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Freedom in the World 2014 - China

Overview:

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) general secretary Xi Jinping, who had assumed his post as part of a broader leadership rotation at the November 2012 party congress, was named state president by the country's largely symbolic parliament in March 2013. Throughout the year, Xi attempted to consolidate his power amid ongoing infighting within the CCP. The 2012 purge of former Chongqing party secretary Bo Xilai was completed in September, when he was sentenced to life in prison on corruption charges. Former domestic security chief Zhou Yongkang, who had been viewed as Bo's most powerful patron, was rumored to be under investigation for corruption at year's end.

Xi initially raised hopes among reform-minded intellectuals that the CCP under his leadership might be more tolerant of dissent and loosen political controls. However, despite a reinvigorated anticorruption drive, official rhetoric about improving the rule of law, and invitations for input from society, such optimism faded as the year progressed. After intellectuals and members of civil society urged the party to adhere to China's constitution and a rare strike by journalists at a major newspaper sparked broader calls to reduce censorship, the authorities responded with campaigns to intensify ideological controls. The state-led anticorruption drive proved opaque and selective, and the latter half of 2013 was marked by crackdowns on grassroots anticorruption activists, new judicial guidelines expanding the criminalization of online speech, and the detention of both prominent social-media commentators and ordinary users.

In November, the CCP Central Committee chosen at the party congress a year earlier convened for its crucial third plenum, announcing a series of modest reforms in the economic, social, and legal spheres. They included a decision to close the country's infamous "reeducation through labor" camps, where individuals can be detained without trial, but the authorities continued to use various alternative forms of administrative or extralegal detention—as well as formal criminal charges with potentially longer sentences—to punish human rights defenders, anticorruption activists, petitioners, and religious believers. Another reform expanded the categories of families permitted to have two children, though the intrusive regulations and harsh practices used to enforce the country's long-standing birth quotas remained in place.

Despite CCP hostility toward organized dissent, both high-profile dissidents and ordinary citizens continued to assert their rights and challenge injustice during 2013. Public protests, online campaigns, journalistic exposés, and activist networks scored several victories, including the release of individuals from wrongful detention. Nevertheless, the ability of Chinese citizens to share breaking news, uncover corruption, or engage in public debate about political and social issues was hampered by the increased internet controls and crackdowns.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 2 / 40 [Key]**A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12**

The CCP has a monopoly on political power, and its Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) sets government and party policy. At the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, a new PSC was announced following an opaque, internal selection process. The committee shrank from nine to seven members, only two of whom—new CCP general secretary Xi Jinping and his deputy, Li Keqiang—had served on the previous panel. Party members—who number some 80 million nationwide, or about 6 percent of the population—hold almost all top posts in the government, military, and internal security services, as well as in many economic entities and social organizations.

The country's legislature, the 3,000-member National People's Congress (NPC), is elected for five-year terms by subnational congresses, formally elects the state president for up to two five-year terms, and confirms the premier after he is nominated by the president. However, the NPC is a largely symbolic body. Only its standing committee meets regularly, while the full congress convenes for just two weeks a year to approve proposed legislation. In March 2013, Xi was appointed president and Li was named premier, solidifying Xi's role as the top leader in the party and the government. He also heads the military as chairman of the party and state military commissions.

The country's only competitive elections are for village committees and urban residency councils, which hold limited authority and are generally subordinate to the local CCP committees. The nomination of candidates remains tightly controlled, and many of the elections have been marred by fraud, corruption, and attacks on independent candidates.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

The CCP does not tolerate any form of organized opposition or independent political parties. Citizens who attempt to form opposition parties or advocate for democratic reforms have been sentenced to long prison terms in recent years. Democracy advocate and 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo remained behind bars in 2013, having been sentenced in 2009 to 11 years in prison for his role in organizing the prodemocracy manifesto Charter 08. His wife, Liu Xia, has been under strict house arrest since 2010; her brother was sentenced in June 2013 to 11 years in prison on what were widely perceived as trumped-up fraud charges in retaliation for Liu Xia's brief contact with activists and foreign journalists.

