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China (2006)

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

7

Civil Liberties:

6

Status:

Not Free

Population:

1,303,700,000

GNI/Capita:

\$1,100

Life Expectancy:

72

Religious Groups:

Daoist (Taoist),
Buddhist, Muslim
(1-2 percent),
Christian (3-4
percent)

Ethnic Groups:

Han, Chinese (92
percent), other
(Tibetan, Mongol,
Korean, Manchu,
and Uyghur)(8
percent)

Capital:

Beijing

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the
World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the
Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit
2004](#)

[Countries at the
Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

The Chinese leadership, guided by President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, continued in 2005 to reshape China's rapidly growing economy from a command economy to a market-oriented one. At the same time, the year was marked by ongoing governmental control and repression of political dissent. Of particular note was the regime's gradual tightening of control of the media and imprisonment of journalists who did not comply with the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) political priorities for news content.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in mainland China in 1949 under Mao Zedong after its defeat of the Kuomintang (or Nationalists) in the Chinese Civil War. Aiming to strengthen his position of leadership and hasten China's socialist transformation, Mao led devastating mass-mobilization campaigns, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), that resulted in millions of deaths and politicized nearly every aspect of daily life. Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping emerged as China's paramount leader. Over the next two decades, Deng maintained the CCP's absolute rule in the political sphere, while guiding China's transition from a largely agrarian economy to a rapidly urbanizing, export-driven market economy.

Deng and other party leaders signaled their intent to maintain political stability at all costs with the 1989 massacre of student protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Following the crackdown, the party tapped Jiang Zemin, Shanghai's party secretary, to replace the relatively moderate Zhao Ziyang as party secretary-general. Jiang became state

president in 1993 and was widely recognized as China's top leader following Deng's death in 1997.

Jiang continued the Dengist policies of privatizing state firms, encouraging private enterprise, and scaling back China's social welfare system. China's leaders saw economic growth as essential to boosting living standards and improving regime legitimacy. However, concerned that too much market liberalization would create social inequalities and overheat the economy, in the 1990s the party leadership centralized control over the state tax system, the People's Bank of China, and stock markets to strengthen macroeconomic steering capacity.

At the CCP's sixteenth party congress in November 2002, Hu Jintao was named to replace Jiang as party general secretary. He was widely recognized as China's supreme leader after Jiang stood down as army chief in September 2004. Wen Jiabao took over Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's day-to-day management of the economy in March 2003. The new government pledged to improve conditions for rural Chinese- who have been left behind by rapid economic growth in urban areas-to carry out reform of the welfare system, and to reduce corruption.

The growing economic inequality between the coastal regions and the interior, rife unemployment among former state employees, and land disputes related to industrial development in rural China have led to political instability. Private firms have replaced government-owned enterprises as the dominant force in the economy. A massive migrant class of as many as 160 million workers has emerged; rural residents have left their homes in search of employment in populous cities. Although recent reforms have aided these migrants in taking advantage of China's economic rise, their shaky legal status exposes them to exploitation by employers and places them at a disadvantage in receiving health care and social services. Measures are under consideration to abolish the legal distinction between urban and rural residents in some areas.

The Chinese government continued to restrict political rights and repress critics of the regime in 2005. Restrictions on communication became more severe as the government strengthened regulations governing internet content in September and cracked down on the efforts of Chinese and foreign journalists to report on mass protests. The utility of village elections for reducing local corruption has been compromised by allegations of violence initiated by local party leaders, including attacks on foreign journalists attempting to cover news stories, such as that of the recall of a village head in Taishi, Guangdong Province, in October.

China has actively attempted to expand its influence among neighboring states. In November 2004, China signed a landmark agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); the agreement is intended to provide the basis for a free-trade zone for 25 percent of the world's population. In August 2005, joint military exercises were held with Russia. In September, China proved instrumental in securing an agreement from North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program and rejoin the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. China's relationship with Japan deteriorated considerably as anti-Japanese protests broke out in Chinese cities in April 2005, sparked by the publication of a Japanese middle school textbook seen as glossing over Japan's World War II atrocities.

