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NOW LIVE: Freedom on the Net 2023



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2023

China

NOT FREE

9
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	-2 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	11 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

9 /100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Note

The numerical scores and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Hong Kong or Tibet, which are examined in separate reports. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report **methodology** and **FAQ**.

Overview

China's authoritarian regime has become increasingly repressive in recent years. The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to tighten control over all aspects of life and governance, including the state bureaucracy, the media, online speech, religious practice, universities, businesses, and civil society associations. The CCP leader and state president, Xi Jinping, secured a third term as party leader in October 2022, further consolidating personal power to a degree not seen in China for decades. Following a multiyear crackdown on political dissent, independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights defenders, China's civil society has been largely decimated.

Key Developments in 2022

- Xi Jinping was appointed to a third five-year term as the CCP's general secretary at the 20th Party Congress in October. The designation, awarded four years after Xi had orchestrated a change in China's constitution to abolish presidential term limits, cleared the way for him to secure a third term as state president in 2023. The CCP also announced the new membership of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), which sets government and party policy; all of those on the revamped committee were Xi loyalists and allies.
- In late November the largest protests since 1989 erupted across the nation, triggered by news of an apartment fire that killed 10 people in Xinjiang's

regional capital, Urumqi. Strict COVID-19 lockdown rules were widely thought to have prevented the victims from escaping. Protesters criticized Xi's "zero-COVID" policy, which had also caused food shortages and other extreme hardships, and some called for Xi's resignation and democratic reforms. Law enforcement authorities moved quickly, and in some cases violently, to quash the protests.

- The government abruptly abandoned key components of its zero-COVID policy in December, in what was seen as a major concession to demonstrators. Official statements and the state-controlled media sector downplayed the consequences of the policies' cancellation, and sought to portray the move as a well-organized process backed by science. Bloomberg News and the *Financial Times* reported on leaked documents from top Chinese health officials in which it was estimated that almost 250 million people in China had contracted COVID-19 in the first 20 days of December.
- Authorities continued to develop intense surveillance and mass data-collection systems capable of monitoring individuals' movements, social contacts, online activity, and other behavior, and to draw on these tools to crush dissent.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

There are no direct or competitive elections for national executive leaders. The National People's Congress (NPC) formally elects the state president for five-year terms and confirms the premier after he is nominated by the president, but both positions are determined in advance by the top CCP leadership and announced at the relevant party congress. The CCP's seven-member PSC, headed by Xi Jinping in his role as the party's general secretary, sets government and party policy in practice. Xi also holds the position of state president and serves as chairman of the state and party military commissions.

Xi was appointed for a third five-year term as CCP general secretary at the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, paving the way for him to remain in power indefinitely. This marked a sharp break from the post-Cultural Revolution practice of maintaining a two-term limit for the country's highest leadership position.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

The 3,000 NPC members are formally elected for five-year terms by subnational congresses, but in practice all candidates are vetted by the CCP. Only the NPC's standing committee meets regularly, with the full congress convening for just two weeks a year to approve proposed legislation; party organs and the State Council, or cabinet, effectively control lawmaking decisions. The current NPC was seated in March 2022.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

0 / 4

Political positions are directly elected only at the lowest levels. Independent candidates who obtain the signatures of 10 supporters are by law allowed to run for seats in the county-level people's congresses, and elections for village committees are also supposed to give residents the chance to choose their representatives. In practice, however, independent candidates for these posts are often kept off the ballot or out of office through intimidation, harassment, fraud, and in some cases detention.

Elections are not administered by an independent body. The indirect elections that populate people's congresses at various levels are conducted by those congresses' standing committees, while village-level elections are conducted by a village electoral committee that answers to the local party committee.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

0 / 4

The CCP effectively monopolizes all political activity and does not permit meaningful political competition. Eight small noncommunist parties are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an official advisory body, but their activities are tightly circumscribed, and they must accept the CCP's leadership as a condition for their existence.