Over the course of the year, more than 65 political reform activists across the country were detained, many for their connection to the New Citizens' Movement, a loosely organized network of individuals seeking to promote the rule of law, transparency, and human rights. One of the movement's leaders, Beijing lawyer Xu Zhiyong, was detained in July and indicted in December on charges of "gathering a crowd to disturb public order," having organized small protests to urge officials to disclose their assets and circulated photographs of the demonstrations online; he faces a prison term of up to five years if convicted.

In addition to advocates of democracy and political reform, tens of thousands of grassroots activists, petitioners, Falun Gong practitioners, Christians, Tibetans, and Uighurs are believed to be in prison or extrajudicial forms of detention for their political or religious views, although complete figures are unavailable. In October 2013, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China published a partial list of over 1,300 current political prisoners.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Corruption remains endemic despite increased government antigraft campaigns. Top party leaders acknowledged growing public resentment over the issue in 2013. In January, Xi Jinping vowed to crack down on corruption by both senior leaders and low-level bureaucrats, while party bodies issued directives instructing officials to curb ostentatious displays of wealth. However, the leadership rejected more fundamental reforms, such as requiring officials to publicly disclose their assets, creating genuinely independent oversight bodies, or lifting political constraints on journalists and law enforcement agencies.

Thousands of officials are investigated and punished each year by government or CCP entities, but prosecution is selective and decision-making highly opaque, with informal personal networks and internal CCP power struggles influencing both the choice of targets and the outcomes. The highest-level target in 2013 was former Chongqing party chief and Politburo member Bo Xilai, who was sentenced to life in prison in September on charges of bribery and abuse of power. Although the authorities tightly controlled information and public discussion about Bo's August trial, the unprecedented release of select excerpts and updates on the

proceedings via an official microblog, including Bo's relative defiance in contesting the prosecution's case, surprised many observers and drew considerable public attention.

Many lower- and mid-level officials were also disciplined, demoted, dismissed, or prosecuted during the year, often after bloggers or journalists exposed evidence of their corruption online. Authorities encouraged the public to submit corruption complaints through official channels rather than airing them publicly or anonymously on the internet, and launched state-run whistleblower websites. They also cracked down on independent anticorruption initiatives and harassed those who exposed earlier cases. Foreign media outlets faced reprisals including website blocking and visa delays after publishing stories on apparent influence peddling by top officials and their families.

CCP officials increasingly seek input from academics and civic groups regarding certain policy areas, though without relinquishing control over the decision-making process. Since open-government regulations took effect in 2008, many agencies have become more forthcoming in publishing official documents. However, implementation has been incomplete. Government bodies retain great discretion to classify or withhold information, including on vital public matters such as food safety, home demolitions, and environmental disasters. Courts have largely hesitated to enforce information requests. The poor quality of official responses has dampened citizens' initial enthusiasm to lodge complaints. China was ranked 80 out of 177 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, but was excluded from the organization's public opinion-based Global Corruption Barometer because Chinese survey companies were reportedly reluctant to participate.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: -1 / 0

The government continues to pursue policies, including large-scale resettlement and work-transfer programs, that are designed in part to alter the demography of ethnic minority regions, especially Tibet and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. [Note: Tibet is examined in a separate report.]

Civil Liberties: 15 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

Despite relative freedom in private discussion and citizen efforts to push the limits of permissible public speech, China's media environment remains extremely restrictive. All Chinese television, radio, and print outlets are owned by the CCP or the state. Moreover, all media outlets are required to follow regularly issued CCP directives to avoid certain topics or publish content from party mouthpieces. Routinely censored topics include calls for greater autonomy in Tibet and Xinjiang, independence for Taiwan, the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, the persecuted Falun Gong spiritual group, the writings of prominent activists, and critical commentary regarding CCP leaders. Other directives issued in 2013 barred or "guided" reporting on antigovernment protests, torture, certain cases of official corruption, and fatal industrial accidents. Outlets that disobey official guidance risk closure, and journalists face dismissal and sometimes imprisonment. Pressure on investigative journalism remained intense during the year, as several respected periodicals and journalists faced suspension, dismissals, or tighter supervision. Meanwhile, regulators introduced various restrictions, including prior censorship for television documentaries, tightened controls on outlets' use of foreign sources or microblogs, and plans to require Chinese journalists to pass a new ideological exam in order to receive their press cards.

