

World Report 2025 - China

Over a decade into President Xi Jinping's rule, efforts to centralize control has led to heightened repression throughout the country. There is no independent civil society, no freedom of expression, association, assembly or religion, and human rights defenders and other perceived critics of the government are persecuted. The government considers the culturally and ethnically distinct Tibetans and Uyghurs as threats and subjects them to particularly harsh repression. Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs remain imprisoned as part of the government's crimes against humanity in the region. It has also ended long-protected civil liberties in Hong Kong. While foreign governments recognize the Chinese government's worsening rights record, they have not confronted Beijing.

Freedom of Expression

The Chinese government controls all major channels of information, such as television, radio, and print publications. Its "Great Firewall" blocks people in China from accessing information commonly available on the internet. It also imposes ideological control over the education system.

While most people in China habitually self-censor, some stories—those that do not challenge the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy—occasionally reach the broader public. A Chinese media outlet's investigative [report](#) on cooking oil contamination in July and Chinese lawyer [Yi Shenghua's post](#) in August exposing an illegal human remains trade attracted widespread public attention. They were followed swiftly by official censorship and punishments.

There were numerous instances of censorship throughout the year. In January, Shanghai police [arrested](#) filmmaker Chen Pinlin ("Plato") for a documentary about the [2022 White Paper protests](#).

Authorities continued to update the country's censorship and surveillance regime to tighten control. In February, the State Secrets Law was revised and [implementing regulations](#) were published in July, [expanding](#) the law's already overly broad scope. In July, the government proposed a new national digital ID card system. The cards, which are ostensibly voluntary, would give state agencies even more ability to [track](#) people online and offline.

Previously tolerated topics have become off-limits. With the Chinese economy faltering, the government has [prohibited](#) discussions of its economic policies and penalized those critical of them. In September, a top Chinese Academy of Social Sciences economist went [missing](#) after he disparaged President Xi's economic policies in a private WeChat group. Also in September, Beijing police [detained](#) US-based artist Gao Zhen, acclaimed for his work critiquing the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong, for "slandering China's heroes and martyrs" while he was visiting the country. Both topics-- China's economic policies and Mao's disastrous legacy – were topics that could be openly discussed in China until recently.

The Chinese government's strengthened information control has international implications, as it has targeted critics of China who have gone into exile and foreign nationals abroad. "[Teacher Li](#)," who collects news and videos from around China and broadcasts them on X, revealed that he had been harassed in Italy, where he is based. Chinese police had also interrogated his followers in China. In August, [investigative reports](#) exposed how people affiliated with the Chinese government had intimidated and assaulted Chinese, Hong Kong and Tibetan protesters during Xi's visit to San Francisco earlier.

The Chinese government's [nine-year-sentence](#) of Taiwanese political activist Yang Chih-yuan for "separatism," and the [suspended death sentence](#) of naturalized Australian writer Yang Hengjun for "espionage" generated widespread attention in these countries. In February, the prominent Hugo

Award for science fiction was found to have [self-censored](#) and excluded some authors for consideration for its 2023 award before holding its ceremony in China.

Freedom of Religion

The Chinese government allows people to practice only five officially recognized religions in approved premises, and maintains control over personnel appointments, publications, finances, and seminary applications.

Since 2016, when President Xi called for “Sinicization” of religions, authorities have sought to reshape religions to promote allegiance to the Party and to Xi. They have stepped up [ideological education](#) of religious leaders. They have removed “unauthorized” religious materials online, including by taking down [religious apps](#) and [videos](#), and by harassing those who [make](#) and [share](#) such materials.

Police routinely arrest, detain, and harass leaders and members of various “illegal” religious groups, including those Catholic and Protestant congregations (or “house churches”) that refuse to join official churches, and [disrupt](#) their peaceful activities. Throughout 2024, these individuals were charged with and convicted of fabricated crimes. In July, [Zhang Chunlei](#), leader of a house church called Ren’ai Reformed Church, was sentenced to five years in prison for “inciting subversion” and “fraud.” The government continues to classify some religious groups, notably the Falun Gong, as “evil cults,” and subjects their members to harassment, arbitrary imprisonment, and torture.

In October, the Vatican [renewed](#) for the third time the [2018 China-Vatican agreement](#), which gives the Chinese authorities the power to name Catholic bishops even as they continue to persecute Catholic house churches and leaders, notably [Bishop Cui Tai](#).

In September, the government freed Chinese-American pastor [David Lin](#), after he had served nearly 20 years in prison.

