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FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2022

China

NOT FREE

9
/100

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

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

9 /100 Not Free

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



Note

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

Overview

China's authoritarian regime has become increasingly repressive in recent years. The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to tighten control over all aspects of life and governance, including the state bureaucracy, the media, online speech, religious practice, universities, businesses, and civil society associations, and it has undermined an earlier series of modest rule-of-law reforms. The CCP leader and state president, Xi Jinping, has consolidated personal power to a degree not seen in China for decades. Human rights activists and lawyers continue to speak out, though at great personal cost.

Key Developments in 2021

- The authorities remained largely successful in containing the COVID-19 virus, but they continued to exploit the pandemic to justify intensified surveillance and control of citizen behavior, and to punish those who provided independent sources of information and criticism about the government's handling of the contagion.
- Numerous new rules and regulations governing media and the internet came into effect during the year, including measures that tightened restrictions on news dissemination and resulted in the banning of mobile applications used by marginalized groups. Meanwhile, the network of volunteer pro-CCP internet commentators was reported to have grown to 20 million people, in addition to two million others who are paid for their service.
- New evidence showed that China's top leaders, including Xi Jinping, were directly involved in the design and implementation of the most draconian policies affecting Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups, including programs

aimed at changing demographics in the relevant areas. Rare first-hand accounts from inside detention camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region revealed systemic sexual abuse and torture of ethnic minority detainees, in addition to credible reports of deaths in custody. The authorities took further steps to forcibly assimilate all ethnic minorities into the dominant Han Chinese national identity, in part by imposing Mandarin as the language of instruction at all educational levels.

- The authorities continued a years-long crackdown on independent civil society, carrying out arrests and criminal prosecutions of journalists, activists, human rights lawyers, and Chinese and foreign activists who challenged state authority. The persecution of religious practitioners of all backgrounds who refused to submit to oppressive state controls also continued unabated, and the limited space for independent academic discussion and research was subjected to new constraints.
- More aggressive regulatory action against some of the country's largest private firms allowed the authorities to counter monopolistic practices and other perceived economic dysfunctions while also advancing Xi Jinping's goal of bringing the economy more firmly under party and state control.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

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

government and party policy in practice. Xi also holds the position of state president and serves as chairman of the state and party military commissions.

Xi was awarded a second five-year term as CCP general secretary at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, and at the NPC session in March 2018 he was confirmed for a second five-year term as state president. Also at that session, the NPC approved amendments to China's constitution that abolished the two-term limit for the state presidency and vice presidency. In 2021, the top leadership continued to lay the groundwork for Xi to remain in office for a third term or indefinitely.

A2 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

The 3,000 NPC members are formally elected for five-year terms by subnational congresses, but in practice all candidates are vetted by the CCP. Only the NPC's standing committee meets regularly, with the full congress convening for just two weeks a year to approve proposed legislation; party organs and the State Council, or cabinet, effectively control lawmaking decisions. The current NPC was seated in March 2018.

A3 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

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

Elections are not administered by an independent body. The indirect elections that populate people's congresses at various levels are conducted by those congresses'

standing committees, while village-level elections are conducted by a village electoral committee that answers to the local party committee. New vetting criteria and other rules that were put in place for village elections held during 2021 helped to ensure that the villages' elected bodies would be identical in membership to the local party committees, and that the local party secretary would be the elected village chief; the terms of village chiefs were also extended from three years to five.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

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

Citizens who have sought to establish genuinely independent political parties or advocated for democracy are nearly all in prison, under house arrest, or in exile. In 2021, the authorities continued to hold prodemocracy activists and lawyers in various forms of detention. It was reported in August that New Citizens' Movement founder and legal activist Xu Zhiyong, in detention since February 2020, had been formally indicted for "subversion," though he had yet to be tried at year's end.

B2 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

China's one-party system provides no institutional mechanism for organized political opposition, and the CCP has ruled without interruption since winning a civil war against the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) in 1949. While factions within the CCP have always existed, they do not compete openly or democratically, and they remain unaccountable to the public. Xi Jinping has steadily increased his personal power and authority within the party since 2012, and the authorities have become even less tolerant of any expression of dissent.