According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 32 journalists were behind bars in China as of December 2013, including a number of Uighurs and Tibetans; the total number of Chinese citizens jailed for freedom of expression violations, especially on the internet, was much higher. Several journalists faced questionable charges of bribery, defamation, or "spreading false rumors" in 2013, but no convictions were reported as of year's end. In January, despite the risk of punishment, journalists at the Guangzhou-based *Southern Weekly* pushed back against official interference by going on strike after propaganda officials altered a New Year's editorial urging greater adherence to China's constitution. The journalists' protest sparked a wider outcry against censorship, both online and in street demonstrations, by segments of Chinese society ranging from students and intellectuals to popular entertainment figures. Some analysts suggested that officials' alarm at the incident contributed to the intensified media and internet controls later in the year.

Harassment of foreign reporters, including occasional physical attacks, and intimidation of their Chinese sources and staff continued during the year. The authorities used the threat of visa denials to retaliate against foreign journalists and news organizations they deemed objectionable. One correspondent—veteran journalist Paul Mooney, who is known for his human rights reporting—was unable to take up a position with Reuters after the government refused to issue him a visa in November. Over two dozen other foreign journalists, most of them from Bloomberg and the *New York Times*, faced de facto expulsion after authorities refused to issue visas and press cards in apparent retribution for articles about the wealth and business connections of top party

leaders and their families. Following international pressure, most of the reporters received their documents by year's end. The websites of Bloomberg and the *Times* have been blocked since 2012, and other foreign news outlets experienced temporary blocking during 2013. Some international radio and television broadcasts, including the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Asia, remain jammed.

China's population of internet users surpassed 600 million in 2013, remaining the world's largest. According to official figures, mobile-telephone users exceeded one billion, with over 460 million people accessing the internet via their mobile devices. The government maintains an elaborate apparatus for censoring and monitoring internet and mobile-phone communications. The authorities block websites or force the deletion of content they deem politically threatening, and sometimes detain those who post such information. The U.S.-based social-media platforms Twitter and Facebook remain blocked, and Chinese internet companies are obliged to adhere to official censorship directives. Nevertheless, domestic microblogging services—with over 300 million users in 2013—have grown rapidly in influence since 2010 as a source of news, an outlet for public opinion, and a tool for mobilization. Over the last few years, users were frequently able to outpace censors to expose government malfeasance, publicize breaking stories, or comment critically on sensitive topics.

However, in 2013 the authorities launched a sweeping crackdown aimed at reasserting control over online discussion. In August, Xi Jinping reportedly gave a speech to party cadres in which he urged them to “wage a war to win over public opinion” and “seize the ground of new media.” Four days later, Chinese-American businessman Charles Xue, whose web commentaries on social and political issues were shared with 12 million followers on the Sina Weibo microblogging platform, was detained for allegedly soliciting prostitutes. He was later shown handcuffed on state television, criticizing the way he had used his microblog to influence public opinion, reinforcing suspicions of a politically motivated prosecution. Other public figures with large microblog followings also faced growing pressure in the form of deletions, locked accounts, and selective arrests and interrogations.

