

Freedom in the World 2026 - Tibet

Note

Freedom in the World reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Related, disputed, or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including distinct conditions for political rights and civil liberties and boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report [methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

Overview

Tibet is ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government based in Beijing, with local decision-making power concentrated in the hands of Chinese party officials. Residents of both Han Chinese and Tibetan ethnicity are denied fundamental rights, but the authorities are especially rigorous in suppressing any signs of dissent among Tibetans, including manifestations of Tibetan religious beliefs and cultural identity. State policies, such as incentives for non-Tibetan people to migrate from other parts of China and the compulsory relocation of ethnic Tibetans, have reduced the ethnic Tibetan share of the population over time.

Key Developments in 2025

- In September, the Chinese government introduced a draft Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, which, if adopted, would intensify forced assimilation practices and enable further repression of minority cultures and languages. The proposed law remained under consideration as of December.
- Chinese authorities persisted in trying to assert government control over Tibetan religious practices during the year, including by claiming to have the exclusive authority to identify the Dalai Lama's successor. The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism who has lived in exile since 1959 and is widely revered by Tibetans, rejected this assertion, saying in July that only credentialed religious leaders overseen by his private trust would have the authority to identify his successor.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

The Chinese government rules Tibet through administration of the Tibet Autonomous Region (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 authority is concentrated in the hands of unelected ethnic Han Chinese officials of the CCP, which has a monopoly on political power. Wang Junzheng, former deputy party secretary and chief security officer in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), was appointed as TAR party secretary in 2021.

The few Tibetans who occupy senior executive positions serve mostly as figureheads. In January 2025, Chinese state media announced that Karma Tseten had been chosen as the new chairman (governor) of the TAR. The TAR chairman is formally elected by the regional people's congress, but in practice such decisions are predetermined by the CCP leadership.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? | 0 / 4

The regional people's congress of the TAR, which is formally elected by lower-level people's congresses, chooses delegates to China's 3,000-member National People's Congress (NPC) every five years. In practice, all candidates are vetted by the CCP. The current TAR people's congress held its first session in January 2023, and the current NPC was seated that March.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? | 0 / 4

As in the rest of China, direct elections are only permitted at the lowest administrative levels. Tight political controls and aggressive state interference ensure that competitive races with independent candidates are even rarer in Tibet than in other parts of the country. Restrictions for village elections exclude candidates who have attended religious teachings abroad, have communicated with overseas Tibetans, or have relatives studying at monasteries outside China.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? | 0 / 4

All organized political activity outside the CCP is illegal and harshly punished, as is any evidence of loyalty to or communication with the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)—a representative body based in Dharamsala, India, that functions as a government-in-exile.

The CTA includes an elected parliament whose members serve five-year terms; there is also a Supreme Justice Commission that adjudicates civil disputes and a directly elected political leader, also serving five-year terms. Votes are collected from the global Tibetan diaspora. The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader who also traditionally served as head of state, renounced his political role in 2011. In 2021, Penpa Tsering was elected as political leader of the CTA.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? | 0 / 4

As in China as a whole, the one-party system structurally precludes and rigorously suppresses the development of any organized political opposition. There has never been a peaceful and democratic transfer of power between rival groups in Tibet.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

0 / 4

The authoritarian CCP is not accountable to voters and denies the public any meaningful influence or independent participation in political affairs.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

0 / 4

Political opportunities for ethnic Tibetans within Tibet remain limited. Ethnic Chinese officials dominate top-level and strategic positions in the CCP and government, while ethnic Tibetans are restricted to lower-level and rubber-stamp positions. The authorities vigorously suppress and harshly punish any independent political or civic engagement by Tibetans, even on local community issues.

Women are well represented in many public-sector jobs and CCP posts within the TAR, though most high-level officials are men. Women and demographic minorities like the LGBT+ or monastic communities are unable to organize independently to advance their political interests.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

As elsewhere in China, unelected CCP officials determine and implement government policies in Tibet. Constitutionally, the TAR, like other ethnic minority regions, should enjoy greater autonomy than Chinese provinces, but in practice it is controlled even more tightly by the central government. CCP entities—like the United Front Work Department—are explicitly in charge of policy areas including religious affairs and ethnic minorities, which are especially relevant for Tibet.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? | **1 / 4**