Citizens who have sought to establish genuinely independent political parties or prodemocracy movements are nearly all in prison, under house arrest, or in exile. The authorities continue to hold prodemocracy activists and lawyers in various forms of detention and prison. New Citizens' Movement founder and legal activist Xu Zhiyong, in detention since February 2020, was reportedly tried in secret for "subversion" in June 2022.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 / 4

China's one-party system provides no institutional mechanism for organized political opposition, and the CCP has ruled without interruption since winning a civil war against the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) in 1949. While factions within the CCP have always existed, they do not compete openly or democratically, and they remain unaccountable to the public. Xi Jinping has steadily increased his personal power and authority within the party since 2012, notably by purging rivals and challengers as part of an anticorruption campaign.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

O / 4

The authoritarian CCP is not accountable to voters and denies the public any meaningful participation in political affairs. The party uses a broad array of coercive tools and methods to suppress independent political engagement.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

O / 4

The political system is dominated in practice by ethnic Han Chinese men. Societal groups such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT+ people have no opportunity to gain meaningful political representation. Nominal representatives of ethnic minority groups such as Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians hold administrative offices and participate in party and state bodies like the NPC, but their role is largely symbolic. Women are severely underrepresented in top CCP and government positions. For the first time in 25 years no women will sit on China's Politburo, after the 20th Party Congress failed to name any in 2022. No woman has ever sat on the PSC.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

O / 4

None of China's national leaders are freely elected, and the legislature plays a rubber-stamp role in policymaking and the development of new laws. The continuing concentration of power in Xi Jinping's hands, an expanding cult of

personality centered on Xi, and his regular calls for greater ideological conformity and party supremacy have further reduced the limited space for policy debate, even within the CCP.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

Since becoming CCP leader in 2012, Xi has pursued an extensive anticorruption campaign. Well over a million officials have been investigated and punished, according to official figures, including senior state, party, and military officials. Anticorruption functions are currently managed by the National Supervisory Commission (NSC), which was established through a 2018 merger of existing state and party entities and is tasked with enforcing political and ideological discipline in addition to compliance with the law. In 2022, anticorruption efforts focused heavily on law enforcement agencies, reflecting both endemic corruption within the police as well as the leadership's effort to secure loyalty within law enforcement.

Nevertheless, corruption remains rooted in the one-party system, which does not tolerate the institutions necessary for effectively addressing graft—such as a free press, independent civil society groups, and impartial courts.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

0 / 4

The Chinese government and the CCP are notoriously opaque. Regulations on “open government” do not effectively compel local party and state organs to share critical data or respond to citizen requests. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the government has developed increasingly sophisticated methods for controlling the diffusion of information and shaping public discourse. In 2022, authorities continued to suppress information about their management of COVID-19, spread disinformation about the pandemic, and punish those who sought to report truthfully about the situation.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

-3

Chinese authorities have aggressively pursued policies to deliberately alter the demographics of ethnic minority regions, particularly in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. Authorities in Xinjiang have interned more than a million Uyghurs and other members of Turkic ethnic minority groups in so-called Vocational Skills Education and Training Centers (VSETCs), as well as in prisons and other detention facilities. While the government claims that VSETCs are educational centers that Uyghurs and others participate in voluntarily, a cache of internal government documents, including speeches and photographs, obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and published in 2022 provided further evidence of their coercive and abusive nature. The documents, which date back to 2017, describe facilities secured by armed guards who have been issued shoot-to-kill orders against anyone attempting to escape. Inside, detainees are subject to aggressive forms of indoctrination and political reeducation that aim to undermine their ethnic identities and religious beliefs.

Uyghur and other Muslim women in Xinjiang, particularly those with two or more children, are subject to a program of forced sterilization. Previous investigations and witness testimony have revealed that Xinjiang authorities have coerced women to accept surgical sterilization, forcibly implanted intrauterine contraceptive devices prior to internment, administered unknown drugs and injections to women in detention, and used fines and internment as punishment for birth-control violations.

