responsive, and sustainable policies that meet societal needs.

Studying public policy, policy cycles, and policy subsystems provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how policies are formulated, implemented, and evolved within complex societal systems. These concepts are foundational to the field of public administration and political science, offering insights into the dynamic processes that shape governmental decisions and societal outcomes. As policymakers navigate an intricate web of interests, institutions, and external influences, analyzing policy cycles and subsystems allows scholars and practitioners alike to decode the patterns, bottlenecks, and opportunities inherent in policy development. This article aims to explore these interconnected concepts in depth, highlighting their significance, features, advantages, and limitations.

Understanding Public Policy

Public policy refers to the deliberate course of action taken by government authorities to address public issues. It encompasses laws, regulations, decisions, and actions designed to influence societal behavior and outcomes. Studying public policy involves understanding the processes, actors, and contexts that shape policy choices.

Features of Public Policy:

- **Intentionality:** Policies are purposefully designed to solve specific problems.
- **Authoritative:** They are created and enforced by legitimate government institutions.
- **Dynamic:** Policies evolve over time due to changing circumstances, political pressures, and societal needs.
- **Multifaceted:** They involve multiple stakeholders, interests, and institutions.

Policy Cycles: The Framework for Understanding Policy Development

The policy cycle model offers a systematic way to analyze how policies are formulated, adopted, implemented, evaluated, and modified. It emphasizes a series of sequential stages, although in practice, these stages often overlap or recur.

Stages of the Policy Cycle

- Agenda Setting: Identifying and prioritizing issues that require governmental action.
- Policy Formulation: Developing possible solutions, proposals, or courses of action.
- Decision-Making: Choosing among alternative policies or approaches.
- Policy Implementation: Putting the chosen policy into practice through various agencies and programs.
- Policy Evaluation: Assessing the effectiveness and impact of the policy.
- Policy Termination or Revision: Modifying or discontinuing policies based on evaluation outcomes.

Advantages of the Policy Cycle Model:

- Clarity: Breaks down complex processes into manageable stages.
- Analytical Utility: Facilitates systematic analysis of policy processes.
- Educational Tool: Helps students and practitioners understand policy development.

Limitations and Criticisms:

- Oversimplification: Real-world policy processes are often non-linear, iterative, and messy.
- Stage Assumption: Not all policies go through all stages sequentially.
- Neglect of Power Dynamics: Does not explicitly account for influence, conflicts, or power struggles among stakeholders.
- Context Ignorance: Less effective in explaining policy change driven by external shocks or crises.

Despite these limitations, the policy cycle remains a foundational concept in public policy analysis, offering a useful starting point for understanding the policymaking process.

Policy Subsystems: The Microcosm of Policy Dynamics

While the policy cycle provides a macro-level view, policy subsystems focus on the more localized, specialized networks of actors and institutions involved in specific policy areas. A policy subsystem is a relatively stable network of governmental agencies, interest groups, experts, and media that concentrate on particular policy issues.

Features of Policy Subsystems

- Specialization: Focused on specific issues such as healthcare, education, or environmental regulation.
- Stable Networks: Comprise recurring actors who interact regularly.
- Issue-Driven: Dynamics are centered around particular policy problems.
- Influence and Power: Certain actors or coalitions hold significant sway over policy outcomes.

Key Actors in Policy Subsystems

- Government agencies and officials responsible for policy implementation.
- Interest groups and advocacy organizations representing various societal interests.
- Policy experts, researchers, and think tanks providing technical knowledge.
- Media outlets shaping public discourse and influencing policymaker priorities.

Features and Dynamics:

- Persistence: Subsystems tend to persist over time, maintaining their structure and influence.
- Boundary Maintenance: They often define who participates and who does not.
- Policy Advocacy: Actors lobby, negotiate, and build coalitions to influence policy decisions.
- Information Flow: They serve as channels for information dissemination and feedback.

Advantages of Studying Policy Subsystems:

- Granular Understanding: Allows detailed analysis of specific policy issues.
- Stakeholder Mapping: Identifies key players and their interests.
- Process Insight: Reveals how consensus, conflict, and negotiation shape policy outcomes.