In a concession to pressure from the World Trade Organization and the United States, China devalued the renminbi by 2 percent in July 2005 and announced the renminbi would float against a basket of currencies rather than remain pegged to the U.S. dollar.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of China cannot change their government democratically. The People's Republic of China is a post-totalitarian regime. Although economic activity is increasingly independent of state control, Chinese citizens cannot democratically change top leaders or publicly express opposition to governmental policy. As stipulated in the Chinese constitution, the CCP possesses a monopoly on political power. Party members hold almost all top national and local governmental, internal security, and military posts. A 3,000-member National People's Congress is, in principle, the Chinese parliament empowered to elect government officials. In practice, it does little more than approve decisions made by the CCP Politburo and its nine-person standing committee. Opposition groups, such as the China Democracy Party, are actively suppressed. The only competitive elections are village elections and elections for urban residency councils. However, these elections are largely dominated by the CCP.

The Chinese state closely monitors political activity and uses vaguely worded, national security regulations to justify detainment or imprisonment of those who are politically active without party approval. Groups considered to pose a threat to the regime, such as the Falungong, are suppressed and persecuted.

Political corruption is a severe problem in China in spite of a much publicized crackdown on official malfeasance. Embezzlement and bribery are rampant, and personal connections between party members and state institutions allow some officials to be virtually above the law. China was ranked 78 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is severely limited in China. All media are owned by state or party institutions and barred from criticizing senior CCP leaders, government policy, and state ideology. Sensitive topics, such as ethnic separatism, Taiwanese independence, democratic reform, and the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, are banned. Journalists who do not adhere to party dictates on news content are harassed, detained, or jailed. In March 2005, the new Regulations on the Administration of Book Quality came into effect, requiring publishers to refrain from reprinting books of questionable political correctness and authorizing the government to confiscate banned books that had already been sold. In August, the Central Propaganda Department issued a new order restricting popular access to foreign films and television programs. The government encouraged the media to engage in self-censorship, as stipulated in the Self-Discipline Agreement for Chinese Radio and Television Announcers and Hosts issued in September.

The popularity of the internet has also led to increased government crackdowns and close monitoring of personal communication. China regularly blocks websites it deems politically threatening. Foreign internet companies have largely cooperated with the Chinese government on censorship enforcement. A prominent example of this was the role played by Yahoo! in providing information leading to the conviction of Hunan journalist Shi Tao, for leaking "state secrets." In the spring of 2004, Shi Tao e-mailed a one-page document outlining instructions for the suppression of news reports about the fifteenth anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown to the New York-based website

Democracy Forum. Chinese court documents suggest that Yahoo! provided information that allowed the procuratorate to identify Shi Tao as the sender of the e-mail, which resulted in his conviction to a 10-year prison sentence. In July 2005, government agencies shut down over a quarter of China's 573,755 websites after their operators failed to register at the Ministry of Information Industry (MII). In September, new regulations were issued that increased the ability of the Chinese government to restrict internet news sites, web logs, and cellular phone text messaging, which is also subject to monitoring by the government.

Though constitutionally recognized, religious freedom is accorded little respect in China. Atheism is taught in schools, and all religious groups and organizations are required to register with the government. Members of unauthorized religious groups, such as Falungong, are harassed, detained, and arrested. In areas that have seen ethnic unrest, such as in predominately Muslim Xinjiang Autonomous Region, religious repression is linked to efforts to curb ethnic separatism. In Xinjiang, minors have been forbidden to attend religious services, and pilgrimages and other religious journeys are closely monitored. The government has taken advantage of the global focus on terrorism to crack down on Islamic groups, labeling them religious extremists. New Regulations on Religious Affairs, which took effect in March 2005, may lead to increased restrictions of religious freedom.

Academic freedom is restricted on sensitive political issues. Universities and research institutions must support official CCP ideology, and many scholars practice self-censorship in the interest of personal safety. Academics risk losing their positions if they publicly criticize the party or state policy. Peking University professor of journalism Jiao Guobiao was removed from his post after an essay he wrote criticizing the party's Propaganda Department, which controls all media content, was posted on the internet.

Freedom of assembly is severely restricted in China. Large anti-Japanese protests took place in major urban areas with the tacit approval of the Chinese government, because the government was hesitant to stand against popular nationalist sentiment. In Shanghai, where anti-Japanese protests turned violent, a number of protestors were subsequently arrested to discourage further demonstrations. Nongovernmental organizations are required to register with the government and follow strict regulatory guidelines, with the constitution specifically prohibiting activities that undermine "party leadership" or go against the "interests of the state."