Human Rights Defenders

Human rights defenders in China are frequently harassed, tortured, and imprisoned. The police also harass their families, including [children](#). Some, such as lawyer Gao Zhisheng and [Peng Lifa](#), known as “Bridge Man” for his public display of anti-government signs, remain forcibly disappeared.

In February, women’s rights activist Li Qiaochu was sentenced to nearly four years in prison for speaking out on detention conditions faced by her partner and fellow activist Xu Zhiyong. She was released in August after completing her sentence, having been detained since 2021. In October, Xu Zhiyong went on a [hunger strike](#) to protest his inhumane treatment in prison.

Chinese authorities released citizen journalist Zhang Zhan in May after she served a four-year prison sentence for reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic. They detained her again in late August and in November arrested her for “creating disturbances”.

In June, feminist journalist Huang Xueqin and labor rights activist Wang Jianbing were [sentenced](#), respectively, to five years and three years and six months in prison for “inciting subversion of state power” for their leading involvement in the #MeToo Movement.

In October, human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife, rights activist Xu Yan, were convicted of “inciting subversion of state power” Yu was sentenced to three years in prison and Xu to 21 months. They were taken into custody while on their way to meet the European Union delegation to China in April 2023.

Women's and Girls' Rights

Gender discrimination in employment remains widespread while alarming cases of [violence against women](#) and [sexual harassment](#) have received public attention in recent years.

China's declining fertility rate has led the government to pivot from [restricting births](#) to exhorting women to [get married](#) and return to "traditional virtues" in ways that undermine gender equality.

The government's push for higher birth rates is limited to heterosexual, married couples. In a landmark case, a Beijing court [rejected](#) Xu Zaozao's final appeal to freeze her eggs, in a blow to the reproductive rights of single women.

In August, the Chinese government proposed a [revised draft law](#) to simplify marriage registration while adding an abusive "30-day cooling off" period to make it harder to divorce.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

While there is growing public acceptance of equal rights for LGBT people in China, increasing repression has also led to greater censorship and closure of LGBT spaces and advocacy groups.

In January, Weibo [censored](#) viral photos and videos of transgender celebrity Jin Xing, who was holding a rainbow flag with the slogan "love is love, love and gender are unrelated." One of China's few remaining lesbian bars, Roxie, closed in June, [alluding](#) to official pressure.

In August, a [custody ruling](#) handed down by a Beijing court became the first legal recognition in China that a child can have two mothers. However, the petitioner, Didi, was denied contact with her son on the grounds that she did not give birth to him and is not genetically related to him.

Tibet

Authorities continue to severely control information in Tibetan areas and respond to public concerns over issues such as mass relocation, environmental degradation, or the marginalization of Tibetan language in primary education with repression.

Information is heavily restricted, but the majority of arbitrary detentions reported by exile media were for posting unapproved content online or having online contact with Tibetans outside China. Tibetans accused of such offenses have been sentenced to [years in prison](#).

In February and March, hundreds of monks and villagers in Derge county, Sichuan, were reportedly detained for [protesting](#) the construction of a hydroelectric dam that will submerge historic monasteries and numerous Tibetan villages.

Hong Kong

In March, the Hong Kong government introduced another national security law, the [Safeguarding National Security Ordinance \(NSO\)](#), after the draconian 2020 National Security Law. The NSO criminalizes peaceful activities, expands police powers, and replaces the colonial-era sedition law, raising the maximum sentence for "sedition" from two to seven years of imprisonment.

After the NSO came into effect, police arrested six people in May, including prominent activist Chow Hang-tung who is already imprisoned, for allegedly publishing "seditious" posts online to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre. Three people were sentenced to between 10 and 14 months in prison for "sedition" for wearing a T-shirt, making online posts, and drawing pro-

democracy graffiti on buses. The Hong Kong government used the new powers under the SNSO to revoke the Hong Kong passports of six exiled activists and to deny political prisoners early release for good behavior.

In May, three judges handpicked for national security cases convicted 14 activists and ex-Hong Kong lawmakers of “conspiracy to commit subversion” in the city’s largest national security trial to date, with 31 other defendants having earlier pleaded guilty. In November, the court sentenced all 45 to prison terms ranging from 4 years and 2 months to 10 years.

At least 304 people have been [arrested](#) for allegedly violating the National Security Law, the SNSO, and the now-revoked “sedition” law since 2020. Among the 176 individuals charged, 161 have been convicted. According to police figures, 10,279 people have been [arrested](#) in connection with the [2019 pro-democracy protests](#), among whom 2,328 “faced legal consequences” including conviction, many for non-violent crimes like “[unlawful assembly](#).”

