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2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: China

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Genocide and crimes against humanity occurred during the year in China against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings by the government; enforced disappearances by the government; torture by the government; involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices; harsh and life-threatening prison and detention conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention by the government including, since 2017, of more than one million Uyghurs and members of other predominantly Muslim minority groups in extrajudicial internment camps, prisons, and an additional unknown number subjected to daytime-only “re-education” training; the lack of an independent judiciary and Communist Party control over the judicial and legal system; political prisoners; transnational repression against individuals in other countries; arbitrary interference with privacy including pervasive and intrusive technical surveillance and monitoring; punishment of family members for offenses allegedly committed by a relative; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including criminal prosecution of journalists, lawyers, writers, bloggers, dissidents, petitioners, and others; serious restrictions on internet freedom, including site blocking; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws that applied to foreign and domestic nongovernmental organizations; restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence; the inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on and harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; instances of coerced abortions and forced sterilization; crimes involving violence targeting members of national, racial, and ethnic minority groups, including Uyghurs; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; the prohibition of independent trade unions and systematic restrictions on workers’ freedom of association; and existence of some of the worst forms of child labor.

The government did not take credible steps to identify or punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were numerous reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year. In many instances few or no details were available. There continued to be no government transparency or public statistics on executions.

In Xinjiang there were reports of custodial deaths related to detentions in the internment camps. In July Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported Tumshuq Prison in Xinjiang’s Maralbeshi County released the

bodies of at least 26 Uyghur inmates to their families before the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

There were multiple reports from Uyghur family members who discovered their relatives died while in internment camps or within weeks of their release from causes related to their detention. According to RFA's December 2022 report, Uyghur poet Abdulla Sawut, detained in 2017 and convicted of "advocating for ethnic separatism," died in December 2022 shortly after his release from prison.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

Enforced disappearances through multiple means continued at a nationwide, systemic scale.

The primary means by which authorities forcibly disappeared individuals for sustained periods of time was known as "Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" (RSDL). RSDL codified in law the long-standing practice of detaining and removing from the public eye individuals the state deemed a risk to national security or intended to use as hostages. The primary disappearance mechanism for public functionaries was known as *liuzhi*. Numerous reports suggested individuals disappeared by RSDL and *liuzhi* were subject to numerous abuses including but not limited to physical and psychological abuse, humiliation, rape, torture, starvation, isolation, and forced confessions. According to an April 2022 report by human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Safeguard Defenders, between 55,977 and 113,407 persons were placed into RSDL (and later faced trial) from 2015 to 2021.

Many Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and members of other Muslim and ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang detained in the government's mass arbitrary detention campaign remain imprisoned. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs alleged many of these detentions amounted to enforced disappearance, since families were often not provided information concerning the length or location of the detention.

According to ChinaAid, former lawyer Tang Jitian was released in January after nearly 400 days in detention. Authorities took Tang into custody in 2021 when he was due to attend a Human Rights Day gathering organized by the European Union in Beijing. A 2022 report by Rights Protection Network (RPN) stated Tang was held in a poorly ventilated room without windows, was beaten and subjected to rounds of sleep deprivation, was deprived of adequate medical care, and fell in a bathroom, suffering a concussion.

The government still had not provided a comprehensive, credible accounting of all those killed, missing, or detained in connection with the violent suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. Many activists involved in the 1989 demonstrations and their family members continued to suffer official harassment. The government made no efforts to prevent, investigate, or punish such harassment.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

The law prohibited the physical abuse and mistreatment of detainees and forbade prison guards from coercing confessions, insulting prisoners' dignity, and beating or encouraging others to beat prisoners. The law excluded evidence obtained through illegal means, including coerced confessions, in certain categories of criminal cases. There were credible reports that authorities routinely ignored prohibitions against torture, especially in politically sensitive cases.

Former prisoners and detainees have reported they were beaten, raped, subjected to electric shock, forced to sit on stools for hours on end, hung by the wrists, deprived of sleep, force-fed, forced to take medication against their will, and otherwise subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

Although prison authorities abused ordinary prisoners, they reportedly singled out political and religious dissidents for particularly harsh treatment.

In May 2022 Fuzhou-based human rights defender Liang Baiduan sued the municipal public security department for police brutality in March 2022 that resulted in broken ribs and injured tendons in his hands, according to media. Liang's attorney appeared on his behalf at a January 29 hearing at a Fuzhou District Court.

The health of Zhang Zhan, sentenced to prison for four years in 2020 for her activities as a citizen journalist during the initial COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, continued to deteriorate while imprisoned in Shanghai; her weight dropped to less than 90 pounds. When Zhang went on a hunger strike in 2021, prison officials force-fed her, tying and chaining her arms, torso, and feet.

Members of the minority Uyghur ethnic group reported systematic torture and other degrading treatment by law enforcement officers and officials working within the penal system and internment camps.

The treatment and abuse of detainees under the liuzhi detention system, which operated outside the judicial system as a legal tool for the government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to investigate corruption and other offenses by officials, featured extended solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, beatings, and forced standing or sitting in uncomfortable positions for hours and sometimes days, according to press reports.

The law stated psychiatric treatment and hospitalization should be "on a voluntary basis," but the law failed to provide meaningful legal protections for persons who could be involuntarily committed, such as access to a lawyer or other advocate or the right to communicate with those outside the psychiatric institution.

Official media reported the Ministry of Public Security directly administered 23 psychiatric hospitals for the criminally insane. While many of those committed to mental health facilities were convicted of murder and other violent crimes, there were also reports of activists, religious or spiritual adherents, and petitioners being involuntarily subjected to psychiatric treatment for political reasons. Public security officials could commit individuals to psychiatric facilities and force treatment for "conditions" that had no basis in psychiatry.

On February 28, media reported church leaders Lian Changnian, Lian Xuliang, and Fu Juan were under RSDL throughout 2022 and were finally transferred to a detention center in February. While in RSDL, interrogators beat them, deprived them of food, blew smoke in their eyes, and denied them the use of toilets.

Impunity was a significant problem in the security forces, including the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of State Security, and the Ministry of Justice, which managed the prison system.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in penal institutions for both political prisoners and criminal offenders were generally harsh and often life threatening or degrading.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Authorities regularly held prisoners and detainees in overcrowded conditions with poor sanitation. Food often was inadequate and of poor quality, and many detainees relied on supplemental food, medicines, and warm clothing provided by relatives when allowed to receive them. Prisoners often reported sleeping on the floor because there were no beds or bedding. In many cases ventilation, heating, lighting, and access to potable water were inadequate.

The lack of adequate, timely medical care for prisoners remained a serious problem.

Conditions in administrative detention facilities were like those in prisons. Detainees reported beatings, sexual assaults, lack of proper food, and limited or no access to medical care.

In April, the Independent Chinese PEN Center reported prison authorities mistreated Lv Gengsong, sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment in 2016 by a Hangzhou court for "state subversion." Because he refused to admit his guilt, prison authorities violated Lv's reading and communication rights, injuring his mental and physical health. Observers believed Lv's conviction was related to his ties to the banned China Democracy Party.

Administration: While detainee abuse was proscribed by law, the mechanism for detainees to report abuse was unclear. The law stated letters from a prisoner to higher authorities of the prison or to judicial organs should not be censored; it was unclear whether the law was observed. While authorities occasionally investigated credible allegations of problematic conditions, the results were not documented in a publicly accessible manner.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities considered information regarding prisons and various other types of administrative and extralegal detention facilities to be a state secret, and the government did not permit independent monitoring.

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

Arbitrary arrest and detention remained systemic. The law granted public security officers broad administrative detention powers and the ability to detain individuals for extended periods without formal arrest or criminal charges. Lawyers, human rights activists, journalists, religious leaders and adherents, and former political prisoners and their family members continued to be targeted for arbitrary detention or arrest.

UN human rights bodies have found the system of Residential Surveillance (RS), a form of house arrest used to detain an individual under investigation, constitutes arbitrary detention and have called for its repeal. In March the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said his office had documented large-scale arbitrary detentions and family separations in Xinjiang. Also in March, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention rendered its opinion that the deprivation of liberty of Uyghurs Qurban Mamut, Ekpar Asat, and Gulshan Abbas was arbitrary.

In September 2022 Safeguard Defenders published a report on RS. Unlike the RSDL system, which allowed police to place a suspect into secret detention at undisclosed locations, RS took place at the suspect's home. In some cases, persons were allowed to receive visitors and use their telephone; in other cases, they were isolated and barred from all communication or visits, and from leaving the house. The report estimated RS was used on between 560,000 and 860,000 persons since 2012.

The law provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but the government generally did not observe this requirement.

There were allegations that detainees in the liuzhi detention system of the National Supervisory Commission-Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (NSC-CCDI) were held incommunicado with no recourse to appeal their detention.

There were no statistics available on the number of individuals in the liuzhi detention system nationwide. In previous years, however, several provinces published these numbers, including, in 2020, Heilongjiang (376) and Jilin (275). One provincial official heading the liuzhi detention system stated suspects averaged 42.5 days in detention before being transferred into the criminal justice system.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Criminal detention beyond 37 days required approval of a formal arrest by the procuratorate, but in cases pertaining to “national security, terrorism, and major bribery,” the law permitted up to six months of incommunicado detention without formal arrest. After formally arresting a suspect, public security authorities were authorized to detain a suspect for up to an additional seven months while the case was investigated.

After completing an investigation, the procuratorate could detain a suspect an additional 45 days while determining whether to file criminal charges. If charges were filed, authorities could detain a suspect for an additional 45 days before beginning judicial proceedings. Public security officials sometimes detained persons beyond the period allowed by law, and pretrial detention periods of a year or longer were common.

The law stipulated detainees be allowed to meet with defense counsel before criminal charges were filed, although lengthy detention without access to lawyers before charges were filed was common. Lawyers reported significant difficulties meeting their clients in detention centers, especially in cases considered politically sensitive.

Criminal defendants could apply for bail (also translated as “a guarantor pending trial”) while awaiting trial, but the system did not operate effectively, and authorities released few suspects on bail.

The law required notification of family members within 24 hours of detention, but authorities often held individuals without providing such notification for significantly longer periods, especially in politically sensitive cases. In some cases, notification did not occur.

Authorities used administrative detention to intimidate political and religious advocates. Forms of administrative detention included compulsory drug rehabilitation treatment (for drug users), “custody and training” (for minor criminal offenders), and “legal education” centers for political activists and religious and spiritual adherents, particularly Falun Gong practitioners. The maximum stay in compulsory drug rehabilitation centers was two years, commonly including six months in a detoxification center. The government maintained similar rehabilitation centers for those charged with prostitution or with soliciting prostitution.

Arbitrary Arrest: Authorities detained or arrested persons on poorly defined allegations of revealing state secrets, subversion, and other crimes to suppress political dissent and public advocacy. Any piece of information could be retroactively designated a state secret, such as information on criminal trials, commercial activity, and any government activity. Authorities also used vaguely worded charges of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” broadly against many civil rights advocates. A counterespionage law granted authorities the power to require individuals and organizations to cease any activities deemed a threat to national security. Failure to comply could result in seizure of property and assets. Revisions to the counterespionage law broadening the definition of espionage went into effect July 10, accompanied by a significant public awareness campaign discouraging a range of interactions with foreigners.