In 2022, poverty alleviation measures included the coercion of hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and other ethnic minority members, mostly farmers and other residents authorities refer to as “surplus rural laborers,” to leave their hometowns and take low-wage jobs elsewhere, largely in state-owned factories. Participants have described prison-like environments where individuals are subjected to political indoctrination. Despite the government’s claim that the relocations are voluntary and to the financial benefit of participants, a UN special

rappporteur in a 2022 report cited evidence that the programs involve forced labor, heavy surveillance, violence, and degrading treatment, and that “some instances may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity.

Increasing numbers of ethnic minority children in Xinjiang and Tibet have been separated from their parents and forced to attend state-run boarding schools, where Mandarin is the sole language of instruction and where students are subject to intense political indoctrination. Those who protest are subject to detention and other forms of punishment. In recent years the Ministry of Education has required preschools across China to make Mandarin Chinese the language of instruction, reflecting an ongoing push to impose Mandarin as the dominant language at all educational levels and further weaken the cultural identities of ethnic minority groups and individuals. A multiyear campaign of detaining ethnic minority writers, scholars, musicians, and religious figures, often meting out long prison terms, continues to damage the cultural, religious, social and economic leadership of these communities.

The government has also continued to promote policies that have attracted hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese to relocate to ethnic minority regions. Programs that encourage marriages between Han Chinese and members of ethnic minorities through financial and other incentives further aim to dilute minority identities.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

0 / 4

China is home to one of the world’s most restrictive media environments and its most sophisticated system of censorship, particularly online. The CCP maintains control over news reporting via direct ownership, accreditation of journalists,

harsh penalties for comments that are critical of party leaders or the CCP, and daily directives to media outlets and websites that guide coverage of breaking news stories. State management of the telecommunications infrastructure enables the blocking of websites, removal of smartphone applications from the domestic market, and mass deletion of social media posts and user accounts that address banned political, social, economic, and religious topics. Thousands of websites have been blocked, many for years, including major news and social media hubs like the *New York Times*, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

Rules and regulations governing the media and internet usage include measures that restrict news dissemination and contribute to the banning of mobile apps focused on minority languages, Bible content, and foreign-language learning, among other topics. Censors have also removed large numbers of social media groups, accounts, or posts that dealt with LGBT+ issues, financial advice, critical views of CCP history, and celebrities. The country's network of some 20 million pro-CCP volunteer internet commentators and more than 2 million paid employees continued to aggressively monitor and censor online communications.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 43 journalists were imprisoned in China in 2022, though the number of people held for uncovering or sharing newsworthy information is far greater. Numerous citizen journalists and bloggers were detained, disappeared, or criminally charged during 2022 for their reporting and online posts. Zhang Zhan, a citizen journalist and former human rights lawyer, continued to serve a 4-year prison sentence for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for her reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic. The whereabouts of many others detained for reporting on the pandemic remain unknown.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

0/4

The CCP regime operates a multifaceted apparatus to control all aspects of religious activity, including by vetting religious leaders for political reliability, placing limits on the number of religious authorities such as priests and imams,

requiring ideological conformity within religious doctrine, and installing security cameras inside religious establishments. All religious groups must go through a rigorous process of certification to be officially recognized by the authorities, with those that refuse to do so being labeled illegal and persecuted. Certain religions and religious groups, including Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims, Falun Gong practitioners, and Christian “house churches,” are persecuted harshly. In Xinjiang, peaceful religious practices are routinely punished under charges of “religious extremism,” resulting in detention, prison sentences, and indoctrination for many Uyghur, Kazakh, and Hui Muslims.

Thousands of Buddhist, Taoist, and folk-religion temples and house churches across China were completely or partially demolished by authorities in recent years. Authorities were reported to have used COVID-19 restrictions and inspections to justify the closure of churches and other religious venues, even as nearby venues like restaurants remained open.

