

Ten Findings from Ten Years of Data on Transnational Repression

Transnational repression threatens security and human rights. The more we know about who is committing it and how, the better we can fight to end it.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin meet in Moscow in 2022. Their governments are top perpetrators of transnational repression, according to new Freedom House research. (Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Transnational repression—the tactics used by governments to stifle dissent among political exiles in other countries—is a global threat to national sovereignty, security, and human rights. Freedom House released the first global survey on the topic in 2021, covering incidents that took place between 2014 and 2020. Today we’re announcing the latest [update](#): our data now covers a full decade and includes 1,219 incidents perpetrated by 48 governments in 103 countries around the world. Here are 10 key findings from 10 years of collecting and analyzing data on transnational repression.

- 1. Ten repressive regimes commit the majority of the world’s transnational repression abuses.** A quarter of the world’s governments (48 states) are using tactics of transnational repression, but 10 are responsible for nearly 80 percent of all physical, direct incidents recorded by Freedom House between 2014 and 2024. The Chinese government remains the most prolific perpetrator, committing 272 incidents, or 22 percent, of recorded cases. The governments of Russia, Turkey, and Egypt are also leading offenders. Authorities in Tajikistan and Cambodia have received less attention despite being major perpetrators of transnational repression against targets in Europe and Asia.
- 2. The worst perpetrators target groups, not just individuals.** Mass events involving the simultaneous targeting of three or more people contributed significantly to cases recorded in 2024, as well as the overall number of incidents linked to top origin countries. The Cambodian government vaulted into the top 10 perpetrators list, partly due to its mass targeting of Cambodian nationals in Australia and Thailand in 2023 and 2024. In July 2024, the Ugandan government carried out a rendition of 36 Ugandan activists attending a leadership training in Kenya. The Chinese regime has pursued groups of Uyghurs in Egypt, Malaysia, and Thailand.
- 3. Cooperation between governments enables transnational repression.** Authorities in countries where dissidents have resettled—both democracies and autocracies—have collaborated with perpetrator states to facilitate 780 incidents since 2014. Host governments have acted on politically motivated Interpol notices, granted questionable extradition requests, and

allowed perpetrators to kidnap and remove individuals from their territories. Cooperation between like-minded autocrats is particularly dangerous for exiled dissidents. Belarusian and Central Asian authorities have relied on their deep-rooted ties with the Russian government to drive their transnational repression campaigns. Additionally, bilateral and multilateral agreements between autocracies have resulted in the detention of dozens of activists in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia since 2014.

4. **Detention is the most common tactic.** The most frequent incident type of transnational repression is detention, accounting for 503 instances in our database. Unlawful deportations occurred 241 times. When perpetrator governments manipulate host-country officials to apprehend and return targeted individuals, the rule of law in host states—including democracies—is degraded.
5. **Perpetrator governments weaponize terrorism allegations.** Authoritarian governments prey on the fears of terrorism in host states to legitimize their cross-border intimidation campaigns. Over 46 percent of cases since 2014 involve a targeted individual accused of terrorism or extremism. Perpetrators often base terrorism claims on religious grounds and against members of separatist movements—including, for example, against Sikh, Kurdish, and Biafran leaders.
6. **Muslims have faced the brunt of transnational repression.** In 64 percent of incidents, the targeted individuals are of Muslim origin. This figure reflects not only the prevalence of Muslim-majority origin countries such as Egypt, Iran, Tajikistan, and Turkey in our dataset, but also the ongoing indiscriminate targeting of Uyghurs, the majority of who are Muslims, by the Chinese government. Muslim individuals comprise the majority—75 percent—of individuals targeted in European and Eurasian host countries.
7. **Transnational repression directly interferes with fundamental freedoms.** All people have the right to free speech, assembly, and association regardless of their immigration status. However, homeland governments seek to prevent targets of transnational repression from exercising these fundamental rights in other countries. In 2024, Thai law enforcement, at the apparent behest of the Cambodian authorities, detained five Cambodian activists who were planning a protest of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet's first visit to Thailand in February. A group of 10 Turkmenistani activists was similarly detained by Turkish authorities during a protest outside of the Turkmenistani Consulate in Istanbul in 2021.
8. **Transnational repression makes international travel risky.** Security checkpoints and passport control at airports, train stations, and other border crossings are all opportunities for transnational repression: we have recorded 369 incidents where an individual was targeted while in transit. Over half involved people seeking asylum. Kenya, Malaysia, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates stand out as hot spots for these incidents. The tactics used against individuals in transit are not limited to detentions, deportations, and renditions—they include assaults and assassinations.
9. **Journalists are prime targets.** Perpetrator governments regularly reach beyond their borders to intimidate journalists and suppress truthful reporting. Since 2014, 26 governments have carried out 124 incidents of transnational repression

against exiled journalists. Authoritarian leaders view independent media and whistleblowers, both at home and abroad, as activists who threaten their power.

10. **Democracies are responding to transnational repression.** Since Freedom House released its first [transnational repression](#) report in 2021, democracies have steadily bolstered policy responses to it. The United States has adopted a “whole-of-government” approach, mobilizing the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Departments of Justice, State, and Homeland Security to prosecute transnational repression, sanction perpetrators, and assist diaspora communities. The United Kingdom and Canada have adopted new legislation to combat the practice. The UN Human Rights Council and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) have taken up the issue of protecting exiled dissidents. And looking ahead, the G7 will focus on transnational repression as a central issue to address through multilateral action in 2025.