In September, the country's highest judicial authorities issued a legal interpretation that expanded the scope and severity of criminal offenses covering online speech and allowed prosecutors to initiate criminal defamation cases in defense of public order or state interests. Under the guidelines, a user could receive up to three years in prison for content deemed false or defamatory if the circumstances are deemed “serious,” meaning the post was viewed more than 5,000 times or reposted more than 500 times. Chinese and international legal experts criticized the threshold as extremely low for such a severe punishment. Throughout August and September, in addition to the high-profile bloggers, police detained and interrogated hundreds of social-media users, with most subject to brief periods of detention rather than full criminal prosecution. The harsh judicial interpretation and growing number of arrests had an immediate and palpable chilling effect on online discourse, more so than previous government attempts to increase control over social media. Data from social-media analysis firms pointed to a decline in traffic and political discussion on Sina Weibo, especially among users with large followings. A growing number of Weibo users also shifted to Tencent's WeChat, a social-media application organized around closed communities and therefore less conducive to viral dissemination of news and nationwide public debate.

Religious freedom is sharply curtailed by the formally atheist Communist Party. All religious groups must register with the government, which regulates their activities, oversees clergy, and guides theology. Some groups, including certain Buddhist and Christian sects, are forbidden, and their members face harassment, imprisonment, and torture. The largest among them is the Falun Gong spiritual group. In 2013, the party launched a new three-year initiative to coerce its adherents to renounce their beliefs. While some Falun Gong practitioners were released from detention as part of the closure of labor camps, authorities seized hundreds of others in home raids, sending them to extralegal detention centers for forced conversion or sentencing them to long prison terms. In October 2013, Wang Hongxia, a former English teacher from Sichuan Province, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for helping fellow Falun Gong adherents to hire defense lawyers. Other unregistered groups, including unofficial Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations, operate in a legal gray zone. Some are able to meet quietly with the tacit approval of local authorities, but “house church” gatherings were raided or harassed in several provinces in 2013, with congregants facing detention and beatings.

Authorities intensified curbs on Islam among the Uighur population of Xinjiang in 2013, conducting pervasive house searches, making hundreds of arrests, monitoring religious leaders, and destroying thousands of publications. Several clashes between Uighur residents and police—some sparked by restrictions on religious practice—led to dozens of deaths. In March, 20 Uighurs were sentenced to prison terms of up to 15 years on charges of “inciting splittism” or engaging in “terrorist” communications, but overseas Uighur groups maintained that the individuals had merely listened to overseas radio broadcasts and discussed religious and cultural topics online. Official restrictions on journalists' access to the region made it difficult to independently verify the details of such cases. The authorities continued to enforce policies marginalizing use of the Uighur language in education and restricting religious attire.

Academic freedom remains restricted with respect to politically sensitive issues. The CCP controls the appointment of top university officials, and many scholars practice self-censorship to protect their careers. Two professors known for their outspoken criticism of one-party rule were dismissed from their positions at prominent universities in Beijing and Shanghai in 2013. Political indoctrination is a required component of the curriculum at all levels of education.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are severely restricted. Citizens risk criminal punishment for organizing demonstrations without prior government approval, which is rarely granted. Nevertheless, workers, farmers, and urban residents held tens of thousands of protests during 2013, reflecting growing discontent over wrongdoing by officials, especially land confiscation, widespread corruption, pollution, and fatal police beatings. The government has struggled to suppress protests without exacerbating public frustration, as some aggrieved protesters resort to violence against officials and symbols of authority. The authorities use force in some cases, while employing softer strategies to deter or disperse large gatherings in others. In March, the authorities responded to an 18-day uprising over land grabs by villagers in Guangdong Province with about 3,000 security officers who cut electricity and phone services, beat protesters, and fired tear gas and stun grenades into the crowds, arresting at least nine people and injuring dozens. Officials in Yunnan Province, by contrast, thwarted a protest movement in Kunming over the construction of a petrochemical plant by summoning local activists for questioning, prohibiting workers to take leave on the day of a scheduled protest, and threatening to fire executives at public institutions if employees were allowed to attend the protest.