There were multiple reports authorities arrested or detained lawyers, religious leaders or adherents, petitioners, and other rights advocates for lengthy periods without officially issuing a charge or providing a reason. Authorities subjected many of these individuals to extralegal house arrest, denial of travel rights, or administrative detention in different types of extralegal detention facilities, including “black jails.” Conditions faced by those under house arrest varied but sometimes included isolation in their homes under guard by security agents. Security officials were frequently stationed inside the homes. Authorities placed many citizens under house arrest during sensitive times, such as during the visits of senior foreign government officials, annual plenary sessions of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, the anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, and sensitive anniversaries in Tibetan areas and Xinjiang. Security agents took some of those not placed under house arrest to remote areas on so-called vacations.

State media reported the NSC-CCDI had “taken away” and detained billionaire Bao Fan, founder of China Renaissance Holdings, on February 7; he remained in custody as of December.

On March 20, Amnesty International reported that, in Urumqi, Xinjiang, State Security officers detained Zhanargül Zhumatay, an ethnic Kazakh musician who advocated for the rights of herders. Zhumatay communicated with persons abroad and spoke out for the land rights of Kazakh herding communities, according to Amnesty International, adding that she had been previously held in an internment camp.

On April 13, lawyer Yu Wensheng and wife Xu Yan were arrested by Beijing police en route to the mission of the European Union. They were later charged with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Previously, Yu was released in 2022 after serving a four-year prison term for his civil society efforts. RFA reported on May 23 that the government was dissuading lawyers from representing Yu and Xu.

On May 18, a district court in Guangzhou sentenced Wang Aizhong (detained since 2021) to three years in prison for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” in connection with his involvement with the “Southern Street Movement.” Authorities did not permit Wang’s wife to attend the trial, RFA reported.

On May 18, Wang Mo, a civil rights activist from Jiangsu Province, went missing after holding up a banner in Guangzhou in support of Wang Aizhong, an activist tried and sentenced that same day, according to press reports. Wang was released on bail after a three-day detention and sent back to his home in Jiangsu, according to a post on X (formerly Twitter).

On June 6, media reported human rights lawyer Chang Weiping was sentenced to three and a half years in prison in Shaanxi Province for “subversion of state power.” Chang, known for his successful representation of HIV and AIDS discrimination cases, was detained in 2020 after he posted a video to YouTube detailing abuse he suffered during a January 2020 detention.

Voice of America reported major judicial irregularities marked the June 21 trial of Shanghai rights activist Harvey Ji (Ji Xiaolong) on charges of “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble” for his online activism both during and immediately following the spring 2022 Shanghai lockdown. Authorities in Shanghai detained Ji in August 2022. Ji published a petition during the lockdown calling on the government to end its zero-COVID policy, compensate companies for losses caused by the policy, and release those jailed during the pandemic for expressing themselves freely.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention could last longer than one year. Defendants in “sensitive cases” reported being subjected to prolonged pretrial detention. Statistics were not published or made publicly available, but lengthy pretrial detentions were especially common in cases of political prisoners.

As of August, China Human Rights Watch cofounder Xu Qin, detained in November 2021 on suspicion of “inciting subversion,” remained in detention in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province. Authorities delayed Xu’s trial for the 10th time on August 3. Her lawyer previously stated the government suspended Xu’s trial in retaliation for her refusal to plead guilty.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

Although the law stated the courts should exercise judicial power independently, without interference from administrative organs, social organizations, and individuals, the judiciary did not exercise judicial power independently. Judges regularly received political guidance on pending cases, including instructions on how to rule, from national and local governments and the CCP, particularly in politically sensitive cases. The CCP directed court operations and approved all judicial and procuratorate appointments.

Corruption often influenced court decisions since safeguards against judicial corruption were vague and poorly enforced. A CCP-controlled committee decided most major cases, and the duty of trial and appellate court judges was to craft a legal justification for the committee's decision. Courts routinely barred the public from attendance.

Trial Procedures

Although the law reaffirmed the presumption of innocence, the criminal justice system remained biased toward a presumption of guilt, especially in high-profile or politically sensitive cases.

Courts often punished defendants who refused to acknowledge guilt with harsher sentences than those who confessed. The appeals process rarely reversed convictions, and it failed to provide sufficient avenues for review. Remedies for violations of defendants' rights were inadequate.

Authorities often closed trials to the public and used the state secrets provision to keep politically sensitive proceedings closed, sometimes even to family members, and to withhold a defendant's access to defense counsel. Criminal defendants were eligible for legal assistance, but most criminal defendants went to trial without a lawyer.

Human rights lawyers reported authorities did not permit them to defend certain clients or threatened them with punishment such as revoking licenses if they chose to do so; defendants in politically sensitive cases frequently found it difficult to find an attorney. Other government tactics to intimidate or otherwise pressure human rights lawyers included unlawful detention, vague "investigations" of legal offices, disbarment, harassment, physical intimidation, and denial of access to evidence and to clients.

Despite regulations that defense attorneys should be allowed to meet suspects or defendants, lawyers often had no pretrial access to their clients (especially in sensitive cases), had limited time to review evidence, and were not allowed to communicate with defendants during trials. Similarly, criminal defendants were frequently not assigned an attorney until a case was brought to court.

Mechanisms allowing defendants to confront their accusers were inadequate. Judges retained significant discretion over whether live witness testimony was required or even allowed. In most criminal trials, prosecutors read witness statements, which neither the defendants nor their lawyers had an opportunity to rebut through cross-examination. Although the law stated pretrial witness statements could not serve as the sole basis for conviction, prosecutors relied heavily on such statements. Defense attorneys had no authority to compel witnesses to testify or to mandate discovery.

Media reports indicated public security authorities used televised confessions to establish guilt before criminal trial proceedings began. In some cases, these confessions were likely a precondition for release. NGOs asserted such statements were likely coerced, perhaps by torture; some detainees who confessed recanted upon release and confirmed their confessions had been coerced. No provision in the law allowed the pretrial broadcast of confessions by criminal suspects.

On April 10, civil rights activists Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong were sentenced to 14- and 12-years' imprisonment, respectively, for "subversion of state power" and incitement to the same, media reported. They were tried in secret in June 2022. The court limited public access because the cases involved "state secrets." Relatives were not allowed to attend the trials and lawyers were warned not to speak with media. Rights groups called the trials "grossly unfair" and the charges "trumped up." Ding and Xu were detained in 2019 after a meeting in Xiamen, Fujian Province, to organize peaceful civil society activities.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Government officials continued to deny holding any political prisoners, asserting persons were detained not for their political or religious views but because they had violated the law. Authorities, however, continued to imprison citizens for reasons related to politics and religion or spiritual beliefs. Human rights organizations estimated thousands of political prisoners (not counting persons held in Xinjiang) remained incarcerated, most in prisons and some in administrative detention. The government did not grant international humanitarian NGOs or UN agencies access to political prisoners. Prison authorities at times withheld medical treatment from political prisoners.

Many political prisoners remained either in prison or held under other forms of detention, including writer Yang Maodong (pen name Guo Feixiong); Uyghur scholars Ilham Tohti, Rahile Dawut, and Hushtar Isa, brother of World Uyghur Congress president Dolkun Isa; retired Uyghur medical doctor Gulshan Abbas; Uyghur entrepreneur Ekpar Asat; Tibetan Buddhist monk Go Sherab Gyatso; Tibetan Dorje Tashi; activists Wang Bingzhang, Chen Jianfang, and Huang Qi; pastors Zhang Shaojie and Wang Yi; Falun Gong practitioner Zhou Deyong; Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai Thaddeus Ma Daqin; rights lawyers and activists Xia Lin, Gao Zhisheng, Xu Zhiyong, Ding Jiayi, Xu Yan, Yu Wensheng, Chang Weiping, and Li Yuhang; citizen journalist Zhang Zhan; Shanghai labor activist Jiang Cunde; and others.

Criminal punishments included “deprivation of political rights” for a fixed period after release from prison, during which an individual could be denied rights of free speech, association, and publication. Former prisoners reported their ability to find employment, travel, obtain residence permits and passports, rent residences, and access social services was severely restricted.

Authorities frequently subjected former political prisoners and their families to surveillance, telephone wiretaps, searches, and other forms of harassment or threats.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

The government and its agents engaged in acts to intimidate or exact reprisals against individuals outside of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), including against Uyghurs and other ethnic minority group members, religious and spiritual practitioners, dissidents, foreign journalists, and PRC students and faculty members on campuses and in academic institutions overseas.

In April Freedom House in its transnational repression report stated the country engaged in transnational repression, including physical and digital threats and intimidation, coercion by proxy, technical espionage, unexplained disappearances, and the abuse of Interpol procedures. Freedom House reported that the government coopted other countries into conducting renditions on its behalf.

Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, Forced Returns, or Other Violence or Threats of Violence: *The Economist* reported in June that PRC police officers subjected a Uyghur woman in Turkey to psychological torture, including by berating her, asking her to post naked photographs of herself on WeChat, and threatening to imprison her family members in Xinjiang. This experience caused the woman to suffer panic attacks and be hospitalized multiple times.

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: Safeguard Defenders reported in August that PRC officials surveilled and harassed Turkey-based family members of Uyghurs living in Xinjiang, relying on networks of Uyghur informants in Turkey – themselves often victims of transnational repression – to collect information for use in coercing family members abroad into silence or support for PRC policies.

Media reported the China Student and Scholar Association functioned as an overseas monitoring mechanism and information network for authorities, suppressing independent academic activity in third countries. This institution allegedly tracked and reported on PRC students with prodemocracy views, leading to intimidation and bullying.

Media reported that PRC students studying abroad expressed heightened concerns about returning home due to the revised counter-espionage law, which raised fears of potential surveillance and reprisals. The revised law required the country's citizens, including students abroad, to assist with intelligence work if requested by the government. Some students worried that their academic activities or contacts abroad could be deemed suspicious, leading to potential legal troubles upon their return.

On January 12, Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* reported PRC doctoral students admitted to Sweden via the Chinese Scholarship Council were obliged to sign secret agreements requiring them to pledge loyalty to the CCP, "serve the interests of the regime," and never participate in activities against the will of PRC authorities. A breach of the agreement could reportedly result in fines for family members in China. In June the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany suspended collaboration with students funded by the Chinese Scholarship Council, citing concerns about students' contracts violating academic freedom. Universities in Denmark, the Netherlands, and elsewhere also cut ties with the council during the year for similar reasons.

In April a foreign government charged two PRC residents of the country with opening and operating an illegal overseas "police service station" as a provincial branch of the Ministry of Public Security. The accused allegedly organized counterprotests, participated in "persuade to return" and other harassment practices on behalf of the PRC government, and stalked prodemocracy activists.

In May a foreign government charged an individual with acting in the country as an agent of the PRC government by allegedly providing PRC officials with information on local individuals and organizations, organizing a counterprotest against prodemocracy dissidents, providing photographs of and information on dissidents to PRC government officials, and providing the names of potential recruits to the Ministry of Public Security.