The government continued to operate mobile “transformation” units, which subject members of “illegal” religious groups to severe psychological and physical torture intended to force them to “transform” by renouncing their religious beliefs. Thousands of members of such illegal groups are also sentenced to long prison terms and illegal forms of detention, in which torture and ill-treatment are routine. Children under the age of 18 are prohibited by law from attending church or engaging in religious activities. Dozens of Falun Gong practitioners were reported to have died in custody, or shortly after their release, in recent years.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

0/4

Academic freedom is heavily restricted. Efforts to police classroom discussions are present at all levels of education, including via installation of surveillance cameras in some classrooms, large-scale recruitment of student informants, and the creation of special departments to supervise the political thinking of teaching staff. The CCP controls the appointment of top university officials, and CCP committees and party branches have significant formal authority over university

administration. Many scholars practice self-censorship to protect their careers and personal safety.

Political indoctrination, including the study of “Xi Jinping Thought,” is a required component of the curriculum at all levels of education. A number of universities have removed references to “freedom of thought” from their charters, replacing them with pledges of loyalty to the CCP. Professors and students face reprisals—ranging from censored writings, travel restrictions, and demotions to arrest and imprisonment—for expressing views that are deemed critical of the CCP’s governance or Xi’s leadership. Authorities have continued to shut down or nationalize private schools across the country, in an effort to bring all education under state control.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

1 / 4

Citizens continue to be charged and sentenced to sometimes long prison terms for critical or satirical social media posts on a variety of subjects, notably the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and criticism or perceived criticism of Xi or the CCP. In addition to criminal punishment, internet users face account deletions, job dismissals, arbitrary detention, and police interrogation over such posts.

The government’s vast ability to monitor citizens’ lives and communications inhibits online and offline conversations. Administrators of social media applications like WeChat closely monitor user discussions to ensure conformity with government content restrictions. Surveillance cameras, now frequently augmented with facial-recognition software, cover many urban areas and public transportation, and these networks are expanding into rural regions. Devices used by police to quickly extract and scan data from smartphones, initially deployed in Xinjiang, have spread nationwide.

Police have access to the personal details of broad categories of individuals. China’s Cybersecurity Law obliges companies to store Chinese users’ data within the country and submit to often intrusive security reviews. Telecommunications companies are required to obtain facial scans of new internet or mobile phone

users as part of the real-name registration process, which is combined with mass surveillance tools to closely monitor all residents. Electronic surveillance is supplemented with offline monitoring by neighborhood party committees and “public security volunteers” who are visible during large events.

There is an especially heavy police presence in ethnic minority regions, particularly Xinjiang. The ability of Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang to express themselves freely, even in private, has been further undermined in recent years by a policy of having Chinese officials live in their homes to monitor and indoctrinate them.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	1/4
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The constitution protects the right of citizens to demonstrate, but in practice protesters seldom obtain approval and risk punishment for assembling without permission. Spontaneous demonstrations have provided some outlet for local grievances, though they are frequently met with police violence and criminal prosecution. Solitary protests—in which an individual holds a placard in public, for example—can be criminally punished. Armed police have been accused of opening fire during past protests, particularly in Xinjiang.

Following widespread spontaneous protests at the end of 2022 against the country’s zero-OVID policy—dubbed the “white paper” movement because many participants held up blank pieces of paper, a tactic meant to both evade arrest and implicitly criticize censorship—dozens of protesters were detained, with many reporting abusive interrogation procedures.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?	0/4
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Both Chinese and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) lack meaningful autonomy. While hundreds of thousands of NGOs are formally registered, many effectively operate as government-sponsored entities and focus primarily on service delivery. Nearly all prominent NGOs that focused on policy advocacy, including in previously less politically sensitive areas, have been shuttered under government pressure in recent years.

Engaging in NGO work unsanctioned by the state is risky, and many NGO workers have been detained and jailed. In 2022, it was reported that Cheng Yuan, the founder of an NGO that advocated for the rights of migrant workers and people with chronic health issues and disabilities, had been tortured in prison while serving a multiyear sentence imposed after a secret trial.