The central government ranks provincial and city officials based on the number of petitioners who travel from their jurisdictions to Beijing to report injustices, affecting their chances of promotion. As a result, local officials routinely intercept and harass petitioners, at times detaining them in illegal “black jails” and labor camps to stop them from visiting Beijing. Detained petitioners are reportedly subject to beatings, psychological abuse, and sexual violence. In November 2013, state media reported that the authorities planned to abolish the ranking system to encourage disputes to be settled locally, and have implemented pilot programs in Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces. However, some experts warned that without the pressure to reduce numbers of petitioners, local officials would have even fewer incentives to address grievances.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are required to register, obtain a government sponsor, and follow strict regulations, including vague prohibitions on advocating non-CCP rule, “damaging national unity,” or “upsetting ethnic harmony.” Nevertheless, the number of civil society groups, especially those whose work is not politically sensitive or is focused on service provision, continued to expand during the year, while informal activist networks scored minor victories on more difficult issues. Official statistics showed that more than half a million civil society organizations were formally registered in 2013. Millions of other groups are thought to operate without registration or as commercial entities. In December, the Ministry of Civil Affairs announced plans to abolish the requirement to obtain a government sponsor for certain types of civil society organizations. Meanwhile, the authorities continue to deny registration to groups promoting issues disfavored by the CCP. In November, Hunan Province authorities denied a gay rights activist’s attempt to set up an NGO, declaring that it would violate Chinese morality, though no law bans same-sex activity. Despite restrictions on obtaining foreign donations, experts observed that domestic charitable giving is on the rise and civil society groups are increasingly taking a rights-based approach in advocacy.

The only legal labor union is the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which has long been criticized for failing to properly defend workers’ rights. Nevertheless, workers have asserted themselves informally via strikes, collective petitioning, and selection of negotiating representatives. They have also used social media to bolster solidarity. Arbitration mechanisms established under 2008 labor laws have proven disappointing to workers, who complain of biased mediators, lengthy procedures, and employers’ failure to comply with rulings. Collective bargaining is legal but rarely leads to success if not accompanied by strikes and social-media campaigns. The hiring of subcontractors has enabled employers to bypass contract protections in the 2008 legal reforms. Amendments to the law that took effect in July are designed to limit the use of subcontractors, but implementation was uncertain. Workers are routinely denied social insurance and other legal benefits, while dangerous workplace conditions continue to claim many tens of thousands of lives each year. The use of juveniles in government-sanctioned “work-study” programs remains a serious problem.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The CCP controls the judiciary. Party political-legal committees supervise the operations of courts at all levels, and allow party officials to influence verdicts and sentences. Most judges are CCP members. Their appointment, salaries, and promotions are largely determined by party and government officials at the same bureaucratic level. CCP influence is especially evident in politically sensitive cases, such as the prosecution of activists or officials like Bo Xilai who have fallen out of favor.

Adjudication of minor civil and administrative disputes is fairer than in politically sensitive or criminal cases. However, even in commercial litigation and civil suits involving private individuals, previous limited progress toward the rule of law has stalled or been reversed. Judges have increasingly been pressured to resolve civil disputes through mediation, sometimes forced, rather than actual adjudication. In March 2013, a new chief justice possessing a law degree was appointed, replacing a CCP veteran with no formal legal training. Following official statements surrounding the CCP Central Committee’s third plenum that acknowledged the

need for greater transparency and judicial autonomy from local authorities, some experts speculated about a possible reduction of political control over parts of the judiciary in the coming years.

The country's growing contingent of civil rights lawyers continued to face restrictions and physical attacks in 2013. Lawyers were prevented from seeing their clients, disbarred, beaten, and in some cases detained. Prominent lawyer Gao Zhisheng remained imprisoned and at risk of torture at year's end. In May, plainclothes police beat and detained 11 lawyers as they were attempting to investigate abuses at an extralegal detention center in Sichuan Province.

Criminal trials, which often amount to mere sentencing announcements, are frequently closed to the public, and the conviction rate is estimated at 98 percent. In January 2013, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law took effect. They include improvements for ordinary criminal proceedings, including exclusion of evidence obtained through torture, access for lawyers to their clients, and the possibility of witnesses being cross-examined. However, legal experts raised concerns that the revised law includes exceptions for cases of "endangering state security," "terrorism," and "major bribery"—categories often employed to punish nonviolent activism and political expression. The amendments allow such suspects to be detained in an unspecified location for up to six months, and notification of families is not strictly required, essentially legalizing the practice of enforced disappearances.