B3 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

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

B4 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

The political system is dominated in practice by ethnic Han Chinese men. Societal groups such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT+ people have no opportunity to gain meaningful political representation and—as with the rest of the population—are barred from advancing their interests outside the structures controlled by the CCP. Nominal representatives of ethnic minority groups such as Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians participate in party and state bodies like the NPC, but their role is largely symbolic. Women are severely underrepresented in top CCP and government positions, and the situation has grown slightly worse in recent years. Just one woman was named to the 25-member Politburo at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, down from the previous two. No woman has ever sat on the PSC.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

None of China's national leaders are freely elected, and the legislature plays a largely rubber-stamp role in policymaking and the development of new laws. The continuing concentration of power in Xi Jinping's hands, an expanding cult of personality centered on Xi, and his regular calls for greater ideological conformity and party supremacy have further reduced the limited space for policy debate, even within the CCP.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

Since becoming CCP leader in 2012, Xi has pursued an extensive anticorruption campaign. Well over a million officials have been investigated and punished, according to official figures, including senior state, party, and military officials. However, the campaign is widely believed to have been pursued selectively against Xi's potential rivals. Anticorruption functions are currently managed by the National Supervisory Commission (NSC), which was established through a 2018 merger of existing state and party entities and is tasked with enforcing political and ideological discipline in addition to compliance with the law.

While anticorruption efforts have generated a chilling effect among officials and reduced ostentatious displays of wealth, corruption remains rooted in the one-party system, which does not tolerate the institutions necessary for effectively addressing graft, including a free press, independent civil society groups, and impartial courts.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

0 / 4

The Chinese government and the CCP are notoriously opaque. Regulations on “open government” do not effectively compel local party and state organs to share critical data or respond to citizen requests. Under Xi Jinping’s leadership, the government has developed increasingly sophisticated methods for controlling the diffusion of information and shaping public discourse. In 2021 the authorities continued to suppress information about their management of COVID-19, to spread disinformation about the pandemic, and to punish those who sought to report truthfully about the situation.

Add Q

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

-3

Despite growing international condemnation, the government continued in 2021 to aggressively pursue policies that are altering the demographics of ethnic minority regions, especially Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. New analysis provided strong evidence that China’s top leaders, including Xi Jinping, were directly involved in the design and implementation of the most draconian of these policies.

The ongoing detention of more than one million Uyghurs and other Muslims in internment camps or forced-labor facilities in Xinjiang continued to limit birth rates among those communities. Rare first-hand accounts from inside the camps that were made public by international media during 2021 pointed to systemic sexual abuse and torture of detainees. Uyghur and other Muslim women in Xinjiang, particularly those with two or more children, are subject to a program of forced sterilization, and “surplus rural laborers” in both Xinjiang and Tibet have been relocated en masse by the authorities. Despite the government’s claim that the relocations are voluntary and beneficial to participants, the evidence suggests conditions that are tantamount to forced labor, with members of ethnic minorities housed separately in prison-like environments, subjected to political indoctrination, and economically exploited. The government also promotes policies intended to attract Han Chinese migrants to ethnic minority regions. Programs aimed at encouraging marriages between Han Chinese and members of ethnic minorities through financial and other incentives are meant to further dilute minority identities.

The authorities have increasingly sought to undermine minority cultures and identities across the country, not just in Uyghur, Tibetan, and Mongolian areas. In August 2021, the Ministry of Education issued notification of a new policy requiring all preschools in China to make Mandarin Chinese the language of instruction, deepening its push to impose Mandarin as the dominant language at all educational levels. Increasing numbers of ethnic minority children in Xinjiang and Tibet have been separated from their parents and forced to attend state-run boarding schools, where Mandarin is the sole language of instruction and where students are subject to intense political indoctrination. Those who protest are subject to detention and other forms of punishment.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

0/4

China is home to one of the world's most restrictive media environments and its most sophisticated system of censorship, particularly online. The CCP maintains control over news reporting via direct ownership, accreditation of journalists, harsh penalties for comments that are critical of party leaders or the CCP, and daily directives to media outlets and websites that guide coverage of breaking news stories. State management of the telecommunications infrastructure enables the blocking of websites, removal of smartphone applications from the domestic market, and mass deletion of social media posts and user accounts that touch on banned political, social, economic, and religious topics. Thousands of websites have been blocked, many for years, including major news and social media hubs like the *New York Times*, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

Numerous new rules and regulations governing the media and internet usage came into effect during 2021, including measures that restricted news dissemination and

contributed to the banning of mobile apps focused on minority languages, Bible content, and foreign-language learning, among other topics. Censors also removed large numbers of social media groups, accounts, or posts that dealt with LGBT+ issues, financial advice, critical views of CCP history, and celebrities.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 50 journalists were behind bars in China in connection with their work as of December 2021, though the actual number of people held for uncovering or sharing newsworthy information is far greater. The authorities subjected the renewal of both Chinese and foreign journalists' press cards to heightened scrutiny and political criteria. BBC China correspondent John Sudworth was forced to leave China in March following his reporting on Xinjiang, having faced harassment and a harsh smear campaign against him in state media.

