

Freedom on the Net 2025 - China

Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Internet users in China have faced the world's worst conditions for internet freedom for over a decade. People face severe legal and extralegal repercussions for online activities like sharing news stories, talking about their religious beliefs, and communicating with family members and others overseas. Authorities wield immense power to censor and manipulate online content.

- Authorities disconnected journalist Gao Yu from fixed and mobile internet in August 2024 in retaliation for her online commentary (A3).¹
- Researchers found that authorities in Henan Province had implemented a website-blocking system to prevent people in the region from accessing certain content, in addition to the thousands of domains blocked by the national-level Great Firewall (B1).²
- Censors removed social media posts on sensitive issues, including discussions about a vehicular attack that killed dozens of people in Zhuhai in November 2024 and criticism of a new digital identity system.³ After authorities urged platforms to clean up material that contained problems such as “provoking extreme opposition, fabricating false information, promoting vulgarity, and advocating bad culture,” among others, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) announced in early 2025 that platforms had removed more than a million pieces of content (B2).⁴
- People mobilized online in support of various causes, despite the potential for censorship and other repercussions. In July 2024, online and offline protests led the central government to weaken policy changes that would have hurt investors who previously held shares in now-bankrupt companies (B8).⁵
- In February 2025, it was reported that six activists had received jail sentences on charges of “subverting state power” for organizing an opposition political party; the charging document highlighted activities carried out primarily on the internet. The prison sentences, which ranged from 3 to 12 years, were upheld in a September 2024 ruling (C3).⁶
- In May 2025, the CAC and Ministry of Public Service introduced the National Online Identity Authentication Public Service, a digital identity system under which users would provide official government documents to register for internet services. According to the May 2025 measures, the system would allow users to verify their identities—which is mandatory to post on social media websites and register domains—while shielding personal information from internet providers.⁷ The measures took force in July 2025, after the coverage period, though major platforms implemented the system after a draft version released in July 2024. Rights activists criticized the move as a means of increasing state control over the internet and undermining online anonymity (C4 and C6).⁸

Political Overview

China is ruled by a repressive regime. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains tight control over the state bureaucracy, the media, online speech, religious practice, universities, businesses, and civil society. CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has consolidated personal power to a degree not seen in China for decades. Following a multiyear crackdown on political dissent, independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights defenders, China's independent civil society has been largely decimated.

This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to [ongoing budget constraints](#). Please consider making a [donation](#) to support future editions of this vital resource.

For additional background information, see last year's [full report](#).

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections? 5 / 6

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons? 1 / 3

A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity? 1 / 6

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? 0 / 6

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner? 0 / 4

B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards? 0 / 6

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards? 0 / 4

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process? 0 / 4

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship? | 0 / 4

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest? | 0 / 4

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online? | 0 / 3

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability? | 1 / 4

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues? | 1 / 6

C Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence? | 0 / 6

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? | 0 / 4

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? | 0 / 6

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? | 0 / 4

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy? | 0 / 6

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?

0 /
6

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?

0 /
5

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?

0 /
3

Footnotes

- 1 “China shuts down journalist’s internet, cell service,” Committee to Protect Journalists, August 28, 2024, <https://cpj.org/2024/08/china-shuts-down-journalists-internet-cell-serv....>
- 2Mingshi Wu, Ali Zohaib, Zakir Durumeric, Amir Houmansadr, and Eric Wustrow, “A Wall Behind A Wall: Emerging Regional Censorship in China,” Great Firewall Report, May 11, 2025, <https://gfw.report/publications/sp25/en/>.
- 3Vivian Wang, “After Deadly Car Rampage, Chinese Officials Try to Erase Any Hint of It,” The New York Times. November 13, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/13/world/asia/china-car-zhuhai-ramming...>; “China’s Draft Internet ID Measure Threatens to Tighten Online Censorship,” The Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (NCHRD) and ARTICLE 19, February 5, 2025, https://www.nchrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/internetID_full-analys....
- 4“多平台发布“清朗·2025年春节网络环境整治”专项行动治理成效和典型案例” [“Multi-platform release of “Qinglang · 2025 Spring Festival Network Environmental Remediation” special action governance effectiveness and typical cases”], Cyberspace Administration of China, February 13, 2025, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2025-02/13/c_1741063712043835.htm.
- 5James Pomfret and Engen Tham, “After protests, China reverses course on law that hurt shareholders,” Reuters, December 24, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/after-protests-china-reverses-cours...> ; see also “China Dissent Monitor,” Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/china-dissent-monitor>.
- 6“因组建“中国民主胜利党”而被以“颠覆国家政权罪”判刑的唐高峰（12年）、王威（8年）、王一飞（7年6个月）、周丹（6年）、刘振刚（5年6个月）、代露（3年）等6位人士的情况通报” [“A report on the cases of six individuals—Tang Gaofeng (12 years), Wang Wei (8 years), Wang Yifei (7 years and 6 months), Zhou Dan (6 years), Liu Zhengang (5 years and 6 months), and Dai Lu (3 years)—who were sentenced for “subversion of state power” for forming the “China Democratic Victory Party.””], Weiquanwang, February 1, 2025, <https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2025/02/12876536.html?spref=tw>; “Prisoner Updates 2025 #2,” Dui Hua, 2025, <https://duihua.org/prisoner-updates-2025-2/>.
- 7“Measures on the Management of the National Online Identity Authentication Public Service,” China Law Translate, May 23, 2025, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/online-id-2/>.
- 8“China: New Internet ID System a threat to online expression,” Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, June 25, 2025, <https://www.nchrd.org/2025/07/china-introduces-national-cyber-id-amid-p...>; “China’s Draft Internet ID Measure Threatens to Tighten Online Censorship,” The Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders and