Corruption is believed to be extensive, as in the rest of China, though little information is available on the scale of the problem. There have been moves in recent years to curb graft among the region's officials as part of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's nationwide anticorruption campaign. However, many prosecutions are believed to be politically selective or reprisals for perceived political and religious disloyalty. Efforts to control corruption are monopolized by the CCP leadership; as elsewhere in China, citizens who seek to expose official misdeeds in Tibet have faced detention and prosecution.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? | **0 / 4**

Governance is opaque in all of China but even more so in Tibet, where the CCP's policies and decision-making processes are rarely if ever exposed to public scrutiny.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

-3

In recent years, the Chinese government has accelerated policies that decrease the proportion of Tibetans in the TAR and undermine their cultural and religious identity—part of a renewed, nationwide campaign to “Sinicize” religious and ethnic minority populations. The Chinese government has reportedly placed up to a million Tibetan children, ranging in age from four to eighteen, in residential boarding institutions across the Tibetan plateau. Reports by the civil society group Tibet Action Institute and testimonies from the region indicate that a growing number of Tibetan children are losing the ability to converse in Tibetan and becoming estranged from their families and communities. According to a Tibet Action Institute report published in January 2025, children in residential boarding institutions are also “highly vulnerable” to neglect and abuse.

In September 2025, the Chinese government submitted its draft Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress to the NPC. The proposed legislation would remove the constitutionally guaranteed minority rights promised in the 1984 Law on Regional National Autonomy, including the right to use minority languages, and directs the Chinese government to “firmly establish correct views of the state, of history, of the nation, of culture and of religion” among people of all ethnic groups. Rights advocates have expressed concern that, if adopted, the legislation would lead to increased repression of minority groups. The draft law remained under consideration as of December 2025.

Chinese authorities have imposed mass relocation policies in Tibet, using coercive tactics to evict ethnic Tibetans from their homes. According to a 2024 report by Human Rights Watch, between 2016 and 2024, the Chinese government relocated or initiated the relocation process for 500 villages, displacing an estimated 140,000 Tibetans. Similarly, the government’s Farmer and Pastoralist Training and Labor Transfer Action Plan has forced tens of thousands of Tibetan farmers and nomads to surrender their land-use rights to state-run collectives, become wage laborers, and move to urban areas where they are crowded into large apartment blocks and prevented from pursuing traditional ways of life. Parallel government policies encourage ethnic Chinese migration to the TAR; such migrants typically do not change their household registration, meaning their numbers are not reflected in official statistics. “Ethnic unity” regulations promote intermarriage between Han Chinese and Tibetans through financial incentives, further eroding Tibetans’ distinct cultural and religious identity.

Tibetan has been phased out as a language of instruction in schools over the past decade, and the government has begun forcing Tibetan parents, many of whom are Tibetan-speaking nomads and farmers, to learn Mandarin. Chinese authorities have incarcerated scores of Tibetan cultural, religious, and intellectual figures, including monks, writers, musicians, and prominent scholars. The exact number of people imprisoned is unknown due to Beijing’s tight control of information in the region.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 0 / 4

CCP authorities control news media in Tibet even more strictly than in other areas of the country. Individuals who use the internet, social media, or other means to share politically sensitive news or commentary face

arrest and heavy criminal penalties. Dozens of Tibetans have been arrested for phone- and internet-related offenses in recent years, such as sending photos to people outside of the TAR and keeping “banned content”—like references to Tibetan religious practices—on their devices. Use of the Tibetan language is banned on a range of social media applications, particularly those that feature streaming and live communication services.

The TAR is the only provincial-level region of China that requires foreigners to obtain a special permit to enter, and foreign journalists are regularly prevented from visiting. In practice, journalists also face barriers in access to Tibetan areas of Sichuan and other provinces, though no permission is officially required to travel to those places. Tibetans who communicate with foreign media or other foreign contacts without permission face criminal prosecution and long prison sentences. Sharing local information online can also lead to punishment.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? | 0 / 4

Religious practice is carefully managed and restricted in Tibet. Chinese authorities view Tibetan reverence for the Dalai Lama and adherence to the region’s unique form of Buddhism as a threat to CCP rule. In recent years, the Chinese government has asserted that only the CCP has the power to choose the next Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama has rejected this claim, saying only a trust that he created will have the authority to identify the next Dalai Lama, who, according to Tibetan Buddhist beliefs, will be a reincarnation of the current leader. Tibetan Buddhist clergy and lay believers are forced to denounce the Dalai Lama, pledge their loyalty to the CCP and socialism above their religious beliefs, and attend political reeducation sessions. People who possess Dalai Lama–related materials, especially in the TAR, are routinely detained and at times criminally prosecuted.