Early in the year, the Central Propaganda Department banned the posting of news-related information by anyone without a license, effectively raising the risks of engaging in any current-affairs commentary. Numerous citizen journalists and bloggers were detained, disappeared, or criminally charged during 2021 for their reporting and online posts. The government set up a tip line for people to report critical comments about the party and state. Meanwhile, the country's network of pro-CCP volunteer internet commentators was reported to have grown to 20 million people, in addition to two million others who are paid for their service.

Zhang Zhan, a citizen journalist and former human rights lawyer who was sentenced to four years in prison in December 2020 for “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble” through her reporting from Wuhan on the COVID-19 pandemic, was said to be close to death in late 2021 after months of hunger striking to protest her imprisonment. The whereabouts of others detained for their reporting early in the pandemic remained unknown.

D2 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

The CCP regime operates a multifaceted apparatus to control all aspects of religious activity, including by vetting religious leaders for political reliability, placing limits on the number of priests, requiring ideological conformity within religious doctrine, and

installing security cameras inside religious establishments. Certain religions and religious groups, including Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims, Falun Gong practitioners, and Christian “house churches,” are persecuted particularly harshly. In Xinjiang, children under 18 cannot enter mosques or receive religious instruction. Peaceful religious practices are routinely punished under charges of “religious extremism,” resulting in detention, prison sentences, and indoctrination for many Uyghur, Kazakh, and Hui Muslims. However, all religious groups must go through a rigorous process of certification to be officially recognized by the authorities, with those that refuse to do so being labeled illegal and persecuted, including independent Buddhist groups. Even recognized groups and their places of worship are being forced to visibly conform to the CCP’s interpretation of “Chinese culture” as part of the regime’s broader effort under Xi Jinping to assimilate minority groups. Hundreds of Buddhist, Taoist, and folk-religion temples across China have also been completely or partially demolished by authorities in recent years.

The government has expanded the use of mobile “transformation” units, which subject members of illegal religious groups to severe psychological and physical torture intended to force them to “transform” by renouncing their religious beliefs. Thousands of members of such illegal groups are also sentenced to long prison terms and illegal forms of detention, in which torture and ill-treatment are routine. Dozens of Falun Gong practitioners were reported to have died in custody, or shortly after their release, during 2021.

D3 0-4 pts

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

O / 4

Academic freedom is heavily restricted, and the space for academic discussion and research that departs from CCP guidelines has been reduced further in recent years. Efforts to police classroom discussions have increased at all levels of education, including via installation of surveillance cameras in some classrooms, large-scale recruitment of student informants, and the creation of special departments to supervise the political thinking of teaching staff. The CCP controls the appointment of top university officials, and a revised set of rules issued in April 2021 gave greater formal authority over university administration to CCP committees and party

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

Political indoctrination, including the study of “Xi Jinping Thought,” is a required component of the curriculum at all levels of education. Increased government funding to support research promoting party ideology has spurred the establishment of dozens of centers dedicated to “Xi Jinping Thought.” A number of universities have formally removed references to “freedom of thought” from their charters in recent years, replacing them with pledges of loyalty to the CCP. Professors and students face reprisals—ranging from censored writings, travel restrictions, and demotions to arrest and imprisonment—for expressing views that are deemed critical of the CCP’s governance and Xi’s leadership. Geng Xiaonan, a publisher, was sentenced in February 2021 to three years in prison for publicly expressing support for Xu Zhangrun, a Tsinghua University law professor who had been detained and dismissed in 2020 in connection with publications that criticized Xi’s authoritarian policies.

The government issued sweeping new restrictions on the country’s \$100 billion private school and tutoring industry in July, sharply limiting the operations, educational content, and foreign contacts of such services.

D4 0-4 pts

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

1 / 4

Citizens continue to be charged and sentenced to sometimes long prison terms for critical or satirical social media posts on a variety of subjects. Among numerous other recent cases, Niu Tengyu was sentenced to 14 years in prison in December 2020 after a photo of Xi Jinping’s daughter was posted on the online portal he administered. It was reported in June 2021 that blogger Qiu Ziming had been sentenced to eight months in prison for “defaming martyrs” by questioning official information about military deaths near the border with India. In addition to criminal punishment, internet users face account deletions, job dismissals, arbitrary detention, and police interrogation in response to politically sensitive or simply humorous comments made on social media platforms.