On June 20, a foreign court convicted three men of harassing victims at the direction of PRC authorities and acting as foreign agents of the PRC government in that country.

Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools: There were credible reports authorities attempted to misuse international law enforcement tools for politically motivated purposes as a reprisal against specific individuals outside the country.

On August 21, the *Washington Post* reported on the country's law enforcement relationship with Fiji and PRC misuse of international law enforcement tools to project its police powers overseas. A 2011 police cooperation memorandum of understanding between the two countries, scrapped by Fiji on January 26, went beyond the normal scope of such agreements between other developing countries, the report stated.

Efforts to Control Mobility: There were reports the PRC attempted to control mobility to exact reprisal against citizens abroad. Authorities refused to renew passports for Uyghurs, Tibetans, and others living abroad.

Bilateral Pressure: There were credible reports that for politically motivated purposes, the PRC pressured other countries aimed at forcing those countries to take adverse action against specific individuals or groups.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

Property-related disputes between citizens and authorities sometimes turned violent. These disputes frequently stemmed from local officials' collusion with property developers to pay little or no compensation to displaced residents, a lack of effective government oversight or media scrutiny of local officials' involvement in property transactions, and a lack of legal remedies or other dispute resolution mechanisms for displaced residents.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

The law stated the “freedom and privacy of correspondence of citizens are protected by law,” but authorities did not respect the privacy of citizens. Although the law required warrants before officers could search premises, officials frequently ignored this requirement. The Public Security Bureau and prosecutors were authorized to issue search warrants on their own authority without judicial review. There continued to be reports of cases of forced entry by police officers.

Authorities routinely monitored telephone calls, text messages, faxes, email, instant messaging, social media apps, and other digital communications intended to remain private, particularly of political activists. Authorities also opened and censored domestic and international mail. Security services routinely monitored and entered residences and offices to gain access to computers, telephones, and fax machines.

According to Freedom House, rapid advances in surveillance technology – including artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and intrusive surveillance apps – coupled with growing police access to user data helped facilitate the prosecution of prominent dissidents as well as ordinary users.

On June 6, according to media reports, a passenger on a ferry in Haikou was investigated by police and customs officers. The officers obtained his WeChat conversation records, including deleted messages, simply by searching his national identification number in their system. According to RFA, the national identification number gave authorities access to all of a user’s personal information, including bank accounts, property, hotel stays, purchase records, and social media history.

According to media reports, the Ministry of Public Security used tens of millions of surveillance cameras throughout the country to monitor the public. Human rights groups stated authorities relied on cameras and other forms of surveillance to monitor and intimidate political dissidents, religious leaders and adherents, Tibetans, and Uyghurs. These included facial recognition and “gait recognition” video surveillance, allowing police not only to monitor a situation but also to quickly identify individuals in crowds. The monitoring and disruption of telephone and internet communications were particularly widespread in Xinjiang and Tibetan areas. The law allowed security agencies to cut communication networks during “major security incidents.” *China Digital Times* published an article on February 7 on “Sharp Eyes,” a “rural focused initiative” that encouraged citizens to surveil one another. Through this initiative, the village party committee had access to all household surveillance devices.

In May Internet Protocol Video Market (IPVM), a security and technology research group, reported that the Public Security Bureau of Shanghai’s Songjiang District had announced a “Big Data” project that included development of a software module specifically for “spotting” Uyghurs arriving in Shanghai. IPVM also reported in July that Chengmai County in Hainan Province – more than 1,600 miles from Xinjiang – in December 2022 purchased facial recognition cameras capable of detecting Uyghurs.

Government authorities interfered in families’ living arrangements when a family member was involved in perceived sensitive political activities. Authorities punished the family members of those deemed to have made politically sensitive remarks or online posts. In some cases, public security officials pressured schools not to allow the children of prominent political detainees to enroll.

Although the government sought to create a unified national social credit system, dozens of disparate social credit systems operated at the local, provincial, and national government levels. There were also “private” social credit systems operated by technology companies. These systems collected vast amounts of data from companies and individuals in an effort to address deficiencies in “social trust,” strengthen access to credit, and reduce corruption. These agencies collected

information on academic records, traffic violations, social media presence, friendships, adherence to birth control regulations, employment performance, consumption habits, and other topics.

Industry experts believed the social credit system was not used to target companies or individuals for their political or religious beliefs, noting authorities possessed other tools to target companies and individuals.

The government continued to use the “double-linked household” system in Xinjiang developed through many years of use in Tibet. This system divided towns and neighborhoods into units of 10 households each, with the households in each unit instructed to watch over each other and report on “security issues” and poverty problems to the government, thus turning average citizens into informers.

In Xinjiang the government also continued to require Uyghur families to accept government “home stays,” in which officials or volunteers forcibly lived in Uyghurs’ homes and monitored families’ observance of religion for signs of “extremism.” Those who exhibited behaviors the government considered to be signs of “extremism,” such as praying, possessing religious texts, or abstaining from alcohol or tobacco, could be detained in “re-education camps.” The government restricted the right to have children (see section 6, Reproductive Rights).

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The constitution stated citizens “enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.” Authorities, however, did not respect these rights, especially when their exercise conflicted with CCP interests. Authorities continued to impose tight control of all print, broadcast, electronic, and social media and regularly used them to propagate government views and CCP ideology. Authorities censored and manipulated the press, social media, and the internet, particularly around sensitive anniversaries and topics such as public health.

Freedom of Expression: Citizens often avoided discussing political matters, leaders, or “sensitive” topics for fear of official punishment. Authorities routinely took harsh action against citizens who questioned the legitimacy of the CCP or criticized President Xi. Some independent think tanks, study groups, and seminars reported pressure to cancel sessions on sensitive topics. Many others confirmed authorities regularly warned them against meeting with foreign reporters or diplomats and to avoid participating in diplomatic receptions or public programs organized by foreign entities.

Those who made comments deemed politically sensitive in public speeches, performances, exhibitions, academic discussions, or remarks to media, or who posted sensitive comments online, remained subject to punitive measures, as did members of their families. In addition, an increase in electronic surveillance in public spaces, coupled with the movement of many citizens’ routine interactions to the heavily monitored digital space, meant the government monitored an increasing percentage of daily life. Conversations in groups or peer-to-peer on social media platforms and via messaging applications were subject to censorship, monitoring, and action from authorities. These developments further eroded freedom of speech.

On April 27, the NGO PEN America published its annual *Freedom to Write Index*. PEN America reported 90 documented cases of writers held in custody in 2022 (including six new cases), 35 in

dominant Han Chinese areas (excluding Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang) and 33 writers and scholars imprisoned in Xinjiang.

In February blogger Ruan Xiaohuan was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for "inciting state subversion." Ruan anonymously operated the blog *Program Think*, which criticized the CCP, reported on corruption, and provided cybersecurity tips on circumventing censorship. Shanghai authorities arrested Ruan in Shanghai in 2021, international media reported. Ruan was reportedly appealing the sentence but the Shanghai court refused him access to lawyers who specialized in human rights cases. Shanghai authorities in early June briefly detained Ruan's spouse Bei Zhenying, according to international media.

In May Beijing's Culture and Tourism Bureau fined the Xiaoguo Culture Media Company 14.7 million yuan (\$2.13 million) and barred it from hosting performances in Beijing and Shanghai in retaliation for a joke by standup comedian Li Haoshi during a performance that some interpreted as insulting the People's Liberation Army, reported international media.

Authorities arrested or detained countless citizens for "spreading fake news," "illegal information dissemination," or "spreading rumors online." These claims ranged from sharing political views or promoting religious extremism to sharing factual reports on public health concerns, including COVID-19.

These abuses were especially stark in Xinjiang, where the government ran a multifaceted system of physical and cyber controls to stop individuals from expressing themselves or practicing their religion or spiritual beliefs. In Xinjiang police regularly stopped Muslims and members of non-Han ethnic minorities and demanded to review their cell phones for any evidence of communication deemed inappropriate.

The government extensively used mobile phone apps, cameras, and other electronics to monitor all speech and movement. Authorities in Xinjiang employed a comprehensive database that tracked the movements, mobile app usage, and even electricity and gasoline consumption of inhabitants in the region.

Control of public depictions of President Xi was severe, with censors aggressively shutting down any depiction that varied from official media storylines. Censors continued to block images of the Winnie the Pooh cartoon character on social media because internet users used it to represent Xi. Social media sites did not allow comments related to Xi and other prominent PRC leaders.

On June 2, in advance of the June 4 anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the social media platform Douyin issued censorship instructions to key opinion leaders in the streaming space, the *China Digital Times* reported. The instructions reportedly banned the display of lit candle emojis, a universal online expression of grief and a favored expression of remembrance in the country.

Violence and Harassment: The government frequently impeded the work of members of the press, including citizen journalists. Journalists reported being subjected to physical attack, harassment, monitoring, and intimidation when reporting on sensitive topics. Government officials used criminal prosecution, civil lawsuits, violence, detention, and other forms of harassment to intimidate authors and journalists and to prevent the dissemination of unsanctioned information on a wide range of topics.

Family members of journalists based overseas also faced harassment, and in some cases detention, in retaliation for reporting by their relatives. Dozens of Uyghur relatives of overseas-based journalists working for RFA's Uyghur Service disappeared or were detained in Xinjiang.

Journalists faced the threat of demotion or dismissal for publishing views that challenged the government. In many cases, potential sources refused to meet with journalists due to actual or feared government pressure. Journalist often refused, even in informal settings with non-PRC

interlocutors, to discuss even nonsensitive topics. So-called taboo topics included not only Tibet, Taiwan, and corruption, but also natural disasters and the #MeToo movement.

Authorities imprisoned numerous journalists working in traditional and new media. Reporters Without Borders' 2022 *World Press Freedom Index* tallied at least 102 journalists (professional and nonprofessional) detained in the country. Of these, 60 came from Xinjiang.

As of October, two foreign journalists of Chinese descent remained detained on "espionage" charges: Swedish publisher Gui Minhai, founder of a Hong Kong publishing house, who was sentenced in 2020 to 10 years in prison; and Australian journalist Yang Hengjun, arrested in 2019 and since detained without a verdict.

In a report published March 1, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China described barriers faced by foreign journalists reporting in the country in 2022, including the abusive application of zero-COVID policy restrictions, and intimidation in the form of physical assaults, being visibly followed, online trolling, cyber hacking, and visa denials. The report, based on 102 club members' responses to a survey, highlighted that 46 percent of respondents had been prevented from reporting in the field due to alleged health and safety grounds despite presenting "no health risk by China's own standards." Correspondents reported their WeChat communications were monitored, and many believed their internet accounts were compromised. Accessing PRC sources was also increasingly difficult; 78 percent of the survey respondents were told by potential interviewees that they were not allowed to speak to them or that they needed prior permission. Authorities also encouraged individuals to file lawsuits or threaten legal action against foreign journalists. Even individuals who explicitly agreed to media interviews later filed lawsuits against foreign correspondents. The Foreign Correspondents' Club described members' access to state-organized public events such as certain meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference as "effectively cut off."