Torture remains widespread, either for the purpose of extracting confessions or forcing 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. Overall, detention facilities are estimated to hold three to five million people. Conditions are generally harsh, with reports of inadequate food, regular beatings, and deprivation of medical care; the government generally does not permit visits by independent monitoring groups. A lengthy magazine exposé and independent documentary published in mid-2013 described systematic torture at the Masanjia "reeducation through labor" camp in northeast China, including electric shocks and the use of specialized torture devices, contributing to public pressure to abolish the camps.

Following years of such pressure, the authorities in January had issued a preliminary announcement that the decades-old network of "reeducation through labor" camps, which permit individuals to be held for up to four years without a judicial hearing, would be abolished by year's end. The camps were believed to hold several hundred thousand citizens, including a substantial contingent of political and religious prisoners, alongside petty criminals, prostitutes, and drug offenders. Throughout the year, the media and human rights groups reported the closure of camps and the release of prisoners, including prisoners of conscience. In late December, the Standing Committee of the NPC formally approved the camps' abolition and the release of remaining detainees, though it affirmed the legitimacy of existing sentences to prevent victims from suing for redress.

However, according to media reports and a detailed report published by Amnesty International in December, alternative nonjudicial detention systems were used during the year to hold the same categories of detainees previously subject to reeducation through labor, though often for shorter terms. Some camps were transformed into coercive drug-rehabilitation centers, and prostitutes were sent to "custody and education centers," both of which typically involve forced labor. Some petitioners and Falun Gong detainees who had failed to "reform" were sent directly to other types of extralegal facilities for indefinite detention. More broadly, a growing number of activists, petitioners, microbloggers, and Falun Gong practitioners have been confined in extralegal "black jails," "legal education centers," or psychiatric facilities. Others faced formal prosecution, with some receiving harsher sentences than those possible via the labor camp system.

Fifty-five crimes, including nonviolent offenses, carry the death penalty, though the CCP's November 2013 reform plans included a gradual reduction in the applicability of capital punishment. The number of executions each year is a state secret. An estimate by the San Francisco-based Duihua Foundation put the number at 3,000 for 2012. While still more than the combined total for the rest of the world, this represents a sharp decline from an estimated 12,000 annual executions a decade earlier. Executed prisoners remain the primary source of organs for transplant operations, though the government reiterated plans in August 2013 to phase out the practice in the coming years. Some experts continued to raise concerns that those imprisoned for their religious beliefs or ethnic identity have also been used as sources for organs.

The CCP controls and directs the security forces at all levels. During 2013, the party continued to expand investment in its apparatus for "stability maintenance," a term that encompasses maintaining law and order, suppressing peaceful dissent, and closely monitoring the populace. Key components include state intelligence agencies, such as the Public Security Bureau; paramilitary forces like the People's Armed Police; and extralegal CCP-based entities like the 610 Office, stability-maintenance units, and administrative enforcers called *chengguan*. In 2013, the government reportedly allocated 769 billion yuan (\$125 billion) for internal security, an increase of more than 8 percent from 2012. The total surpassed the military budget for the third consecutive year. The spending has fueled a lucrative market for surveillance and police equipment. Analysts reported that some party chiefs were attempting to curb the growing power of the internal security apparatus, noting that the CCP portfolio overseeing the legal system was downgraded in rank during the November 2012 party congress.

