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KEY FINDINGS

In 2022, religious freedom conditions in China further deteriorated. The government continued to vigorously implement its “[sinicization of religion](#)” policy and demand that religious groups support the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rule and ideology. The CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD), the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), and state-controlled religious organizations are integral in [implementing](#) this coercive policy. Although China officially recognizes Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism, groups with perceived foreign connections—such as Uyghurs and other Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, underground Catholics, and house church Protestants—are especially vulnerable to persecution. [The Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services](#) took effect in March, banning religious content on the internet and further [constricting](#) the narrow space for religious groups. The Chinese government and state-owned entities such as Hikvision—accused of complicity in abuses in the Uyghur region, known as Xinjiang—[hired](#) former U.S. officials and former members of Congress to [lobby](#) on their behalf, undermining religious freedom and related human rights in China.

During the year, Chinese authorities [continued](#) their repressive [sinicization of Islam and forced assimilation](#) policy in Xinjiang that attempts to eradicate Uyghurs’ and other Turkic Muslims’ distinct ethnoreligious identities. In May, a [report](#) based on leaked internal [police files](#) from two Xinjiang counties confirmed the existence and brutality of concentration camps where Uyghurs have been detained. The report [held](#) high-level CCP and government officials, including CCP leader Xi Jinping, responsible. New reports noted a policy [shift](#) from detaining Uyghurs in camps to sending them to prisons. [Forced labor](#), [political indoctrination](#), mass surveillance, an intrusive homestay program that embeds officials in Uyghur households, and [forced interfaith marriages](#) also continued.

Government control and suppression of Tibetan Buddhism intensified. Authorities [restricted](#) Tibetans’ access to religious sites, [banned](#) religious gatherings, [destroyed](#) sites and symbols of religious significance, and [subjected](#) Tibetan monks and nuns to

[political indoctrination](#), including at “[reeducation centers](#).” Authorities reportedly tortured Tibetan monks in prison, including [Rinchen Tsultrim](#) and [Sherab Gyatso](#), who suffer from poor health, and they [detained](#) Tibetans for religious activities [honoring](#) the Dalai Lama or [possessing](#) his portraits. The Chinese government repeatedly [stated](#) its intent to interfere in the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation, claiming it has the ultimate authority to appoint his successor. In 2022, at least three Tibetans [self-immolated](#), protesting the government’s policies in Tibet. Moreover, authorities reportedly [conducted](#) mass DNA collection in Tibet, likely to strengthen surveillance and control there.

Despite [renewal](#) in October of the Vatican-China agreement on bishop appointments, in December the Vatican [protested](#) the government’s installation of a bishop without its approval. Across China, authorities [detained](#) or otherwise [forcibly disappeared](#) Catholic [priests and bishops](#)—including Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu and Bishop Augustine Cui Tai—who refused to join the state-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

Persecution of Protestant house church Christians also intensified in 2022. The government carried out a [nationwide crackdown](#) on house churches by harassing, [detaining](#), [physically abusing](#), and [sentencing](#) Protestants who [refused](#) to join the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Authorities targeted Reformed house church Christians, including Elder [Zhang Chunlei](#) of Ren’ai Reformed Church and Pastor [An Yankui](#) of Taiyuan Zion Reformed Church. Reports also emerged of harsh persecution of ethnic minority Protestants, such as [Lisu and Nu](#) Protestants in Yunnan Province and [Kyrgyz](#) Protestants in Xinjiang reeducation camps.

The government continued its persecution of Falun Gong and the Church of Almighty God (CAG), often using “anti-cult” provisions under [Article 300](#) of China’s Criminal Law. In 2022, Falun Gong sources documented [7,331](#) cases of harassment and arrest, [633](#) prison sentences, and [172](#) deaths because of persecution. Reports also [documented](#) detention, imprisonment, and [torture](#) of CAG members, some of whom reportedly [died](#) due to abuses.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Redesignate China as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
 - Adopt a whole-of-government approach by elevating and integrating religious freedom as a key strategic objective in U.S. foreign policy toward China and by raising religious freedom concerns in all bilateral dialogues and engagement;
 - Continue imposing sanctions to target Chinese officials and entities responsible for severe religious freedom violations, especially within the CCP’s UFWD, SARA, and the public security and state security apparatus; and
 - Work with like-minded countries in international fora, including the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), to collectively hold the Chinese government accountable for severe religious freedom violations, including by creating a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate and identify perpetrators of ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and document other severe human rights abuses throughout China.
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Support legislation to counter the CCP’s malign influence in the United States, particularly its lobbying efforts that undermine religious freedom and related human rights.

Background

China is officially an [atheist state](#). Of its [estimated](#) 1.4 billion people, approximately 18 percent are Buddhist, including Tibetan Buddhists; five percent are Christian; and two percent are Muslim. Other significant religious traditions include Taoism, Falun Gong, and folk religion practices.

The CCP has long repressed religious freedom and in recent years has become increasingly hostile toward religion, implementing campaigns to “sinicize” Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, and Christianity to remove alleged “foreign influences.” These policies require religious groups to support the CCP, including by altering their religious teachings to conform to CCP ideology and policy. Both registered and unregistered religious groups that run afoul of the CCP face harassment, detention, arrest, imprisonment, and other abuses.