Many foreign reporters were caught up in diplomatic rows outside of their control. Since April at least three correspondents from Indian outlets had their press credentials revoked or their renewal denied.

According to a September 2022 report from Freedom House, foreign correspondents in the country were "subjected to attempted interrogations in connection with national security charges."

Foreign news bureaus could only hire local staff through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-affiliated Diplomatic Service Bureau. These employees were prohibited from engaging in independent reporting and instructed to provide "a good image of the country." Local employees were also subject to harassment and intimidation. Authorities limited the number of local staff foreign press bureaus could hire, in some cases allowing only one local researcher per correspondent from outlets out of favor with authorities. Some outlets reported trouble hiring even one local researcher per correspondent. New staff were wary of taking on responsibilities that could be considered politically sensitive.

Authorities continued to suppress any reporting related to the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square.

As of October at least two journalists (freelancer Li Siqi and *Renwu Magazine* reporter Wang Xue) remained detained for their presence at protests in November 2022 against the government's zero-COVID policies, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF). *Beijing News* journalist Yang Liu and freelancer Qin Ziyi were also detained, then released on bail in late January. The four faced charges ranging from "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" to "gathering a crowd to disrupt public order." Other journalists and press freedom defenders remained detained, including at least four held for their coverage or comments on handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: journalist Zhang Zhan and political commentators Guo Quan, Fang Bin, and Ren Zhiqiang.

On April 10, political commentator Xu Zhiyong was sentenced to 14 years in prison for "subversion of state power" by the Linshu County Court of Shandong Province, following his arrest in 2020 after having published an opinion piece critical of Xi Jinping and his handling of the COVID-19

crisis, reported RSF. Xu was sentenced along with civil rights activist Ding Jiaxi, who received a 12-year prison term, after a closed-door trial that took place in June 2022. Both were reportedly deprived of water, food, and sleep, and subjected to prolonged interrogations on a “tiger chair.”

On April 23, according to RSF, the family of former *Guangming Daily* deputy editor and columnist Dong Yuyu revealed that Dong had been detained for more than a year under charges of “espionage” and faces at least 10 years in prison. Dong was taken into custody in February 2022 while meeting a Japanese diplomat at a hotel in Beijing and was held incommunicado for six months before being later formally arrested. As of October no date had been announced for Dong’s trial and the only evidence presented was his contacts with foreign diplomats and overseas academic fellowships he received.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including

Online Media: The CCP and government maintained ultimate authority over all published, online, and broadcast material. Officially, only state-run media outlets had government approval to cover CCP leaders or other topics deemed “sensitive.” While it did not dictate all content to be published or broadcast, the CCP and the government had unchecked authority to mandate if, when, and how particular topics were reported or to order they not be reported at all.

The government’s propaganda department issued daily guidance on what topics should be promoted in all media outlets and how those topics should be covered. Directives warned against reporting on topics such as COVID-19 outbreaks, the official response, and international inquiries, as well as party and official reputation, health and safety in general, and foreign affairs. Orders issued following Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine barred any criticism of Russia or favorable comments on NATO and remained in force as of October. Chinese reporters working for private media companies confirmed increased pressure to conform to government requirements on story selection and content.

Only journalists with official government accreditation were allowed to publish news in print or online. The CCP constantly monitored all forms of journalist output, including printed news, television reporting, and online news, including livestreaming. Journalists and editors self-censored to stay within the lines dictated by the CCP. They faced serious penalties for crossing those lines, which were often vague, subject to change at the discretion of propaganda officials, and enforced retroactively.

The government sought to exercise complete control over public and private commentary regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, undermining local and international efforts to report on the virus’s spread. COVID-19 information on Chinese social media was closely monitored from the outbreak’s earliest manifestation. Popular livestreaming and messaging platforms WeChat and YY continued censorship protocols.

Because the CCP did not consider internet news companies “official” media, they were subject to debilitating regulations and barred from reporting on potentially “sensitive” stories.

Citizen journalists faced a difficult climate, with authorities seeking to control content published through social media, including “self-media” or “we-media” accounts. These were typically blogs operated independently on social media without official backing from established outlets. Unaccredited reporters could face legal fallout or even criminal charges.

Newscasts from overseas news outlets, largely restricted to hotels and foreign residence compounds, were censored. Articles on sensitive topics were removed from international magazines. Foreign newscasts were often blacked out when covering sensitive subjects.

Government regulations restricted and limited public access to foreign television shows, which were banned during primetime, and local streamers had to limit the foreign portion of their program libraries to less than 30 percent. Government rules banned the sale of foreign publications without an import permit. This included sales on online shopping platforms, which were banned from

offering “overseas publications,” including books, movies, and games that did not already have government approval. The ban also applied to services related to publications.

Authorities banned books with content deemed inconsistent with officially sanctioned views. The law permitted only government-approved publishing houses to print books. All books and magazines continued to require state-issued publication numbers, expensive and difficult to obtain. Newspapers, periodicals, books, audio and video recordings, or electronic publications could not be printed or distributed without the approval of central authorities and relevant provincial publishing authorities. Individuals who attempted to publish without government approval faced imprisonment, fines, confiscation of their books, and other punishment. The CCP practice of preemptively classifying certain topics as state secrets applied to the publishing industry.

The editorial board of *Film, Television and Theater Review Journal* published at Nanjing University collectively resigned in January for “not being able to tell the truth.” Hu Decai, the editor of the journal, and the entire editorial board issued a statement explaining that, “Nine years ago, we vowed to take ‘modernization’ and ‘telling the truth’ as the mission for this journal. If we can’t adhere to this belief, then our work doesn’t have much meaning.”

After publishing a report on the surge of cremations (up 72 percent year to year in Zhejiang Province in the first quarter of the year), the news site *Caixin* was forced to remove the article. Zhejiang Province removed the data from its website that the article drew on, although some posts about the surge of cremations remained on social media site Weibo.

In April a news editor posted on social media he and his team members had left Shanghai-based news outlet *Sixth Tone*. In a long thread, the editor said that conditions deteriorated after *Sixth Tone* published a piece in January criticizing the zero-COVID policy. After the article was criticized from “above,” editors and reporters on that project were forced to resign or suspended, including the editor in chief.

Libel/Slander Laws: By law, defamation could be punished by up to three years’ imprisonment; truth was not a defense.

National Security: Authorities often justified restrictions on expression based on an expansive definition of national security. Government leaders cited the threat of terrorism to justify restricting freedom of expression by Muslims and other religious minorities. These justifications were a baseline rationale for restrictions on press movements, publications, and other forms of expression.

In March state security officers in Shanghai detained Li Yanhe, a book publisher and radio host for Taiwanese public broadcaster Radio Taiwan International, while he was visiting relatives in the city, reported the Committee to Protect Journalists. A Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson said that Li was under investigation for “conducting activities endangering national security.” Li founded Gusa Press, which published books critical of PRC authorities. Li also hosted the show *Seeing China This Way – Time with Fucha* on Radio Taiwan International, where he discussed Chinese politics and current affairs.

Bloomberg reported in July that Guangzhou police forced TEDx Guangzhou to cancel an event in August, citing the Foreign NGO Law, even though TEDx organizers argued that they were neither an NGO nor affiliated with a foreign entity other than having permission to use the TED name.

Internet Freedom

The government tightly controlled and highly censored domestic internet usage, including monitoring private online communications. The law allowed the government to “monitor, defend, and handle cybersecurity risks and threats originating from within the country or overseas sources,” and criminalized using the internet to “create or disseminate false information to disrupt the economic or social order.” The law also permitted security agencies to cut communication networks across an entire geographic region during “major security incidents.”

The law also obliged internet companies to cooperate fully with investigations of suspected leaks of state secrets, stop the transmission of such information once discovered, and report the crime to authorities. These obligations were defined broadly and without clear limits. Failure to delete material when ordered was punishable by administrative action, by the Ministry of State Security, for example, or by law enforcement authorities.

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) operated a website called the Reporting Center for Illegal and Undesirable Information, where internet users could report information deemed harmful to the country, including political information.

Domestic internet authorities led by the Cybersecurity Defense Bureau targeted individuals accused of defaming the government online, whether in public or private messages. The CAC directly managed internet content, including online news media, and promoted CCP propaganda. It enjoyed broad authority in regulating online media practices and played a large role in regulating and shaping information dissemination online.

By regulation, internet service providers were required by the CAC to verify accounts that contained content or logos involving the state or government agencies to prevent someone misleading the public. All user accounts seeking to produce content on specialized topics were required to provide the professional qualifications of the account users demonstrating expertise in that topic. CAC regulations required internet users to use their real name when posting comments or “liking” a post and stated users could be warned for posting “negative” information or for spreading rumors.

The government employed tens of thousands of individuals at the national, provincial, and local levels to monitor electronic communications and online content. Internet companies employed thousands to carry out CCP and government directives. CAC regulations required websites, mobile apps, forums, blogs, instant communications services, and search engines to ensure news coverage of a political, economic, diplomatic, or commentary nature reflected government positions and priorities.

The law required internet platform companies operating in the country to control content on their platforms or face penalties. According to Citizen Lab, China-based users of the WeChat platform were subjected to automatic filtering of chat messages and images.

The popular communication app WeChat remained heavily censored. Posts on sensitive topics disappeared when sent to or from a China-registered account. Authorities continued to monitor the app for political dissidence and other criticism, and detained, tried, or imprisoned some writers. PRC citizens abroad who used accounts created in China were still subject to censorship.

Human rights activists reported authorities questioned them concerning their participation in human rights-related chat groups, including on WeChat and WhatsApp. Authorities monitored the groups to identify activists, which led to increased self-censorship on WeChat.

The government continued efforts to limit virtual private network (VPN) use. While the government permitted some, including major international companies, to utilize VPNs, many smaller businesses, academics, and citizens were prohibited from using these tools. The government regularly penalized those caught using unauthorized VPNs. RFA reported in June that Mehmud Memtimin, a Uyghur university student, was sentenced in 2017 to 13 years’ imprisonment for using a VPN to view “illegal information.”

At the same time, the government tacitly allowed individuals to use VPNs to access X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and other websites normally inaccessible in the country for the purpose of attacking views that criticized the government. Encrypted communication apps such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Signal were regularly blocked, and VPNs disrupted, especially during “sensitive” times of the year and important political events.

The government blocked thousands of foreign websites, including those of news organizations including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, the BBC, and *The Economist*, as well as websites of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Authorities blocked many other websites and applications, including but not limited to Google, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Clubhouse, Signal, and Wikipedia. Despite being blocked, X and other foreign social media sites were estimated to have millions of users in the country, including government and party officials and prominent journalists and media figures. Authorities also blocked access to scores of foreign university websites.

On May 21, *The Straits Times* reported that Malaysian comedian Nigel Ng (“Uncle Roger”) was censored in China for jokes that were widely shared on social media about the PRC’s surveillance state and its policy towards Taiwan. Censors removed Ng’s accounts on PRC social media platforms Weibo and Bili, where he had hundreds of thousands of followers.