In 2024, Chinese authorities arbitrarily forced Tibetan residents of four villages in Sichuan to remove and destroy religious objects from their homes.

In April 2025, a monastery affiliated with highly respected Tibetan Buddhist leader Tulku Hungkar Dorje announced that he had died in custody in Vietnam the previous month. Hungkar Dorje had reportedly gone missing eight months prior to his death after publicly promoting Tibetan language and culture. International rights groups and members of the Tibetan diaspora called for an independent investigation into his disappearance and death; in August, a group of UN experts sent communications to the governments of China and Vietnam, expressing concern and requesting additional information about the case. The circumstances of Hungkar Dorje’s arrest and death remained unclear at year’s end.

“Management committees,” made up of CCP cadres and the police, exercise broad authority to directly control the daily operations of religious communities. “Intelligent temple management” systems operate in nearly all religious institutions, including pervasive video surveillance in all temples and monasteries. Anyone under the age of 18 is prohibited from joining a monastic community, and religious education for children is prohibited.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

| 0 / 4

University professors and schoolteachers cannot address certain topics, and many must attend political indoctrination sessions. The government restricts course materials to suppress unofficial versions of Tibetan history and has phased out the use of Tibetan as the language of instruction in schools. Private and monastery schools have been shut down in recent years in an effort to force students into government-run schools—many of them boarding schools—where Mandarin is the only language of instruction.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

0 / 4

Freedom of expression, including in private, is severely limited by factors including authorities' monitoring of electronic communications, a heavy security presence, recruitment of informants, regular ideological campaigns in Tibetan areas, and harsh punishments for those who post social media content on sensitive subjects. The authorities in Tibet make use of an invasive security and censorship system featuring nearly ubiquitous video cameras, facial-recognition technology, "smart" identity cards, and integrated surveillance systems that allow tracking of residents and tourists in real time. Hundreds of "security centers" operate across the region, with more than 130 in Lhasa alone. Tibetans are regularly detained or imprisoned for expressing support for Tibetan independence, sharing images of the Dalai Lama, sending politically sensitive information abroad, or engaging in other forms of cultural expression.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? | **0 / 4**

Chinese authorities severely restrict freedom of assembly as part of the government's intensified "stability maintenance" policies in Tibet. Control and surveillance of public gatherings extend beyond major towns to villages and rural areas. Even nonviolent protesters are rapidly and often violently dispersed and harshly punished. Despite the restrictions, Tibetans continue to express their views on government policies through sporadic solitary or small-scale protests in public places, though they are usually arrested immediately by police.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

0 / 4

Tibetans are unable to establish and operate nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) without facing punishment by the authorities. Even seemingly apolitical social and community engagement is not tolerated. Many Tibetans working for environmental protection or Tibetan language preservation, for example, have been imprisoned. Foreign NGOs are generally not allowed to operate in Tibet.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | **0 / 4**

Independent trade unions are illegal in Tibet, as in China as a whole. The only legal union organization is the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions, which has long been criticized for failing to properly defend workers' rights. Labor activism in Tibet is riskier and much rarer than in other parts of China.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | **0 / 4**

The CCP controls the judicial system, and courts consequently lack independence. Courts at all levels are supervised by party political-legal committees that influence the appointment of judges, court operations, and

verdicts and sentences. Given the political sensitivity of Tibetan issues, the scope for autonomous judicial decision-making in Tibetan areas is even more limited than elsewhere in China.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 0 / 4

Tibetans are systematically denied due process in criminal matters. Among other abuses, they are subjected to arbitrary arrest, denial of family visits, long periods of enforced disappearance, solitary confinement, and illegal pretrial detention. Authorities often fail to inform families of the detention, whereabouts, and well-being of loved ones and threaten them with punishment for revealing information. Tibetans have even less access to legal representation of their choice than Han Chinese; lawyers seeking to defend them are routinely harassed, denied access to their clients, blocked from attending relevant hearings, and in some cases such attorneys have been disbarred in retaliation for their efforts. Trials are closed if state security interests are invoked, which sometimes occurs even when no political crime is listed. Hundreds of political or religious prisoners are believed to be detained in the TAR or adjacent Tibetan areas.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0 / 4