Limitations:

- Narrow Focus: Might overlook broader political or societal factors.
- Fragmentation: Multiple subsystems can operate independently, making comprehensive analysis challenging.
- Potential for Bias: Dominant actors may skew policy agendas in favor of particular interests.

Interrelation Between Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems

Understanding public policy requires integrating the macro perspective of policy cycles with the micro-level insights from policy subsystems. While the policy cycle provides a sequential framework,

subsystems illuminate the actors, interests, and conflicts that influence each stage.

Synergies:

- Policy subsystems often dominate specific stages, such as formulation and lobbying during decision-making.
- The feedback from evaluation stages can reshape subsystems by altering actor influence or interest coalitions.
- Recognizing subsystem dynamics helps explain why policies sometimes stall, change direction, or face opposition.

Challenges:

- The complexity of interactions can make it difficult to predict policy outcomes.
- Power asymmetries within subsystems can lead to unequal influence, impacting the fairness and effectiveness of policies.

Practical Applications and Implications

Studying policy cycles and subsystems equips policymakers, analysts, and scholars with tools to:

- Design Effective Interventions: By understanding the stages and actors involved, interventions can be targeted more efficiently.
- Anticipate Political Resistance: Recognizing stakeholder interests within subsystems helps in managing opposition.
- Improve Policy Implementation: Awareness of subsystem networks facilitates better communication and coordination.
- Enhance Policy Evaluation: Identifying influential actors and processes enables more comprehensive assessments.

Case Examples:

- Healthcare Policy: A subsystem comprising hospitals, insurance companies, and health agencies influences reform proposals at various cycle stages.
- Environmental Regulation: Environmental advocacy groups, industry representatives, and government agencies form a subsystem that shapes policy formulation and advocacy.

Conclusion

Studying public policy through the lenses of policy cycles and policy subsystems offers a nuanced understanding of how policies are conceived, developed, and enacted. The policy cycle provides a practical and structured approach to analyze the sequential stages of policymaking, while policy subsystems delve into the intricate networks of actors that influence each stage. Recognizing their interconnectedness enhances our ability to diagnose policy issues, anticipate challenges, and craft more effective solutions. Although both frameworks have their limitations—such as oversimplification or narrow focus—they remain invaluable tools in the toolkit of public policy analysis. Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of both the macro processes and micro-level dynamics is essential for fostering transparent, equitable, and effective governance.

Question What are the main stages of the policy cycle in public policy analysis? The main stages include problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and termination or renewal. How do policy subsystems influence the policy process? Policy subsystems consist of actors, institutions, and organizations focused on specific policy issues, shaping agenda-setting, influencing decisions, and affecting policy stability and change. What role do interest groups play within policy subsystems? Interest groups mobilize resources and advocate positions within policy subsystems to influence policy outcomes and represent stakeholders' interests. How can understanding policy cycles improve public policy development? By understanding policy cycles, policymakers and analysts can better anticipate stages, identify opportunities for influence, and improve strategic planning throughout the policy process. What are some common challenges faced during policy implementation? Challenges include resource constraints, bureaucratic resistance, unclear mandates, stakeholder opposition, and unforeseen external factors. How do policy subsystems contribute to policy stability or change? Subsystems can reinforce existing policies through established routines or produce change by introducing new ideas, mobilizing support, or responding to external pressures. What methods are used to study policy cycles and subsystems in public policy research? Researchers use case studies, process tracing, network analysis, stakeholder interviews, and policy mapping to analyze policy cycles and subsystem dynamics. Why is it important to analyze the interactions within policy subsystems? Analyzing interactions helps understand power dynamics, influence patterns, and how consensus or conflicts shape policy outcomes. How have recent political or technological changes affected policy cycles and subsystems? Recent changes, such as digital communication and political polarization, have increased the complexity of policy processes, accelerated policy cycles, and diversified stakeholder participation within subsystems.

Related keywords: public policy process, policy analysis, policy-making stages, policy actors, policy agenda, policy formulation, policy implementation, policy evaluation, policy subsystems theory, policy networks

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