On January 17, the CAC warned it would crack down on “fake information” that spread negative views regarding COVID-19 infections over the Lunar New Year, to prevent the spread of “gloomy emotions” two months after the country abruptly lifted almost all zero-COVID controls. The CAC also stated it would crack down on “deliberate online attempts” to spread anxiety and exaggerate “the dark side of society.” On March 12, the CAC began a campaign targeting social media accounts, including a crackdown on information that “damages the image of the Communist Party and the government.” In May the CAC announced it deleted 1.4 million social media posts and permanently closed 67,000 social media accounts, almost 8,000 of which were taken down for “spreading fake news, rumors, and harmful information.”

In July the CAC announced new rules regarding “independent content creators” such as social media influencers. The rules required social media platforms to monitor user accounts and suspend those that spread false information or discussed sensitive topics in a harmful manner. CAC rules also required better verification of accounts and increased labeling of rumors or controversial information.

The government censored online business and economic information. On July 3, authorities temporarily suspended all domestic social media accounts of media outlet *Health Insight* for allegedly “violating public account management regulations,” one month after it reported on profit-oriented management practices within big hospitals, reported RSF.

Online references to same-sex acts, same-sex relations, and scientifically accurate words for genitalia were banned based on a government pronouncement listing same-sex acts or relations as an “abnormal sexual relation” and forbidding their discussion.

In June a court sentenced He Binggang and his fiancée Zhang Yibo to six- and five-year prison sentences, respectively, for circumventing the government’s internet censorship regime using software called Ogate. Shanghai officials detained He and Zhang in 2021. He lost the ability to walk as a result of abuse during this and previous detentions, which were connected to his practice of Falun Gong.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

While the constitution provided for freedom of peaceful assembly, the government severely restricted this right. The law stipulated that all public assemblies required approval, could not challenge “party leadership,” or infringe upon the “interests of the state” and protests against the political system or national leaders were prohibited. Authorities denied permits and quickly

suppressed demonstrations involving expression of dissenting political views. Authorities also used administrative detention to prevent public demonstrations.

Citizens throughout the country continued to gather publicly and without authorization to protest evictions, forced relocations, and inadequate compensation, often resulting in conflict with authorities or formal charges. Authorities quickly broke up any assembly motivated by broad political or social grievances, sometimes with excessive force. Media reported thousands of protests took place during the year across the country. Although peaceful protests could be authorized, if the restrictions noted above were respected, public security officials rarely granted permits to demonstrate.

Concerts, sporting events, exercise classes, and other meetings of more than 200 persons required approval from public security authorities. Restrictions in Xinjiang were severe: RFA reported in July that Xinjiang authorities launched a 100-day “strike hard” campaign during which they would crack down on “illegal gatherings,” defined as any gathering of more than 30 persons held without prior authorization.

Chinese social media reports indicated stepped-up campus surveillance and censorship in the wake of November 2022 protests against COVID policies, according to *University World News*. Human Rights Watch stated that “once students have gone to a protest and been detained, they will always be on the list and will be harassed and surveilled, probably throughout their lives.” Social media reported local Muslims gathered to protest after local authorities demolished the dome of the Najiaying Mosque in Tonghai County, Yuxi City, Yunnan Province on May 27; clashes broke out between police and protesters. Tonghai police issued a notice requesting protesters surrender to authorities before June 6 to receive a lighter punishment. Calling the protest “a serious case of disrupting social management order, which caused a bad social impact,” local police stated an investigation into the protest was underway.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provided for freedom of association, but the government effectively eliminated this right. CCP policy and government regulations required all professional, social, and economic organizations to officially register with and receive approval from the government. These regulations prevented the formation of autonomous political, human rights, religious, spiritual, labor, and other organizations that the government believed might challenge its authority in any area. Law and regulations explicitly prohibited organizations from conducting political or religious activities, and organizations that did not comply faced criminal penalties. The government maintained tight controls over civil society organizations, even when not engaged in sensitive topics, and in some cases, detained or harassed NGO workers. Propaganda targeted NGOs, smearing them for any affiliation with foreign governments.

The regulatory system for NGOs was highly restrictive; requirements varied depending on whether an organization was foreign or domestic. All domestic NGOs were required to register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and find an officially sanctioned sponsor to serve as their “professional supervisory unit.” Finding a sponsor was often difficult since the sponsor could be held civilly or criminally responsible for the NGO’s activities and sponsorship included burdensome reporting requirements. All organizations were required to report their sources of funding, including foreign funding.

All domestic NGOs were supposed to have a CCP cell, although implementation was not consistent. According to authorities, these CCP cells were to “strengthen guidance” of NGOs in areas such as “decision-making for important projects, important professional activities, major expenditures and funds, acceptance of large donations, and activities involving foreigners.” Authorities were to conduct annual “spot checks” to ensure compliance on “ideological political work, party building, financial and personnel management, study sessions, foreign exchange, acceptance of foreign donations and assistance, and conducting activities according to their charter.”

The law required foreign NGOs to register with the Ministry of Public Security and to find a state-sanctioned sponsor for their operations or for one-time activities. NGOs that failed to comply faced possible civil or criminal penalties. The law provided no appeals process for NGOs denied registration, and it stipulated that NGOs found to have violated certain legal provisions could be banned from operating in the country. The law also stated domestic groups cooperating with unregistered foreign NGOs would be punished and possibly banned.

Many government agencies had no unit responsible for sponsoring foreign NGOs. The vague definition of an NGO, as well as of what constituted “political” and therefore illegal activities, left many business organizations and alumni associations uncertain whether they fell within the purview of the law. The lack of clear communication from the government, coupled with harassment by security authorities, caused some foreign NGOs to suspend or cease operations in the country.

For donations to a domestic organization, foreign NGOs were required to maintain a representative office in the country to receive funds, or to use the bank account of a domestic NGO when conducting temporary activities. By law foreign NGOs were prohibited from using any other method to send and receive funds, and such funding had to be reported to the Ministry of Public Security. Foreign NGOs were prohibited from fundraising and “for-profit activities” under the law. Authorities investigated and restricted local NGOs that received foreign funding with particular vigor, and charges of receiving illegal foreign financial support figured frequently in government campaigns against disfavored NGOs.

Although all registered organizations came under some degree of government control, some NGOs, primarily service-oriented government-operated NGOs or GONGOs, were able to operate with less day-to-day scrutiny. Authorities supported the growth of some NGOs that focused on social problems, such as poverty alleviation and disaster relief.

Authorities investigated, restricted, and expelled international NGOs that assisted Tibetan communities in Tibet and other Tibetan areas. Almost all were forced to curtail their activities altogether due to travel restrictions, official intimidation of staff members, and the failure of local partners to renew project agreements.

On July 10, Shenzhen City released a circular announcing tightened regulations on seminars and forums hosted by “social organizations” (NGOs), requiring them to “enhance political sense of responsibility” and to ensure that the contents of their gatherings complied with the constitution, laws, and regulations. The city stated social organizations were required to cancel seminars that were “void, useless, and nonessential.”

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government did not respect these rights.

The government, often preemptively, harassed and intimidated individuals and their family members by denying them permission to travel, both internationally and domestically, keeping them under house arrest, or submitting them to “forced travel” during politically significant holidays.

In-country Movement: Authorities continued to maintain tight restrictions on freedom of movement, particularly to curtail the movement of individuals deemed political liabilities before key anniversaries, during foreign country national days, visits by foreign dignitaries, or major political events, as well as to forestall demonstrations. Uyghurs faced draconian restrictions on movement within Xinjiang and outside the region, including identification checks for individuals entering or leaving cities and on public roads. In Xinjiang, security officials operated checkpoints managing entry into public places, including markets and mosques, that required all Uyghurs to scan their national identity card, undergo a facial recognition check, and put baggage through airport-style security screening. Such restrictions were not applied consistently to Han Chinese residents in these areas.

The government operated a national household registration system (*hukou*) and maintained restrictions on the freedom to change one's workplace or residence, although many provinces and localities continued to ease restrictions for certain groups of students, investors, and professionals. While many rural residents migrated to the cities, where per capita disposable income was approximately three times the rural per capita income, they often could not change their official residence or workplace within the country. Most cities had annual quotas for the number of new temporary residence permits they could issue, and all workers, including university graduates, had to compete for a limited number of such permits. It was particularly difficult for rural residents to obtain household registration in provincial capitals, but outside those cities many provinces removed or lowered barriers to moving from a rural area to an urban one.

The household registration system added to the difficulties faced by rural residents, even after they relocated to urban areas and found employment. According to the *Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on 2019 National Economic and Social Development*, published in 2020 by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, 280 million individuals lived outside the jurisdiction of their household registration. Migrant workers and their families faced numerous obstacles regarding working conditions and labor rights. Many were unable to access public services, such as public education for their children or social insurance, in the cities where they lived and worked because they were not legally registered urban residents.

Under the “staying at prison employment” system, authorities denied certain persons permission to return to their homes after serving their sentences. These prisoners were placed in administrative detention beyond their original sentence for indefinite periods of prison employment.

On June 26, RFA reported that authorities forced activists to leave Beijing ahead of the Tiananmen massacre anniversary on June 4. Ji Feng, a well-known rights activist, was not allowed to return to Beijing even after the anniversary date passed. Authorities ordered him to stay in Guizhou, where his hukou was registered.

Throughout the year Beijing-based lawyers and families linked to the “709” crackdown in 2015, Wang Quanzhang and Li Wenzu, and Li Heping and Wang Qiaoling, faced direct and indirect harassment from landlords, police, and neighbors reportedly intended to force them out of Beijing, according to media. From April to June, the two couples moved apartments multiple times but encountered continuous harassment including: death threats, smashed windows, police visits after signing new leases, sudden and drastic rent increases, young men blocking the entrances to their homes, landlords changing their locks, and utility shutoffs. Media reported that the couples relocated outside of Beijing and that, on June 9, Li Heping, Wang Qiaoling, and their daughter attempted to fly out of Chengdu airport but were stopped and prohibited from leaving. Social media reported local authorities in Hubei Province were unwilling to process Li Wenzu's passport application.

Foreign Travel: The government controlled emigration and foreign travel. The government denied passport applications, blocked travelers from purchasing train or airline tickets, or used exit controls at departure points to deny foreign travel to persons deemed threats and, at times, their family members, and some persons employed in government posts. Throughout the year many lawyers, artists, authors, and activists were prevented from exiting the country. Authorities also blocked foreign travel by some activists' family members, both PRC and foreign passport holders.

Border officials and police sometimes cited threats to “national security” as the reason for refusing permission to leave the country, although authorities often provided no reason for such exit bans.

Uyghurs, particularly those residing in Xinjiang, reported great difficulty in getting passport applications approved. They were frequently denied passports to travel abroad.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

Although it restricted access to border areas, the government regularly cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which maintained an office in Beijing.

Access to Asylum: The law did not provide for granting refugee or asylum status. The government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees but tracked UNHCR-registered refugees in the country for record-keeping purposes. Asylum applicants and refugees remained in the country without access to education or social services and were subject to deportation at any time.