Detained suspects and prisoners are subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Many Tibetan prisoners of conscience die in custody under circumstances indicating torture, and others are released with severe injuries and in extremely poor health, apparently to avoid deaths in custody. Many of the latter subsequently succumb to their injuries.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0 / 4

Ethnic Tibetans face a range of socioeconomic disadvantages and discriminatory treatment by employers, law enforcement agencies, and other official bodies. The dominant role of the Chinese language in education and employment limits opportunities for rural Tibetans, 80 percent of whom have no or limited Mandarin language skills. Increased Mandarin language testing for employment has disadvantaged ethnic Tibetans seeking more lucrative positions. While Tibetans are supposed to receive preferential treatment in university admission examinations, Tibetan students often face insurmountable obstacles when seeking admission to top-tier national-level secondary schools. Tibetans who apply for public-sector jobs are required to denounce the Dalai Lama, renounce their religious beliefs, and demonstrate their political loyalty in ways that fundamentally negate their ethnic and cultural identity.

Provisions included in the draft ethnic unity law proposed by the Chinese government in September 2025 have prompted concern among human rights defenders and Tibetan rights advocates. If adopted, the law would remove certain constitutionally guaranteed minority rights in the name of "ethnic unity," which rights activists say would escalate the government's repression of minority ethnic groups and possibly accelerate existing forced assimilation policies.

As in the rest of China, bias against women remains widespread, despite laws barring workplace discrimination. LGBT+ people also suffer from discrimination, though same-sex sexual activity is not criminalized. Social pressures discourage discussion of LGBT+ issues.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

0 / 4

The TAR features extreme restrictions on freedom of movement that disproportionately affect ethnic Tibetans. Obstacles including troop deployments, checkpoints, roadblocks, required bureaucratic approvals, and passport restrictions impede freedom of movement both within Tibetan areas—especially the TAR—and between those areas and the outside world. More than 2,000 “inspectors” staff about 700 “discipline committees” that have been set up in recent years in rural Tibetan communities, and these too have tightened travel restrictions, with Tibetans needing permits to enter certain areas, particularly near international borders in the south.

While Han Chinese tourists can travel to Tibet, the movements of foreign tourists, journalists, diplomats, and others are tightly controlled, and they are often denied entry. Tibetans face nearly insurmountable hurdles in acquiring a passport for foreign travel, and the authorities have been known to arbitrarily confiscate valid passports from those who have been able to obtain them. Foreign nationals of Tibetan origin face enormous challenges when seeking a visa to visit Tibet, often waiting for years only for their request to be denied.

Increased China-Nepal cooperation and heightened security along the countries’ shared border has made it difficult for Tibetans to cross into Nepal. Some Tibetan pilgrims who travel abroad face detention upon return to China.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

1 / 4

The economy is dominated by state-owned enterprises and private businesses with informal ties to officials. Tibetans reportedly find it harder than Chinese residents to obtain permits and loans to open businesses, and Tibetan-owned businesses are often arbitrarily shut down.

The multiyear policy of forcing Tibetans off their rural land and into the urban wage economy has given the state additional leverage over a growing proportion of the population, as those affected become increasingly dependent on market wages and government subsidies for their livelihood.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

0 / 4

State policies that actively encourage interethnic marriages with financial and other incentives, and that require couples to designate a single ethnicity for their children, are among the ongoing policies that have reduced the ethnic Tibetan share of the TAR’s population. Tibetan women are vulnerable to human trafficking schemes that result in forced marriage.

In recent years, the Chinese government has imposed policies of mandatory boarding for Tibetan students. Increasingly young children are coerced into a system of politicized educational indoctrination that displaces the children’s native language, culture, and religion. Authorities regularly use fines and the threat of arrest or denial of services to coerce parents into sending their children to the government boarding schools. In many cases, children as young as four are forced to spend five days a week at boarding school, away from their families, where they learn in an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural setting. This state-driven linguistic dispossession creates a language barrier between many children and their parents and grandparents, harming Tibetan family life and cultural foundations.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? | 1 / 4

Exploitative employment practices are pervasive in many industries, as is the case across China, though ethnic Tibetans report additional disadvantages in hiring and compensation. Human trafficking that targets Tibetan women can lead to forced prostitution or exploitative employment in domestic service and other economic sectors elsewhere in China. The herders, farmers, and other Tibetans who are forced off their rural land and resettled in towns and cities are extremely vulnerable to exploitation by public and private employers alike.

