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2015 Scores

Status: Not Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 7.0

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 7

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 7

OVERVIEW

Over the course of 2014, 11 Tibetans set themselves on fire to protest Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. The authorities responded with communications blackouts, "patriotic education" campaigns, travel restrictions, and intrusive new controls on monasteries. The security clampdown that has been in place since a 2008 popular uprising increasingly extended to Tibetan areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

No official dialogue between Beijing and the Dalai Lama took place by year's end, marking the longest period without negotiations since 2002. Meanwhile, Beijing continued to press foreign leaders to refrain from meeting with the Dalai Lama and to endorse the official Chinese position on Tibet.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: -2 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The Chinese government rules Tibet through administration of the TAR and 12 Tibetan autonomous prefectures or counties in the nearby provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan. Under the Chinese constitution, autonomous areas have the right to formulate their own regulations and implement national legislation in accordance with local conditions. In practice, however, decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of senior, ethnic (Han) Chinese CCP officials. In 2011, Chen Quanguo replaced Zhang Qingli as TAR party secretary. The few ethnic Tibetans who occupy senior positions serve mostly as figureheads and echo official doctrine. Losang Gyaltsen replaced Padma Thrinley (known as Pema Choling in the Chinese press) as chairman of the TAR government in 2013; both men are Tibetans.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

All political activity outside the CCP is illegal and harshly punished, as is any evidence of loyalty to or communication with the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, India. The exile government includes an elected parliament serving five-year terms, a Supreme Justice Commission that adjudicates civil disputes, and a directly elected prime minister, also serving five-year terms. The unelected Dalai Lama, who served as head of state, renounced his political role in 2011. Lobsang Sangay was elected prime minister the following month, replacing a two-term incumbent and becoming the exile government's top political official. In September 2014, the Dalai Lama announced he might be the last to hold the title.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption is believed to be extensive in Tibet, as in the rest of China. Nevertheless, little information was available in 2014 on the scale of the problem or official measures to combat it. In July, the Chinese government reportedly sent investigators to the TAR as part of Chinese president Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign. However, the campaign served the dual purpose of strengthening control and ensuring effective implementation of party policies by targeting local officials undermining CCP goals.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: -3 / 0

The Chinese government's economic development programs in Tibet have strongly encouraged ethnic Chinese migration to the region, disproportionately benefited ethnic Chinese residents, and exacerbated the marginalization of ethnic Tibetans, who have also been displaced by mass resettlement campaigns. Intrusive and discriminatory government policies on education and religious institutions have added to Tibetan fears of cultural assimilation.

Civil Liberties: 3 / 60*D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 0 / 16*

Chinese authorities tightly restrict all media in Tibet. Such measures intensified in 2014 as the authorities sought to suppress information about self-immolations and through related security crackdowns. International broadcasts are jammed and communications devices periodically confiscated.

The online restrictions and monitoring in place across China are enforced even more stringently in the TAR. In May 2014, the head of Tibet's propaganda department reportedly vowed to "seal and stifle" the internet in a meeting with the State Council's information office. Internet and mobile-telephone users have been arrested for accessing or transmitting banned information.

In May, two Tibetan monks were reportedly sentenced to five and seven years in prison, respectively, for sharing with 15 people via WeChat, a popular mobile messaging app, a photo that they had captioned. The caption implied that it was shameful that the two people in the photo were wearing fur, a practice denounced by the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy surmised that the Chinese authorities perceived the defendants to be colluding with the Dalai Lama. Another Tibetan monk was reportedly arrested in March after sending emails critical of the Chinese government to friends as well as officials at Tsenden Monastery in Nagchu Prefecture.

According to overseas Tibetan groups, scores of writers, intellectuals, and musicians have been arrested since 2008, with some sentenced to lengthy prison terms. For example, Chinese officials in Barkham County arrested a popular Tibetan singer in May 2014, following his performance in a

concert organized to celebrate Tibetan language and culture. He was released without charge in June.

Foreign journalists were consistently prevented from entering Tibetan areas of Sichuan and other provinces, though no permission is technically required for travel there. Residents who assist foreign journalists are reportedly harassed. In 2013, a French television station aired a documentary that was filmed undercover by a reporter visiting the TAR on a tourist visa. Chinese officials subsequently harassed and threatened the journalist and his station.

The authorities regularly suppress religious activities, particularly those seen as forms of dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence. Many monks were arrested in 2014 for publicly protesting CCP rule. Possession of Dalai Lama-related materials can lead to official harassment and punishment, though many Tibetans secretly possess such items. Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) control who can study in monasteries and nunneries. Officials allow only people over age 18 to become monks and nuns, and they are required to sign a declaration rejecting Tibetan independence, expressing loyalty to the government, and denouncing the Dalai Lama.

Since 2012, the CCP has set up committees of government officials within monasteries to manage their daily operations and enforce party indoctrination campaigns. Authorities in Yulshul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, reportedly ordered monasteries to replace all staff and management committee members with Chinese cadres or party appointees by June 2014. Police posts are increasingly common even in smaller monasteries.

In May 2014, a travel ban was issued for those attempting to visit Mount Kailash – a principal pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists – for religious reasons. Separately, a local regulation was reportedly passed in Diru County in June to severely restrict Tibetan Buddhists' ability to hold and participate in the Great Prayer Festival, one of their most important religious ceremonies.