UNHCR reported that officials continued to restrict UNHCR access to border areas. Authorities sometimes detained and prosecuted citizens who assisted North Korean refugees and asylum seekers, as well as those who facilitated illegal border crossings.

Refoulement: The government continued to consider North Koreans as illegal “economic migrants” rather than refugees or asylum seekers and forcibly returned many of them to North Korea, where such migrants faced harsh punishments including torture, forced abortions, forced labor, gender-based violence including sexual violence, or death. The number of North Koreans entering China fell during the year due to border closures enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2022 the UN special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea reported that more than 1,500 North Koreans were detained in China and at risk of refoulement.

Access to Basic Services: Refugees generally did not have access to public health care, public education, or other social services due to lack of legal status.

Durable Solutions: The government largely cooperated with UNHCR when dealing with the local settlement in China of Han Chinese or members of ethnic minorities originally from Vietnam and Laos but living in China’s border areas since the Vietnam War era. The government and UNHCR continued discussions concerning the granting of citizenship to these long-term residents and their children, many of whom were born in China.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

Not applicable.

G. STATELESS PERSONS

According to international media reports, as many as 30,000 children born to North Korean women in China, most of whom were trafficked and married to PRC citizen spouses, had not been registered because the mother was undocumented, leaving the children de facto stateless. These children were denied access to public services, including education and health care, despite provisions in the law that provided citizenship to children with at least one PRC citizen parent. PRC citizen fathers reportedly sometimes did not register their children to avoid exposing the illegal status of their wives.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution stated, “all power in the People’s Republic of China belongs to the people” and the organs through which citizens exercised state power were the National People’s Congress and the people’s congresses at provincial, district, and local levels. The CCP dictated the legislative agenda to the congress. While the law provided for elections of people’s congress delegates at the county level and below, citizens could not freely choose the officials who governed them. The CCP controlled all elections and continued to control appointments to positions of political power. The CCP used various intimidation tactics, including house arrest, to block independent candidates from running in local elections.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: The government and CCP did not allow national elections. Direct elections occurred under a single-party political system, in which citizens could vote only for local level representatives. All candidates were either members of or approved by the CCP.

According to Ministry of Civil Affairs 2019 statistics, almost all the country’s more than 600,000 villages had implemented direct elections by ordinary citizens for members of local subgovernmental organizations known as village committees. The direct election of officials remained narrow in scope and was strictly confined to the lowest rungs of local governance. Corruption, vote buying, and interference by township-level and CCP officials continued to be problems. The law permitted each voter to cast proxy votes for up to three other voters.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Official statements asserted “the political party system [that] China has adopted is multiparty cooperation and political consultation” under CCP leadership. The CCP, however, retained a monopoly on political power, and the government forbade the creation of new political parties. The government officially recognized nine parties founded prior to 1949, and parties other than the CCP held 30 percent of the seats in the National People’s Congress. These non-CCP members, however, did not function as a political opposition. They exercised very little influence on legislation or policymaking and were only allowed to operate under the direction of the CCP United Front Work Department.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: Women and members of vulnerable, minority, or marginalized or vulnerable groups held few positions of significant influence in the government or CCP structure. No woman was promoted to the 24-member Politburo in the 20th Party Congress in 2022, leaving the Politburo without a woman for the first time since 1997. No woman was ever in the Politburo Standing Committee, the highest leadership group.

Election law provided a general mandate for quotas for women and ethnic-minority representatives in the National People’s Congress, but achieving these quotas often required election authorities to violate the election law. There were no gender quotas mandated for the CCP Central Committee, the State Council, or the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. The expectation that women would bear and raise children, which delayed their careers and made it more difficult for them to move into leadership positions, as well as the mandatory earlier retirement age for women, were barriers to political participation.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials and the government continued its anti-corruption and discipline campaign but did not implement the law consistently or transparently. Corruption remained prevalent. Many cases of corruption involved areas heavily regulated by the government, such as land usage rights, real estate, mining, and infrastructure development, which were susceptible to fraud, bribery, and kickbacks.

By law the NSC-CCDI was the government and CCP body charged with rooting out corruption. Its investigations could target any public official, including police, judges, and prosecutors; the commission could investigate and detain individuals connected to targeted public officials. The NSC-CCDI was vested with powers of the state and could conduct investigations against any employee who performed a public duty; that included doctors, academics, and employees of state-owned enterprises. There were credible reports that the NSC-CCDI investigations and detentions by liuzhi were sometimes politically motivated.

Corruption: In numerous cases government prosecutors investigated public officials and leaders of state-owned enterprises, who generally held high CCP ranks, for corruption.

While the tightly controlled state media apparatus publicized some notable corruption investigations, in general very few details were made public regarding the process by which CCP and government officials were investigated for corruption. Observers also said that corruption charges were often a pretext for purging political rivals.

For additional information about corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

The government sought to maintain control over civil society groups, halt the emergence of independent NGOs, and hinder activities of civil society and human rights groups. The government frequently harassed domestic NGOs and in many cases did not permit them to openly monitor or comment on human rights conditions. The government expressed suspicion of independent organizations and closely scrutinized NGOs with financial or other links overseas. The government continued to bring all domestic NGOs under its direct regulatory control, thereby curtailing the space for independent NGOs to exist. Most large NGOs were quasi-governmental, and all official NGOs were required to have a government agency sponsor (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association).

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: As of August, China Human Rights Watch cofounder Xu Qin, detained in 2021 on suspicion of “inciting subversion,” remained in pretrial detention in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province. Xu’s health was reportedly poor following three hunger strikes while in detention. She was previously arrested in 2018 for speaking out on human rights matters and subsequently placed under RSDL until 2021.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government remained reluctant to accept criticism of its human rights record by other nations or international organizations. The government sharply limited the visits of UN experts to the country and rarely provided substantive answers to queries by UN human rights bodies.

The government used its membership on the UN Economic and Social Council’s Committee on NGOs to block groups critical of China from obtaining UN accreditation and barring accredited activists from participating in UN events. The government also retaliated against human rights groups working with the United Nations.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape of women was illegal and carried a sentence ranging from three years in prison to death. The law did not recognize spousal rape or rape by a person of the same sex. A separate law on sexual assault included male victims but had a lesser maximum penalty of five years in prison. Most allegations of rape were closed through private settlement rather than prosecution.

Domestic violence remained a significant problem. Some scholars said victims were encouraged to attempt to resolve domestic violence through mediation. Societal sentiment that domestic violence was a personal, private matter contributed to underreporting and inaction by authorities when women faced violence at home. The law defined domestic violence as a civil, rather than a criminal, offense. The web publication *Sixth Tone* reported in 2019 that 25 percent of families had experienced domestic violence; more recent data were not available. The government did not effectively enforce laws against rape and domestic violence.

The government supported shelters for survivors of domestic violence and some courts provided protections to survivors, including through protective orders prohibiting a perpetrator of domestic violence from coming near a survivor. Nonetheless, official assistance did not always reach survivors and public security forces often ignored domestic violence. Legal aid institutions working to provide counseling and defense to survivors of domestic violence were often pressured to suspend public activities and cease all forms of policy advocacy, an area that was reserved only for government-sponsored organizations.

According to women's rights activists, a recurring problem in the prosecution of domestic violence cases was authorities' failure to collect evidence, including photographs, hospital records, police records, or children's testimony. Witnesses seldom testified in court.

Social media users widely discussed the alleged homicide of a woman, age 24, in Hui County, Henan, by her estranged husband. Protests reportedly erupted in the small town amidst allegations that authorities were slow to act due to the suspect's family connections. Photographs and videos showed hundreds of protesters rocking a police vehicle, as well as police striking and pepper-spraying protesters. While the alleged homicide and arrest were reported in mainstream press and remained accessible online as of October, videos and images of the protests and some search terms were censored, and official accounts condemned "rumor mongering."

On June 30, a video of a man in Shandong Province repeatedly driving over and killing his wife was widely shared online. The video caused a public outcry and sparked a debate on the lack of protection for domestic violence victims and the struggle to exit an abusive marriage.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: Sexual harassment was common. Human Rights Watch cited one statistic showing nearly 40 percent of women said they experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Many women, however, remained unwilling to report incidents of sexual harassment, believing the justice system was ineffectual, according to official media. Several prominent media reports of sexual harassment were widely shared on social media, helping to raise awareness of the problem, particularly in the workplace.

On February 23, the *South China Morning Post* reported that a young woman in Hangzhou committed suicide after intense cyberbullying over a period of six months due to her pink hair color. The article stated that tech-facilitated gender-based violence had worsened during strict lockdowns and quarantines enacted as part of the zero-COVID policy.

On March 8, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and five other agencies issued two voluntary guidance documents titled “the Rules for the Special Labor Protection of Female Employees in the Workplace” and “the Rules for the Elimination of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.” Media commented that the documents were intended to help guide employers develop their own internal rules and regulations regarding the management and hiring of women employees. The guidance documents expanded the definition to also include any act “with sexual associations” that “makes another feel uncomfortable ... regardless of whether the perpetrator has harassment or any other improper purpose or intention.”

In May several news outlets reported that prominent screenwriter Shi Hang was accused of sexually harassing at least 12 women. Survivors stated on social media that he initiated inappropriate physical contact without their consent at film festivals and other entertainment events. Most of these posts were later censored.

Discrimination: The constitution stated, “women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life.” The law provided for equality in ownership of property, inheritance rights, access to education, and equal pay for equal work. Nonetheless, women reported that discrimination, unfair dismissal, demotion, and wage discrepancies were significant problems.

Discrimination based on gender in employment was widespread. There were advertisements seeking “pretty” women, preferring men, or requiring higher education qualifications from women than men for the same job.

On average women earned 35 percent less than men who did similar work. This wage gap was greater in rural areas. Women were underrepresented in leadership positions, despite their high rate of participation in the labor force. The mandatory retirement age for women was 50 for those in blue-collar jobs and 55 for those in white-collar jobs, while the retirement age for all men was 60. Earlier retirement coupled with a persistent gender pay gap undercut women’s lifelong earning potential and access to leadership positions.

Authorities often did not enforce laws protecting the rights of women. According to legal experts, it was difficult to litigate sex discrimination suits because of vague legal definitions. Some observers noted the agencies tasked with protecting women’s rights tended to focus on maternity-related benefits and wrongful termination due to pregnancy or maternity leave rather than on sex discrimination, gender-based violence, or sexual harassment.

Women’s rights advocates indicated that in rural areas, women often forfeited land and property rights to their husbands in divorce proceedings. The civil code included a provision for a 30-day “cooling off” period in cases of uncontested divorce; some citizens expressed concern this left those seeking escape from domestic violence susceptible to further abuse. Rural contract law and laws protecting women’s rights stipulated women enjoyed equal rights in cases of land management, but experts asserted this was rarely the case due to the complexity of the law and difficulties in its implementation.

Reproductive Rights: Through law and policy, the CCP and government limited the rights of parents to choose the number of children they have. The law restricted most married couples to three children (changed from two in 2021) and allowed couples to apply for permission to have a fourth child if they met local and provincial requirements. The law included provisions aimed at increasing the birth rate and “reducing the burden” of raising children.