The law requires foreign NGOs to find a Chinese sponsor and register with the Ministry of Public Security, and police have the authority to search NGOs' premises without a warrant, seize property, detain personnel, and initiate criminal procedures.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

1 / 4

The only legal labor union organization is the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which has long been criticized for failing to defend workers' rights. Efforts to organize independent trade unions are swiftly shut down by authorities, and the activists involved face harsh penalties. Despite the risks, workers engaged in a number of largely spontaneous strikes, with over 800 recorded during 2022.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

1 / 4

The CCP dominates the judicial system, with courts at all levels supervised by party political-legal committees that have influence over the appointment of judges, court operations, and verdicts and sentences. CCP oversight is evident in politically sensitive cases, and most judges are CCP members. Judges are expected to conform to CCP ideology and uphold the principle of party supremacy over the judiciary. Many judges complain about local officials interfering in cases to protect powerful litigants, support important industries, or avoid their own potential liability.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	1/4
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Violations of due process are widespread in practice. Trials of human rights activists, religious dissidents, and other human rights defenders are routinely held in secret, with even family members being denied information or entry. While adjudication of routine civil and administrative disputes is considered more fair, cases that touch on politically sensitive issues or the interests of powerful groups are subject to decisive “guidance” from party political-legal committees.

Prosecutions rely heavily on confessions, many of which are obtained through torture, despite laws prohibiting such practices. Forced confessions are often televised. An ongoing crackdown on human rights lawyers has left many defendants without effective or independent legal counsel.

Extrajudicial forms of detention remain widespread. The practice of “residential surveillance in a designated location” allows the police to hold individuals in secret detention for up to six months and has been deployed against human rights defenders and lawyers, and government critics.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	0/4
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Conditions in places of detention are harsh, with reports of inadequate food, regular beatings, and deprivation of medical care. In addition to their use to extract confessions, torture and other forms of coercion are widely employed in efforts to force political and religious dissidents to recant their beliefs. Impunity is the norm for police brutality and suspicious deaths in custody. Citizens and lawyers who seek redress for such abuse are often meet with reprisals or imprisonment. Many political and religious dissidents have died in prison or shortly after release due to ill-treatment or denial of medical care. Peaceful protesters are regularly beaten by police or hired aggressors.

The government has gradually reduced the number of crimes that carry the death penalty, though the total was still more than 40 as of 2022. It is estimated that thousands of people are executed each year; the actual figure is considered a state secret. Despite the government's claim that it has ended the transplantation of organs from executed prisoners, the scale and speed of the transplantation industry far exceed what is feasible via the country's nascent voluntary donation system. In June 2021, a group of UN human rights experts expressed alarm over ongoing reports of organs being procured from "minorities, including Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Muslims, and Christians, in detention in China."

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0 / 4

Chinese laws formally prohibit discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, or health condition, but these protections are often violated in practice. Several laws bar gender discrimination in the workplace, and some indicators of gender equality have reportedly improved over the past decade. Nevertheless, bias remains endemic, including in job recruitment and college admissions. Women's rights activists and individuals who campaign against sexual harassment and assault have themselves faced harassment, detention, and in some cases criminal prosecution. In August 2022, Zhou Xiaoxuan lost her landmark case against CCTV host Zhu Jun, whom she had accused of sexual harassment, on the grounds of "insufficient evidence." She had come forward with the allegations in 2018, helping to galvanize the #MeToo movement in China.

Members of ethnic and religious minority groups, LGBT+ people, people with disabilities, and people with illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B also face discrimination in employment and access to education. Members of religious and ethnic minorities are disproportionately targeted and abused by security forces and in the criminal justice system. In addition to being held in extrajudicial detention in larger numbers, members of these groups tend to be sentenced to longer prison terms than Han Chinese convicts. Data has shown showing higher-than-normal unemployment rates for former COVID-19 patients. Propaganda under Xi's leadership has sought to negatively associate LGBT+ individuals with liberal "Western" culture, exacerbating discrimination against them.