Ideological education campaigns reach most monasteries and nunneries in the region. Such campaigns typically force participants to recognize the CCP claim that China "liberated" Tibet and to denounce the Dalai Lama. Some monks and nuns have reportedly left their institutions to avoid the sessions. The effort has also been extended to the lay population in recent years, with students, civil servants, and farmers required to participate in discussions, singing sessions, and propaganda film screenings. In a program initiated in 2011, tens of thousands of CCP cadres have been sent to villages across the TAR to scrutinize residents' views and enforce the government's message.

University professors cannot lecture on certain topics, and many must attend political indoctrination sessions. The government restricts course materials to prevent the circulation of unofficial versions of Tibetan history.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

The Chinese authorities severely restrict freedoms of assembly and association. Independent trade unions and human rights groups are illegal, and even nonviolent protests are often harshly punished. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) including those focused only on development and public health operate under highly restrictive agreements. Nevertheless, Tibetans continue to seek avenues for expressing dissatisfaction with government policies. In 2014, Tibetans staged periodic demonstrations or vigils to protest CCP rule. Authorities often responded with arrests or violent crackdowns. In August, security forces opened fire on hundreds of Tibetan demonstrators in Sichuan province, severely wounding nearly a dozen people and detaining many others. The Tibetans were protesting the arrest of village leader Dema Wangdak, who had criticized Chinese officials for harassing Tibetan women at a local event. In November, two young men from Ngaba County were sentenced to two and three years in prison, respectively, for engaging in separate

solitary protests; they had waved Tibetan flags while shouting slogans calling for freedom in Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama.

A rare labor action occurred in May 2014, as 100 teachers in the Tibetan prefecture of Qinhai province protested low pay and benefits stemming from their status as "substitute" teachers.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The judicial system in Tibet does not justly enforce the rule of law, and torture is reportedly widespread. Critics of Chinese rule continue to face arrests and disappearances. Defendants lack access to meaningful legal representation. Trials are closed if state security is invoked, and sometimes even when no political crime is listed. Chinese lawyers who offer to defend Tibetan suspects have been harassed or disbarred. Security forces routinely engage in arbitrary detention, and detainees' families are often left uninformed as to their whereabouts or well-being. In December 2014, for example, authorities took Tibetan political prisoner Tenzin Choedak to a hospital after he sustained a brutal assault; he later died as a result of his injuries. Critics have accused the government of perpetrating the beating, and Choedak showed signs of having been tortured while in custody.

The use of self-immolation to protest Chinese rule saw a sharp decline in 2014, following harsh punishments inflicted by the Chinese authorities. Authorities responded to immolations with information blackouts, a heightened security presence, and increased surveillance. Guidelines unveiled in 2012 state that engaging in self-immolations and organizing, assisting, or gathering crowds related to such acts should be considered criminal offenses, including intentional homicide in some cases. Officials have offered cash rewards of hundreds of thousands of yuan for information on planned self-immolations. Since 2013, the government has also employed collective punishment tactics in Dzoeg County, Sichuan Province, canceling public benefits for the households of self-immolators and ending state-funded projects in their villages.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people suffer from discrimination. No LGBT-focused groups operate in the TAR, and discussion of LGBT issues is taboo.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Heightened restrictions on freedom of movement – including the use of troop deployments, roadblocks, and passport restrictions – continued in 2014, particularly in areas where self-immolations took place. Increased security efforts reportedly kept the number of Tibetans who successfully crossed the border into Nepal at around 100 in 2014, continuing a trend of annual declines from more than 2,000 in 2007. Some Tibetan students who were accepted by foreign schools were denied passports, preventing them from studying abroad. Authorities continued to restrict access to the TAR for human rights researchers as well as some tourists in 2014. They were denied entry surrounding politically sensitive dates, such as the anniversary of the 2008 protests. During other periods, they were required to travel in groups and obtain official permission to visit the TAR, and even then, last-minute travel bans were sometimes imposed.

T Tibetans receive preferential treatment in university admission examinations, but this is often not enough to secure entrance. The dominant role of the Chinese language in education and employment limits opportunities for many Tibetans. Private employers favor ethnic Chinese for many jobs, and Tibetans reportedly find it more difficult to obtain permits and loans to open businesses.

Since 2003, the authorities have intensified efforts to resettle rural Tibetans – either by force or with inducements – into permanent-housing areas with little economic infrastructure. According to Human Rights Watch, more than two million TAR residents have been resettled since 2006, and

plans to continue the program persisted in 2014. Many have reportedly tried to return to their previous lands, risking conflict with officials.

China's restrictive family-planning policies are more leniently enforced for Tibetans and other ethnic minorities. As a result, the TAR is one of the few areas of China without a skewed sex ratio. Officials limit urban Tibetans to two children and encourage rural Tibetans to stop at three. Women are well represented in many public-sector jobs and CCP posts within the TAR, though most high-level officials are men. However, advocates noted in 2014 that women suffer specific religious and political persecution related to Chinese suppression of Tibetan identity. Furthermore, cases of trafficking in Tibetan women have surged in recent years, with many being taken to China for domestic service and forced marriages.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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