Enforcement of the decades-old population-control policy, which originally limited parents to one child, relied on social pressure, education, propaganda, and economic penalties, as well as on measures such as mandatory pregnancy examinations, forced contraception, forced sterilizations, and coerced abortions. Penalties for exceeding the permitted number of children were not enforced uniformly and varied by province. The law as implemented required each woman with an unauthorized pregnancy to abort or to pay a social compensation fee, which could reach 10 times a person’s annual disposable income. Those with the financial means often paid the fee to ensure their children born in violation of the birth restrictions would have access to a wide array of

government-provided social services and rights. Some avoided the fee by hiding such children with friends or relatives. The law only mentioned the rights of married couples, which meant unmarried women were not authorized to have children. In addition, they consequently had social compensation fees imposed on them, if they gave birth “outside of the policy,” and they could be subjected to the denial of legal documents such as birth documents and the hukou residence permit, although local governments rarely enforced these regulations.

Ethnic and religious minority women, particularly Uyghurs, continued to be often subjected to coercive population control measures not applied to the ethnic Han Chinese population. Government targeting of ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang with intensified coercive population control measures resulted in plummeting birth rates since 2018. There were widespread reports of coercive population control measures, including forced abortions, forced sterilizations, involuntary IUD insertions, and pregnancy checks, occurring at detention centers in the region and targeting minority groups, primarily Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs. Non-Han Chinese parents judged to have exceeded the government limit on the number of children risked being sent to detention centers unless they paid exorbitant fines.

The country’s national family planning laws started to relax restrictions on reproductive rights, but local implementation remained inconsistent and unmarried persons were often discriminated against legally. Unmarried pregnant women continued to face difficulty accessing prenatal care at public hospitals and obtaining insurance coverage for prenatal care. Media reported in vitro fertilization was illegal for single women almost everywhere in the country.

Sexual and reproductive health services including emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis were available for survivors of sexual violence at public hospitals.

News outlet *Caixin Global* reported in July that “China has launched a six-month campaign to crack down on surrogacy, the illegal sale of sperm and eggs, and other illicit activities involving the use of human-assisted reproductive technology.” The campaign was part of the government’s effort to regulate the “enormous unmet demand for assisted reproduction” and the black market of “underground surrogacy agencies and medical institutions that issue fraudulent birth certificates.”

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

Although the constitution and laws included language to protect members of racial or ethnic minorities or groups from violence and discrimination, the government did not enforce these laws effectively, and authorities perpetrated and promoted violence against members of racial or ethnic minority groups. The government promoted racism and institutional discrimination against minorities, and disparaged and denied the resulting complaints, cracking down on peaceful expressions of ethnic culture and religion.

Official state media continued to publish propaganda describing members of minority ethnic or religious groups as violent or inferior. Such propaganda emphasized the connection between Islam and acts of violence and described religious adherents as culturally backwards and less educated, and thus in need of re-education.

The government’s efforts to assimilate ethnic groups, such as its “Sinicization” campaign, resulted in ethnically based restrictions on movement, including curtailed ability to travel freely or obtain travel documents, greater surveillance and presence of armed police in ethnic minority communities, and legislative and administrative restrictions on cultural and religious practices.

The government continued to promote Han Chinese migration into minority areas, significantly increasing the population of Han in Xinjiang. Han Chinese officials held the majority of the most powerful CCP posts and many government positions in minority autonomous regions, particularly Xinjiang.

“Deradicalization Regulations” in Xinjiang codified efforts to “contain and eradicate extremism”; the government used its broad definition of extremism to detain more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in re-education or detention centers, designed to instill patriotism and erase their religious and ethnic identities. Many previously held in these centers were later transferred to the formal prison system, convicted on spurious charges in closed trials, and sentenced to unusually long prison terms. In March the RFA reported authorities sentenced Uyghur Ayshemhan Abdulla to 21 years in prison for sending her three children to a home-based religious school. Originally detained in 2017, she reportedly received seven years for each child.

RFA reported in January that Xinjiang police arrested Kamile Wayit, age 19, a Uyghur university student, for posting a video on social media about the November 2022 protests against the country’s COVID-19 restrictions. Authorities later confirmed she was arrested for “advocating extremism,” and RFA reported she received a three-year prison sentence – a harsher punishment than that given to many who had participated in the demonstrations.

The government implemented severe restrictions on expressions of minority groups’ culture, language, and religious identity, including regulations prohibiting behaviors the government considered signs of “extremism” such as growing “abnormal” beards, wearing veils in public places, and suddenly stopping smoking and drinking alcohol, among other behaviors. The regulations banned the use of some Islamic names and set punishments for teaching religion to children. Authorities conducted “household surveys” and “home stays” in which officials or volunteers forcibly lived in Uyghurs’ homes and monitored families for signs of “extremism.” Authorities also used a vast array of surveillance technology specifically designed to target and track Uyghurs.

In March the UN Economic and Social Council’s Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights expressed concern that China’s “counter-terrorism” and “counter-extremism” strategies increased restrictions on expression of Muslim religious practices, and placed persons practicing Islam at risk of criminal sanction or coercion into re-education programs or employment schemes.

The national government perpetuated and condoned policies and attitudes that promoted discrimination; minority groups in border and other regions had less access to education than their Han Chinese counterparts, faced job discrimination in favor of Han Chinese migrants, and earned incomes well below those in other parts of the country. Government development programs and job provisions intentionally disrupted traditional living patterns of minority groups and in some cases included the forced relocation of persons and the forced settlement of nomads.

Ethnic Kazakhs were also targeted. In March Radio Free Europe reported that before allowing them to travel abroad, authorities required some ethnic Kazakh citizens to register their family members with Xinjiang authorities; if travelers criticized PRC policies while abroad, their Xinjiang-based family would be punished. Radio Free Europe also reported that PRC pressure on the families of ethnic Kazakh PRC citizens had led some Kazakhs to halt their protests in front of the PRC embassy in Astana and consulate in Almaty.

There was employment-related discrimination against the Uyghur and other mostly Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. The International Labor Organization urged the government to immediately cease any discriminatory practices against them, including internment or imprisonment on ethnic and religious grounds for deradicalization purposes.

In August, the Helena Kennedy Centre at Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom reported that government labor transfer programs had increased in scale, with companies continuing to accept “surplus laborers” transferred from predominantly Uyghur or Turkic Muslim-minority regions of Xinjiang. Research published in June concluded agricultural labor transfer programs continued at significant scale through at least 2022. NGO reporting, academic research, and survivor accounts assessed that labor transfer programs involved significant state coercion and presented serious indications of forced labor.

Freedom of assembly was severely limited in Xinjiang. For information regarding abuses of religious freedom in Xinjiang, see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

For specific information on Tibet, see the Tibet Annex.

CHILDREN

Birth Registration: Parents were required to register their children in compliance with the national household registration system within one month of birth. Children born outside policy quotas or to single women often could not be registered or receive other legal documents such as the hukou residence permit. Unregistered children could not access public services, including education, health care, identity registration, or pension benefits.

Education: Although the law provided for nine years of compulsory education for children, many children in poor rural areas did not attend school for the required period, and some never attended. Fees and other school-related expenses made it difficult for poorer families and some migrant workers to send their children to school. The gap in education quality between rural and urban youth remained extensive; many children of unregistered migrant workers in cities attended unlicensed and poorly equipped schools. The central government and local authorities continued to promote political indoctrination of children.

The law stated “schools (classes and grades) and other institutions of education where most of the students come from minority nationalities shall, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use their languages as the medium of instruction.” Despite such provisions, measures requiring full instruction in Mandarin beginning in preschool and banning the use of Uyghur in all educational activities and management were implemented throughout Xinjiang, according to international media.

Government authorities in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and other autonomous regions and provinces required instructors to use Mandarin to teach history and politics instead of the local language, to encourage a “national common language”; observers viewed this policy as a means to erode unique languages and cultures.

Child Abuse: The physical abuse of children was grounds for criminal prosecution, and the law provided for the protection of children. Sexual abuse of children, particularly of rural children, was a significant problem.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage was 22 for men and 20 for women. There were reports of forced marriages, primarily in rural areas.

On April 7, a court in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, sentenced the husband and five other human traffickers to between eight and 13 years in prison for the abuse and illegal detention of a woman found chained in an outhouse in January 2022. The six, one of whom was the woman's husband, were also charged with trafficking in women, according to media reports. The woman reportedly had an intellectual disability, was the victim of bride trafficking, and had given birth to eight children.

Sixth Tone reported in February parents in Sichuan Province sold their daughter, age 16, into a forced marriage. The girl escaped the marriage and fled to Guangdong Province where she became a migrant worker. The groom's relatives found her and forcibly brought her back to Sichuan, but she contacted staff at a rest stop in Guangxi Autonomous Region who alerted police. Police, however, sent her back to her family in Sichuan and took no action against her “husband” or family.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The minimum legal age for consensual sex was 14. Persons who forced girls younger than 14 into commercial sex could be sentenced to from 10 years to life in prison in addition to a fine or confiscation of property. In especially serious cases, violators could

receive a life sentence or death sentence, in addition to having their property confiscated. Those who paid for commercial sex with girls younger than 14 were subject to five years or more in prison in addition to paying a fine.

Pornography of any kind, including child pornography, was illegal; authorities enforced the law. Under the criminal code, those producing, reproducing, publishing, selling, or disseminating obscene materials with the purpose of making a profit could be sentenced to up to three years in prison or put under criminal detention or surveillance in addition to paying a fine. Offenders in serious cases could receive prison sentences of three to 10 years in addition to paying a fine.

According to the law, persons broadcasting or showing obscene materials to those younger than 18 were to be “severely punished.”

Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: The law forbade infanticide, although NGOs reported that infanticide of girls due to a traditional preference for sons and coercive birth limitation policies continued. Gender-biased abortions and the abandonment and neglect of baby girls were believed to be in decline but continued to be a problem.

ANTISEMITISM

The government did not recognize Judaism as an ethnicity or religion. The World Jewish Congress estimated the Jewish population at 2,500.

In a July report, the China Media Project stated that antisemitic content was increasing on PRC social media and noted that, although quick to delete political dissent and other information, censors did not remove openly propagated statements about hating Jews or propounding antisemitic conspiracy theories. Antisemitic content and sentiment surged following Hamas’ attack on Israel in October.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

FORCED ORGAN HARVESTING

Some activists and organizations accused the government of forcibly harvesting organs from prisoners of conscience, including religious and spiritual adherents such as Falun Gong practitioners and Muslim detainees in Xinjiang.

In August, *Epoch Times* (a Falun Gong newspaper) reported a doctor agreed to go on the record to recount forced organ harvesting that occurred in 1994 in Dalian City, Liaoning Province, and a conversation in 2002 that revealed Falun Gong practitioners were a specific organ source.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: No laws criminalized private consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. There were no reports of police using seemingly neutral laws to arbitrarily arrest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons.