Press freedom declined further. Media tycoon Jimmy Lai’s national security trial, which began in December 2023, is ongoing. The 76-year-old Lai has been held in solitary confinement since December 2020. In September, two journalists of the now-defunct Stand News were sentenced to 21 and 11 months respectively for “sedition.” That month, the government denied work visa and entry into the city to an Associated Press photojournalist who took photos of Jimmy Lai in prison.

The Hong Kong government has repeatedly [harassed](#) the Hong Kong Journalist Association, including making a claim for HK\$400,000 (US\$51,000) in back taxes. Both [Radio Free Asia](#), funded by the US government, and [Epoch Times](#), a media outlet run by the persecuted religious group Falun Gong, closed their Hong Kong offices in 2024.

Authorities curtailed freedoms of expression, association and assembly. On June 4, police [arrested](#) at least nine people for holding placards, lighting candles, or turning on their phone flashlights near Victoria Park, where the Tiananmen Massacre commemorations took place before 2020.

The government also curbed freedom of expression. In May, the High Court [ruled](#) that the government’s injunction to block use of the popular 2019 protest song “Glory to Hong Kong” was lawful. Scottish and US distributors repeatedly [removed](#) the song from streaming platforms even though the order had no extraterritorial effect. In October, Hong Kong authorities appeared to [block](#) some Hong Kong internet users’ access to *Flow HK*, an online magazine hosted in the US.

In January, the government-funded Hong Kong Arts Development Council [withdrew](#) its funding for the Hong Kong Drama Awards, while the Leisure and Cultural Services Department refused to provide the awards ceremony a venue.

Xinjiang

The Chinese government has committed [crimes against humanity](#) against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims as part of its abusive “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism.” Violations in Xinjiang include mass arbitrary detention torture, mass surveillance, forced labor, cultural and religious persecution, and family separation.

The Chinese government has continued to deny these abuses. Responding to a number of relevant recommendations made during the Universal Periodic Review of its rights record by the UN Human Rights Council in January, the Chinese government [dismissed](#) a groundbreaking 2022 UN report documenting these abuses, including alleged crimes against humanity, as “illegal and void.” In August, the office of the UN high commissioner for human rights [reported](#) that “many problematic laws and policies” underlying the 2022 UN report remain in place and noted the challenges in monitoring the situation due to “limited access to information and the fear of reprisals against individuals who engage with the United Nations.” In September, the US delivered a [joint statement](#) at the UN Human Rights Council on behalf of the “core group of countries” that previously [sought a dedicated discussion of the situation by the UN](#) rights body, calling on the

Chinese government to “engage meaningfully” with the UN to implement the report’s recommendations.

Official Chinese statements [continue to affirm](#) its abusive campaign, which conflates Uyghurs’ everyday peaceful behavior with terrorism and extremism. In May, a top central government official responsible for political and legal affairs, Chen Wenqing, [said](#) the government will “persist in cracking down on violent terrorist crimes” and “promote legalization and normalization of counterterrorism and stability maintenance” in the Uyghur region.

An estimated [half-million](#) people have been sentenced to long prison sentences without due process during the Strike Hard Campaign, and many remain imprisoned, including [Rahile Dawut](#), [Gulshan Abbas](#), [Perhat Tursun](#), [Adil Tuniyaz](#), [Yalqun Rozi](#), [Ekpar Asat](#). Prominent Uyghur scholar [Ilham Tohti](#) has spent 10 years in prison as part of his unjust life sentence for “separatism.”

In February, China revised regulations in Xinjiang to further [tighten control](#) over religious practices, which includes controlling the appearance, number, location and size of religious venues, and requiring them to become training grounds that promote the values of the Chinese Communist Party to the people.

A Human Rights Watch [report](#) found that global car brands have increasing risk of exposure to Uyghur forced labor in their aluminum supply chain, adding to a growing body of research that shows that Uyghur forced labor taints industries globally, including [solar panels](#), cars, [apparel](#), [seafood](#), and [critical minerals](#). Since the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act in 2022 entered into force, the US government has [denied entry](#) to \$750 million worth of goods linked to forced labor in Xinjiang. The European Union approved a [law](#) in December prohibiting the import and export of goods linked to forced labor.

Climate Change Policy and Impacts

China is the world’s [largest emitter](#) of greenhouse gases, [largest producer](#) and consumer of coal, and the largest importer of [oil](#) and [gas](#). Its banks are among the [largest financiers](#) of fossil-fuel operations in the world.

Despite improved targets, the Climate Action Tracker rates China’s domestic emission reduction target as “highly [insufficient](#)” to meet the Paris Agreement goal to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Extreme weather events driven by global warming have become more common across China and are projected to increase in frequency and severity.