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

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

Electronic surveillance is supplemented with offline monitoring by neighborhood party committees, "public security volunteers" who are visible during large events, and an especially heavy police presence in places like Xinjiang. The ability of Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang to express themselves freely, even in private, has been further undermined in recent years by a policy of having Chinese officials live in their homes to monitor and indoctrinate them.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	1/4
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The constitution protects the right of citizens to demonstrate, but in practice protesters seldom obtain approval and risk punishment for assembling without permission. Spontaneous demonstrations have provided some outlet for local grievances, though they are increasingly met with police violence and criminal prosecution rather than limited concessions by officials. Solitary protests—in which

an individual holds a placard in public, for example—can be criminally punished. Activist Zhang Wuzhou was sentenced to two years and nine months in prison in March 2021 for holding up a sign to denounce the harsh national security law imposed on Hong Kong and to commemorate the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Armed police have been accused of opening fire during past protests, particularly in Xinjiang.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

0 / 4

The crackdown on civil society in recent years has largely deprived both Chinese and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of meaningful autonomy, especially for those whose work relates to human rights and governance. The space for organizations to operate without formal registration, long a common practice, has also been reduced. Nearly all prominent NGOs that focused on policy advocacy, including in previously less politically sensitive areas, have been shuttered under government pressure in recent years. Hundreds of thousands of NGOs are formally registered, but many effectively operate as government-sponsored entities and focus primarily on service delivery.

The law requires foreign NGOs to find a Chinese sponsor and register with the Ministry of Public Security, and police have the authority to search NGOs' premises without a warrant, seize property, detain personnel, and initiate criminal procedures. A list of sponsoring Chinese entities documented by the ChinaFile NGO Project indicated a heavy presence of state and CCP-affiliated organizations. The number of foreign NGOs that choose to deregister rather than attempt to comply with the law has increased each year since it took effect in 2017.

E3 0-4 pts

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

1 / 4

The only legal labor union organization is the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which has long been criticized for failing to properly defend workers' rights, but has reportedly become even less of an ally to

workers in recent years. Worker efforts to organize independent trade unions are swiftly shut down by authorities, and the activists involved face harsh penalties. Chen Guojiang, who led an effort to organize delivery workers, was detained in February 2021 and faced criminal charges, though his whereabouts and status were not publicly known at year's end. Despite the risks, workers continue to engage in largely spontaneous strikes, with nearly 1,100 recorded during 2021.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	1/4
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The CCP dominates the judicial system, with courts at all levels supervised by party political-legal committees that have influence over the appointment of judges, court operations, and verdicts and sentences. CCP oversight is especially evident in politically sensitive cases, and most judges are CCP members. Judges are expected to conform to CCP ideology and uphold the party's "absolute leadership" of the courts.

Incremental reforms aimed at improving judicial performance and increasing the courts' transparency, professionalism, and autonomy from local authorities were introduced in 2014, but they have been undercut by the principle of party supremacy over the judiciary. Many judges complain about local officials interfering in cases to protect powerful litigants, support important industries, or avoid their own potential liability. The reported disappearance of millions of court rulings from an online database in 2021 cast further doubt on the judiciary's commitment to transparency.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	1/4
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Reforms to the criminal justice system in recent decades were ostensibly meant to guarantee better access to lawyers, allow witnesses to be cross-examined, and establish other safeguards to prevent wrongful convictions. However, violations of due process are widespread in practice. Criminal trials are frequently held in secret,

and the conviction rate is estimated at 98 percent or more. While adjudication of routine civil and administrative disputes is considered more fair, cases that touch on politically sensitive issues or the interests of powerful groups are subject to decisive “guidance” from political-legal committees.

Prosecutions rely heavily on confessions, many of which are obtained through torture, despite laws prohibiting such practices. Forced confessions are often televised. A multiyear crackdown on human rights lawyers has left defendants without effective or independent legal counsel, while the lawyers affected are either in jail, under house arrest, or unable to continue their work.

Extrajudicial forms of detention remain widespread, with detainees commonly held incommunicado. The use of “residential surveillance in a designated location,” which allows the police to hold individuals in secret detention for up to six months, has increased in recent years, with more than 6,000 people estimated to be held under this system by 2019.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0 / 4

Conditions in places of detention are harsh, with reports of inadequate food, regular beatings, and deprivation of medical care. In addition to their use to extract confessions, torture and other forms of coercion are widely employed to force political and religious dissidents to recant their beliefs. Security agents routinely flout legal protections, and impunity is the norm for police brutality and suspicious deaths in custody. Citizens and lawyers who seek redress for such abuse often meet with reprisals or imprisonment. In April 2021, anticorruption activist Guo Hongwei died in a prison hospital under suspicious circumstances while serving a 13-year prison sentence.