Chinese laws formally prohibit discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, or health condition, but they do not guarantee equal treatment for all segments of society in practice. Ethnic and religious

minorities, the disabled, and people with HIV/AIDS face widespread de facto discrimination, in some cases with official encouragement. This includes discrimination in access to employment and education. Separately, despite international legal protections for asylum seekers and refugees, Chinese law enforcement agencies continue to seek out and repatriate North Korean defectors, who face imprisonment or execution upon return.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The *hukou* (household registration) system remains in place, limiting the ability of China's 800 million rural residents and migrant workers to fully access urban social services, such as education for their children. Since *hukou* status is hereditary, subject to change only for those who meet strict income or educational requirements, China faces a growing underclass of low-wage migrant workers, many now living in cities for decades but denied the same benefits as their neighbors holding urban *hukou*. In late 2013, senior leaders vowed to carry out an overhaul of the *hukou* system by gradually lifting registration restrictions, first in smaller cities and then in the larger ones. Several ministries submitted reform proposals, but no regulatory changes had been made by year's end.

According to the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, an estimated 14 million people were affected by restrictions on foreign travel and acquiring passports, many of them Uighurs and Tibetans. Political and religious dissidents, human rights defenders, and certain scholars were also prevented from traveling abroad or to Hong Kong, and some were placed under house arrest during politically sensitive times.

Property rights protection remains weak in practice. Urban land is owned by the state, even if the buildings that sit on it are privately owned. Rural land is collectively owned by villages. Farmers enjoy long-term lease rights to the land they farm, but are barred from selling or developing it. Low compensation standards and weak legal protections have facilitated land seizures by local officials, who often evict the residents and transfer the land rights to developers. Corruption is endemic in such projects, and local governments rely on land development as a key source of operating revenue, funds for debt repayment, and economic growth statistics that are critical to officials' careers. According to the State Bureau of Letters and Visits, an estimated four million disputes resulting from land grabs and property demolition occur each year. Residents who resist eviction, seek legal redress, or organize protests often face violence at the hands of local police or hired thugs.

Since the 1980s, the space for private business has expanded dramatically. Since the early 2000s, however, the resurgence of state-owned enterprises—which dominate key industries such as utilities, energy, banking, and transportation—and limits on private access to lending from state banks has impeded the growth of the private sector. Chinese citizens are legally permitted to establish and operate private businesses. However, those without official protection can find themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis competitors, in legal disputes, or in dealings with regulators. Foreign companies can similarly face arbitrary regulatory obstacles, demands for bribes and other inducements, or negative media campaigns.

China's population controls mandate that couples must obtain government permission before giving birth. Most urban couples are limited to one child and rural residents to two. Compliance is enforced by intrusive government directives—such as required implantation of long-term contraception devices—and the inability of unregistered children to obtain *hukou* status, except upon payment of substantial fines. Birth and sterilization quotas remain crucial to the career advancement of local officials. Consequently, compulsory abortion and sterilization still occur, though less frequently than in the past. According to the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, regulations in 22 of 31 provincial-level administrative units explicitly endorse abortions as an enforcement tool, an increase from the previous year. Relatives of unsterilized women or couples with unapproved births are subject to high fines, job dismissal, reduced government benefits, and occasionally detention. These controls, combined with commercial ultrasound technology and societal pressures favoring boys, have led to sex-selective abortion and a general shortage of females, exacerbating the problem of human trafficking.

At the end of 2013, the NPC Standing Committee announced a limited relaxation of China's population-control policies, specifying that couples in which both of the spouses are only children would be allowed to have two children. Demographers estimate that the change could lead to one or two million additional births per year, on top of the current 15 million per year. Party leaders said local authorities would gradually implement the reforms over the coming months.

Domestic violence affects one-quarter of Chinese women, according to official figures. The problem is addressed in scattered provincial-level laws; national-level provisions are not comprehensive. Many claims are not recognized by courts, leaving victims unprotected. A draft Anti-Domestic Violence Law has stalled but remained on the NPC's legislative agenda in 2013. Several laws bar gender discrimination in the workplace, and gender equality has reportedly improved over the past decade, but bias remains widespread, including in job recruitment and college admissions. Women remain severely underrepresented in important CCP and government positions.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)

Explanatory Note:

The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Hong Kong or Tibet, which are examined in separate reports.

2014 Scores

Status

Not Free

Freedom Rating

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

6.5

Civil Liberties

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

6

Political Rights

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

7

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