Chinese workers are not allowed to form independent labor unions. The only union permitted is the government-controlled All China Federation of Trade Unions. Independent labor leaders are harassed, detained, and jailed for their efforts. Collective bargaining is legal in all industries but seldom occurs in practice. Despite the fact that workers lack the legal right to strike, there has been a growing wave of strikes over layoffs, dangerous working conditions, unpaid wages, benefits, and unemployment stipends. The reaction of local officials has been mixed, with strike leaders often arrested, while other strikers are given partial concessions.

Although labor laws exist, they are poorly enforced, and employers frequently ignore minimum wage requirements and fail to implement required health and safety measures. Highly publicized mining accidents in Shaanxi Province during November 2004 and Liaoning Province in February 2005 prompted the government to publicize its concerns with improving worker safety.

The party controls the judiciary. The CCP directs verdicts and sentences, particularly in politically sensitive cases. Despite some recent criminal procedure reforms, trials-which are often mere sentence hearings-are frequently closed; few criminal defendants have access to counsel. Officials often subject suspects to "severe psychological pressure" to confess, and coerced confessions are frequently admitted as evidence. Police frequently conduct searches without warrants and at times monitor telephone conversations and other personal communications to use as evidence against suspected dissidents. Many political prisoners and ordinary alleged criminals lack trials altogether, detained instead by bureaucratic fiat in "reeducation through labor" camps. Endemic corruption further exacerbates the lack of due process in the judicial system. Judicial conditions are worst in capital punishment cases; 65 crimes carry the death penalty, and perpetrators may be executed within days of their arrest.

Though in most cases security forces are under direct civilian control, misuse of authority remains frequent, and human rights violations are widespread. There have been cases of extrajudicial and politically motivated murders, torture, beatings, coercion, arbitrary arrest, and detention. Political prisoners may be subjected to prolonged detention without formal prosecution; New York Times researcher Zhao Yan remains in custody by order of the Ministry of State Security since his detention in September 2004 on suspicion of leaking state secrets. Though by law people suspected of committing a crime have the right to seek an attorney, police often prevent or obstruct suspects from doing so. According to the Beijing Youth Daily, only 14.5 percent of criminal suspects in Beijing meet with a lawyer during the first 48 hours of detention, a statistic that is believed to be much lower in rural areas. Lawyers who are overly vocal in expressing the rights of their clients are frequently harassed or arrested.

Although antidiscrimination laws exist, religious groups, minorities, and people with HIV/AIDS face severe discrimination in mainstream society. The majority Han Chinese population has reaped an outsized share of benefits from government programs and economic growth, despite government initiatives to improve living standards for ethnic minorities.

The government's focus on economic reform and rapid modernization has caused the evictions of urban residents, particularly in large coastal cities, with local authorities forcibly removing hundreds of thousands of residents without adequate compensation in the interest of urban development projects. The Public Security Ministry counted 87,000 "public order disturbances" in 2005, a 15 percent increase from the number of disturbances in 2004. Protesters of forced evictions have been met with severe police repression. Ye Guozhu, a housing advocate, was arrested in December 2004 for "disturbing social order" after applying for a permit to hold a demonstration in Beijing.

Though the Ministry of Labor and Social Services issued new regulations in 2005 to make it easier for rural migrants to seek jobs in urban areas, mobility is strictly controlled by the government through a highly regulated residency (hukou) system, tied to educational and health benefits. Citizens require permission from the government and from their employer prior to moving from city to city; people in rural areas who wish to move to urban areas face inconvenient bureaucratic application procedures-a de facto restriction on mobility.

Serious human rights violations against women and girls continue, mostly as a result of the enforcement of the one-child policy and a cultural preference for males over females. The shortage of women and girls in rural areas has created a market for the trafficking of women and girls, who are sold as "wives" or pressed into the sex industry.

China's population-control policy remains in place and is an indication of continued governmental control over personal life. Chinese couples may have no more than one child, with the exception of couples born from "one-child" families. The one-child policy is less stringently enforced in rural areas. The Population and Family Planning Law requires couples who have unapproved children to pay extra fees, while at the same time giving preferential treatment to couples who abide by birth limits. The use of compulsory abortion or sterilization by local officials enforcing family planning regulations occurs in isolated cases, though less frequently than in the past.