Accountability for International Crimes against Uyghurs

In August, the UNHRC’s [special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, concluded](#) that forced labor of Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang “may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity.” That same month, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet [found](#) that human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including arbitrary and discriminatory detention of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim groups, “may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.” In October, the UNHRC [rejected](#) a motion led by Western member states to hold a debate on China’s human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. UNHRC member states voting against the motion [included](#) Muslim-majority countries, such as Qatar, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan.

In June, the European Parliament adopted a resolution [condemning](#) China’s oppression of Uyghurs, including “mass deportation, political indoctrination, family separation, restrictions on religious freedom, cultural destruction and the extensive use of surveillance.” The resolution further stated that the “birth prevention measures and the separation of Uyghur children from their families amount to crimes against humanity and represent a serious risk of genocide.” In a December [resolution](#), the European Parliament reiterated its recognition of China’s abuses against Uyghurs as constituting crimes against humanity and representing a serious risk of genocide. The Parliament urged European Union (EU) member states to “consider prosecuting Chinese officials deemed responsible for crimes against humanity, on the basis of the principle of universal jurisdiction” and called for “additional EU sanctions targeting Chinese officials and entities responsible for crimes against humanity.”

Religious Freedom in Hong Kong

In May, Hong Kong authorities [arrested](#) 90-year-old [Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun](#), bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, accusing him of “colluding with foreign forces” under Hong Kong’s National Security

Law (NSL). Despite his release on bail, his situation remained precarious. Democracy activist and religious freedom advocate Jimmy Lai, another high-profile Catholic figure, [pled](#) not guilty to NSL charges in August and court authorities [postponed](#) his trial in December. He is currently serving prison terms on other charges related to his political activism. If convicted, both Zen and Lai could [face](#) the maximum penalty of life imprisonment. In the U.S. Department of State’s March 2022 *Hong Kong Policy Act Report*, religious groups [stated](#) concern about the Chinese government’s potential “targeting of civil society organizations or individuals affiliated with religious groups that were active in the 2019 pro-democracy movement.”

Key U.S. Policy

In March, the State Department [announced](#) visa sanctions on Chinese officials deemed responsible for or complicit in human rights abuses in China and abroad that targeted religious and spiritual practitioners and members of ethnic minority groups, including transnational repression to silence Uyghur American activists. That same month, the U.S. Department of Justice arrested and [charged](#) Wang Shujun for engaging in transnational repression activities on behalf of China’s Ministry of State Security (MSS). Wang’s victims included Uyghur and Tibetan activists in the United States and abroad. In May, the Justice Department [indicted](#) Wang and four MSS agents on espionage and transnational repression charges.

On November 30, the State Department [redesignated](#) China as a CPC under IRFA and reimposed existing restrictions on exports of crime control or detection instruments or equipment to China. In December, the U.S. Department of the Treasury [imposed](#) financial sanctions on Wu Yingjie, party secretary of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and Zhang Hongbo, TAR Public Security Bureau director, for human rights abuses in Tibet, pursuant to [Executive Order 13818](#). In addition, the State Department [imposed](#) visa sanctions on Zhang and Tang Yong, former deputy director of Chongqing city, for human rights and religious freedom violations in Tibet and against Falun Gong practitioners, respectively.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) [took effect](#) in June, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection began [implementing](#) it by prohibiting imports from Xinjiang. In August, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [published](#) its initial consolidated UFLPA Entity List, subjecting named Chinese entities to “rebuttable presumptions” in accordance with the UFLPA. In December, the U.S. Department of Commerce [added](#) Tianjin Tiandi Weiye Technologies to its Entity List for complicity in human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang.

In December, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Uyghur Policy Act of 2021 ([H.R.4785](#)) to address human rights issues in Xinjiang. Members of Congress introduced bills in 2022 to counter foreign lobbying on behalf of countries like China, including the PAID OFF Act of 2022 ([S.4901](#)), the SHAME Act ([H.R.9140](#)), and the Disclosing Foreign Influence in Lobbying Act ([S.4254](#)).

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Factsheet:** [State-Controlled Religion and Religious Freedom Violations in China](#)
- **Hearing:** [China’s Religious Freedom Violations: Domestic Repression and Malign Influence Abroad](#)
- **Podcast:** [The Plight of Christians in China](#)

**Additional view statement on China by
Commissioners Abraham Cooper, David Curry,
Frederick A. Davie, Sharon Kleinbaum, Mohamed
Magid, Stephen Schneck, Nury Turkel, Eric Ueland,
and Frank Wolf**

At the height of Cold War hostilities in 1980, it would have been unthinkable for any reputable firm to take on the Soviet Union as a client.

And yet today, untold profits are being raked in by lobbyists willing to whitewash the record and aims of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government.

It's time to make this activity illegal.

As the Commission's report documents, the Chinese Government is an equal opportunity persecutor of people of faith—Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims, and Falun Gong practitioners.

In Xinjiang, the CCP is committing genocide, operating a network of mass internment camps and prisons and systematically separating Uyghur children from their parents.

Any notion of Hong Kong's autonomy is fantasy. A once vibrant, open society has been transformed with shocking speed. The ruthless crackdown on dissent found 90-year-old Catholic Cardinal Zen in its crosshairs.

In every corner of the globe the Chinese government actively works to subvert U.S. interests.

FBI Director Christopher Wray said, "the counterintelligence and economic espionage efforts emanating from the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are a grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States."

The Chinese government oversees the most advanced surveillance state in human history and actively exports these technologies to other repressive regimes worldwide.

As USCIRF recommends in this report, we urge the Biden Administration and Congress to ban lobbying groups and law firms from representing the Chinese government and its interests.