Violence and Harassment: LGBTQI+ individuals reported incidents of violence, including domestic violence; however, they encountered difficulties in seeking legal redress, since regulations

on domestic violence did not include recognition of same-sex relationships.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, and same-sex couples were not allowed to marry or adopt children. Obtaining redress was further hindered by societal discrimination and traditional norms, resulting in most LGBTQI+ persons refraining from publicly discussing discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Nonetheless, the civil code included a provision that protected certain tenancy rights for designated partners of deceased property owners without officially defined family relationships.

On January 24, the online magazine *The Diplomat* published an article on a discrimination lawsuit against China Southern Airlines brought by a former flight attendant who was reportedly fired due to his sexual orientation. According to online media, a court in Shenzhen dismissed the case, citing that the flight attendant was let go due to safety concerns. The dismissal caused a public outcry, drawing attention to the lack of legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

On March 29, Beijing Number 2 Intermediate Court released information regarding a transgender discrimination case as a model case for “integrating core socialist values” into judgments, according to *Beijing News*. According to details provided by the court, a trans woman sued e-commerce company Dang Dang for illegal termination of her contract after an unresolved dispute over sick leave she took to recover from gender affirmation surgery. Throughout the legal process, Dang Dang sent the plaintiff messages that addressed her as “Mr.” and threatened to use political connections to influence the court’s decision – correspondence that the court included in full in its judgment handing the plaintiff her win over Dang Dang. Legal observers noted the judgment leaned on illegal termination grounds instead of discrimination, but nonetheless represented progress for trans advocacy.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: To update their gender marker on identity documents after gender affirming surgery, individuals were required to be age 18 or older, to have proof of familial consent to the surgery, and to have had the intent to undergo gender-affirming surgery for at least five years.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: NGOs and media reported attempts to “convert” LGBTQI+ individuals in public hospitals and private clinics that in some cases entailed involuntary confinement, forcible medication, and electroshocks. There were reports gender “normalization” surgeries on intersex infants and children were commonly practiced, usually in secret due to stigma.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The country’s overall restrictions on these freedoms applied to LGBTQI+ groups, topics, and activities. NGOs working on LGBTQI+ matters noted restrictions on foreign organizations made their work more difficult. Individuals and organizations working on LGBTQI+ matters reported discrimination and harassment from authorities.

In February, two students at Tsinghua University identified only as Huang and Li were disciplined for distributing Pride flags on campus in July 2022, according to *The Diplomat*. The magazine reported Tsinghua concluded that they had distributed unauthorized materials and “created a harmful influence.” The university punished them by prohibiting them from receiving postgraduate recommendations and scholarships for six months and recording the infraction in their official dossiers.

On June 27, BBC reported that Beijing LGBT Center, one of the country’s last remaining operating LGBTQI+ organizations, had closed. Time reported that the center previously indicated problems, including forced relocation, canceled or postponed work, and vilification of individuals associated with the center. Beijing LGBT Center community members were detained, and family and friends questioned by police, leading to increasing mental health concerns.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The law protected the rights of persons with disabilities and prohibited discrimination, but persons with disabilities were not able to access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others.

According to the law, persons with disabilities “are entitled to enjoyment of equal rights as other citizens in political, economic, cultural, and social fields, in family life, and in other aspects.” Discrimination against, insult of, and infringement upon persons with disabilities was prohibited. The law prohibited discrimination against children with disabilities and codified a variety of judicial protections for juveniles. The government took efforts to promote and enforce these laws.

The law forbade marriage for persons with certain mental disabilities, such as schizophrenia. If doctors found a couple was at risk of transmitting congenital disabilities to their children, the couple could marry only if they agreed to use birth control or undergo sterilization. In some instances, officials continued to require couples to abort pregnancies when doctors discovered possible disabilities during prenatal examinations. The law stipulated local governments were to employ such practices to eliminate the birth of children with disabilities.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The law did not provide for freedom of association, and workers were not free to organize or join unions of their own choosing. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) was the only union recognized under the law. Independent unions were illegal, and the law did not protect the right to strike. The law allowed collective wage bargaining for workers in all types of enterprises. The law further provided for industrial sector-wide or regional collective contracts, and enterprise-level collective contracts were generally compulsory throughout the country. Regulations required the government-controlled union to gather input from workers prior to consultation with management and to submit collective contracts to workers or their congress for approval. There was no legal obligation for employers to negotiate or to bargain in good faith, and some employers refused to do so. Most collective contracts simply restated wage and hour terms already established by law.

The law provided for legal protections from antiunion discrimination and specified union representatives could not be transferred or terminated by enterprise management during their term of office. The law provided for the reinstatement of workers dismissed for official union activity and penalties for enterprises that engaged in antiunion activities. The law did not protect workers who requested or took part in collective negotiations with their employers independent of the officially recognized union.

All union activity had to be approved by and organized under the ACFTU, a CCP organ chaired by a member of the Politburo. The ACFTU and its provincial and local branches continued to establish new constituent unions and add new members, especially among workers in technology companies and in the transportation and service sectors. The law gave the ACFTU financial and administrative control over constituent unions empowered to represent employees in negotiating and signing collective contracts with enterprises and public institutions. The law did not mandate the ACFTU to represent the interests of workers in disputes directly. The only legally specified roles for the

ACFTU in strikes were to participate in investigations and to assist the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in resolving disputes.

The ACFTU and the CCP used a variety of mechanisms to influence the selection of trade union representatives. Although the law stated trade union officers at each level should be elected, ACFTU-affiliated unions appointed most factory-level union officers, often in coordination with employers. Official union leaders were often drawn from the ranks of management. Direct election by workers of union leaders continued to be rare, occurred only at the enterprise level, and was subject to supervision by higher levels of the union or the CCP. In enterprises where direct election of union officers took place, regional ACFTU officers and local CCP authorities retained control over the selection and approval of candidates. Even in these cases, workers and NGOs expressed concern regarding the credibility of elections.

The ACFTU constituent unions were generally ineffective in representing and protecting the rights and interests of workers. Workers generally did not view the ACFTU as an advocate, especially migrant workers, who rarely interacted with union officials. The government effectively maintained the primacy of the ACFTU and prevented the emergence of independent labor organizations.

Labor inspectors lacked authority to compel employers to bargain with the union. Penalties were limited and never applied against employers who violated the law. Workers who tried to exercise their rights outside of the official unions were subject to penalties.

While the law outlined general procedures for resolving disputes, procedures were lengthy and subject to delays. Local authorities in some areas actively sought to limit efforts by independent civil society organizations and legal practitioners. The law did not expressly prohibit work stoppages and did not prohibit workers from striking spontaneously. Although some local authorities tolerated strikes protesting unpaid or underpaid wages, reports of police crackdowns on strikes continued throughout the year. In cases where local authorities cracked down on strikes, they sometimes charged leaders with vague criminal offenses, such as “inciting subversion of state power,” “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” “gathering a crowd to disturb public order,” or “damaging production operations,” or detained them without charges.

Coordinated efforts by governments at the central, provincial, and local levels, including censorship, surveillance, harassment, detention, and travel restrictions on labor rights defenders and restrictions on funding sources for NGOs, disrupted labor rights advocacy. The government continued to target labor activists, students, and others advocating for worker rights. The International Labor Organization’s Committee on the Freedom of Association noted concern regarding the reports of government harassment, intimidation, arrests, and physical abuse.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited the employment of children younger than 16. It referred to workers between ages 16 and 18 as “juvenile workers” and prohibited them from engaging in certain forms of dangerous work, including in mines. Where there were reports of child labor in the private sector, the government reportedly enforced the law.

The law specified administrative review, fines, and revocation of business licenses of enterprises that illegally hired children. The law provided that underage working children be returned to their parents or other custodians in their original place of residence. Penalties were commensurate with

those for analogous serious crimes such as kidnapping, but a gap remained between legislation and implementation, despite annual inspection campaigns launched by local authorities across the country. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

There were reports of child labor in the manufacturing, service, and retail sectors. Children were reportedly found working at machine and electronic factories, beverage stores, and employed as waiters.

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: There was no national minimum wage, but the law required local and provincial governments to set their own minimum wage rates according to standards promulgated by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. The minimum wages were above the poverty level. By law employees were limited to working eight hours a day and 40 hours per week; work beyond this standard was considered overtime and had to be paid at a premium.

There were multiple reports of widespread violations of labor law with respect to lack of proper overtime pay. In June and September, China Labor Watch published the results of investigations into information-technology factories and found evidence of forced overtime, lack of training and insurance, and workplace harassment. A separate study in January into factories that were integral to the printing supply chain found evidence of long-term overwork and unpaid overtime.

According to monthly figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics, enterprise workers worked an average of nearly 49 hours per week every month since March, suggesting six-day workweeks were the norm.

According to blacklists posted by multiple provincial and municipal authorities, wage arrears remained a widespread problem. Provincial and local governments at various levels continued efforts to prevent arrears and to recover payment of unpaid wages and insurance contributions. According to the Ministry of Justice, legal aid organizations across the country investigated approximately 400,000 migrant worker cases and helped 437,000 migrant workers recover almost 5.5 billion yuan (\$755 million) in wages and other benefits in 2022.

Subcontracting made rural laborers susceptible to delayed payment or nonpayment for their work, prompting them to join in collective action. Even with contracts, migrant workers had less access to benefits, especially social insurance.

Occupational Safety and Health: The Ministry of Emergency Management set and enforced occupational safety regulations. The National Health Committee set and enforced occupational health regulations. The law required employers to provide free health checkups for employees working in hazardous conditions and to inform the employees of the results. The law also provided workers the right to report violations or remove themselves from workplace situations that could endanger their health without jeopardy to their employment. By law identifying unsafe conditions was the responsibility of occupational safety and health (OSH) experts, not workers.

According to media reports, occupational diseases were prevalent and underreported. Patients came from many industries, including coal, chemical engineering, and construction.

Workplace accidents were widespread. Workplace accidents and injuries were particularly common and deadly in the coal industry, according to media reports. Media and NGO reports attributed accidents to a lack of safety checks, weak enforcement of laws and regulations, ineffective supervision, and inadequate emergency responses.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government inconsistently enforced its wage, hour, and OSH laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar laws such as fraud or negligence. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced visits and could initiate sanctions.

The government seldom enforced overtime laws, and 48-hour workweeks were common for a wide range of workers. Companies that violated wage, hour, and OSH regulations faced various penalties, including suspension of business operations, rescission of business certificates and licenses, or entry onto publicly available “blacklists” maintained by local governments. Inspections, however, were generally inadequate and the penalties and other compliance mechanisms were only sometimes enforced.

Inspectors did not operate in the informal sector. Workers in the informal sector worked longer hours and earned less than comparable workers in the formal sector. Workers in the informal sector often lacked legal and social benefits covered under labor contracts. Informal work was particularly prevalent for internal migrants and domestic workers; 90 percent of an estimated 35 million domestic workers lacked formal work agreements and protections.

Workers in the gig economy, estimated to number 200 million, were considered contract workers. Gig workers at online platforms were covered by the 2002 Work Safety Law. There were reports of delivery drivers injured or killed on the job and that companies cut the per-package commission pay for couriers. There were numerous delivery-worker protests against heavy workloads or low wages.