Despite China's international obligation to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, law enforcement agencies continue to repatriate North Korean defectors, who face imprisonment or execution upon return.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

1 / 4

Prior to the sudden abandonment of the strict zero-COVID policies in late November 2022, following widespread protests, lockdowns in dozens of cities across the country restricted people's movement, and in some cases confining them to their homes or to quarantine centers. The COVID-19 "health code" app, which was in use until late 2022, was reportedly used to restrict peoples' access to air and train travel, medical facilities, and a range of public services and spaces based on arbitrary or opaque criteria. Some individuals reported that they were prevented from attending protests after their health code app suddenly turned from green to red while they were en route to the event, pointing to the government's use of the app to restrict the movements of specific individuals.

While China's constitution gives individuals the right to petition the government concerning a grievance or injustice, in practice petitioners are routinely

intercepted in their efforts to travel to government centers, forcibly returned to their hometowns, or extralegally detained.

Despite the government's stated commitment to reforming the *hukou* (household registration) system, it continues to prevent close to 300 million internal migrants from enjoying full legal rights as residents in the cities where they work.

Police checkpoints throughout Xinjiang limit residents' ability to travel or even leave their hometowns.

Millions of people are affected by government restrictions on their access to foreign travel and passports, with Uyghurs and Tibetans experiencing the greatest difficulty. The authorities continued to use COVID-19 as a justification to restrict overseas travel. Many overseas Chinese nationals who engage in politically sensitive activities abroad are prevented from returning to China, while those who seek refuge abroad often face forced repatriation and arrest.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1/4

The authorities dominate the economy through state-owned enterprises in key sectors such as banking and energy, through state ownership of land, and through political and regulatory control. Chinese citizens are legally permitted to establish and operate private businesses. However, all enterprises are vulnerable to political interference, arbitrary regulatory obstacles, debilitating censorship, negative media campaigns, demands for bribes, and other forms of corruption.

An ongoing government crackdown on private businesses, particularly large technology and social media firms, has ostensibly been aimed at curbing monopolistic practices, uncontrolled growth, and other economic ills, but has also brought the private sector more firmly under CCP control. Running a business continues to expose individuals to prosecution and long prison terms. Chinese-Canadian Xiao Jianhua, one of China's richest businessmen, was sentenced to 13 years in prison on bribery and other charges in August 2022, five years after his abduction from a Four Seasons hotel in Hong Kong. Tomorrow Holdings, the

investment group he had founded, had been linked to family members of prominent former officials.

Property rights protection remains weak. Urban land is owned by the state, with only the buildings themselves in private hands. Rural land is collectively owned by villages. Farmers enjoy long-term lease rights to the land they work, but they have been restricted in their ability to transfer, sell, or develop it. Low compensation and weak legal protections have facilitated land seizures by local officials, who often evict residents and transfer the land rights to developers. Corruption is endemic in such projects, and local governments rely on land development as a crucial source of revenue.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2 / 4

Following regulatory changes in 2021 allowing couples to have up to three children, out of concern over falling fertility rates, the government in 2022 launched a new campaign instructing local family planning officials to limit the number of abortions, including by discouraging abortions for “nonmedical” reasons. The move was interpreted as a further effort to boost the country’s declining fertility rate. While ethnic minority couples were already permitted to have up to three children prior to 2021, in practice ethnic Tibetans as well as Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang are subject to abusive policies aimed at limiting their reproduction.

Domestic violence continues to affect one-quarter of Chinese women, according to official figures, despite laws criminalizing the behavior. The law does not criminalize spousal rape.

Chinese law defines marriage as the union between a man and a woman, denying marriage rights to same-sex couples. Muslims in Xinjiang face restrictions and penalties related to aspects of their appearance with religious connotations, such as headscarves on women or beards on men.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?**2/4**

While workers in China are afforded important protections under existing laws, violations of labor and employment regulations are widespread. Exploitative employment practices such as wage theft, excessive overtime, student labor, and unsafe working conditions are pervasive in many industries. Forced labor and human trafficking are common, affecting internal migrants as well as Chinese nationals who are trafficked abroad. Forced labor is the norm in prisons and other detention facilities.

**On China**

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

9/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

9/100 **Not Free***In Other Reports*

Freedom on the Net 2023

Other Years

2022

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