The government has gradually reduced the number of crimes that carry the death penalty, though the total was still more than 40 as of 2021. It is estimated that thousands of people are executed each year; the actual figure is considered a state secret. Despite the government’s claim that it has ended the transplantation of organs from executed prisoners, the scale and speed of the transplantation industry far

exceed what is feasible via the country's nascent voluntary donation system. In June 2021, a group of UN human rights experts expressed alarm over ongoing reports of organs being procured from "minorities, including Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Muslims, and Christians, in detention in China."

F4 0-4 pts

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

0 / 4

Chinese laws formally prohibit discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, or health condition, but these protections are often violated in practice. Several laws bar gender discrimination in the workplace, and some indicators of gender equality have reportedly improved over the past decade. Nevertheless, bias remains endemic, including in job recruitment and college admissions. Women's rights activists and individuals involved in the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and assault have themselves faced harassment, detention, and in some cases criminal prosecution. After tennis star Peng Shuai accused former PSC member Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault on social media in November 2021, she disappeared from public view, only to reappear in tightly controlled settings and effectively disavow her original allegations; the topic remained heavily censored amid widespread concern about Peng's well-being at year's end.

Members of ethnic and religious minority groups, LGBT+ people, people with disabilities, and people with illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B also face discrimination in employment and access to education. Members of religious and ethnic minorities are disproportionately targeted and abused by security forces and in the criminal justice system. In addition to being held in extrajudicial detention in larger numbers, members of these communities tend to be sentenced to longer prison terms than Han Chinese convicts.

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

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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

1/4

Despite the government's stated commitment to reforming the *hukou* (household registration) system, it continues to prevent roughly 290 million internal migrants from enjoying full legal rights as residents in the cities where they work. Recent partial reforms still leave a large majority of migrants without equal rights or full access to the same social services enjoyed by urban residents, such as education for their children in local schools.

Police checkpoints throughout Xinjiang limit residents' ability to travel or even leave their hometowns. As in the previous year, pandemic-related controls in 2021 included abusive enforcement methods, and some lockdowns reportedly failed to accommodate residents' needs for food and other basic provisions. Local governments continued to employ the Social Credit System, designed to rate citizens' trustworthiness using a wide range of data, as well as mandatory "health code" mobile apps intended to combat COVID-19, to deny people access to air and train travel, medical facilities, and other public services and spaces based on arbitrary or opaque criteria. While China's constitution gives individuals the right to petition the government concerning a grievance or injustice, in practice petitioners are routinely intercepted in their efforts to travel to government centers, forcibly returned to their hometowns, or extralegally detained in "black jails," psychiatric institutions, and other sites.

Millions of people are affected by government restrictions on their access to foreign travel and passports, with Uyghurs and Tibetans experiencing the greatest difficulty. Many overseas Chinese nationals who engage in politically sensitive activities abroad are at risk of being prevented from returning to China, while those who seek refuge abroad may face forced repatriation and arrest.

G2 0-4 pts

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

1/4

The authorities dominate the economy through state-owned enterprises in key sectors such as banking and energy, through state ownership of land, and through political and regulatory control. Chinese citizens are legally permitted to establish and operate private businesses. However, all enterprises are vulnerable to political interference, arbitrary regulatory obstacles, debilitating censorship, negative media campaigns, demands for bribes, and other forms of corruption. A 2021 government crackdown on private businesses, particularly large technology and social media firms, was ostensibly aimed at curbing monopolistic practices, uncontrolled growth, and other economic ills, but it effectively brought the private sector more firmly under CCP control.

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

G3 0-4 pts

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

2/4

The government further adjusted family-planning regulations in 2021, allowing all married couples to have up to three children rather than two, though officials retained their authority to regulate reproduction and reportedly began applying pressure for more births to stave off population decline. While ethnic minority couples were already permitted to have up to three children prior to 2021, in practice

ethnic Tibetans as well as Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang are subject to abusive policies aimed at limiting their reproduction.

Domestic violence continues to affect one-quarter of Chinese women, according to official figures, despite laws criminalizing the behavior. Activists have complained that the law does not criminalize spousal rape, and that it remains extremely difficult for victims to win court cases.

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

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2/4

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



On China

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

9/100 **Not Free**

Internet Freedom Score

10/100 **Not Free**

Other Years

2021

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