

# China 2024 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

Genocide and crimes against humanity occurred during the year in China against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices; arbitrary arrest and detention by the government including, since 2017, of more than one million Uyghurs and members of other predominantly Muslim minority groups in extrajudicial internment camps, prisons, and an additional unknown number subjected to daytime-only “re-education” training; acts of transnational repression against individuals in other countries; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests and criminal prosecution of journalists, lawyers, writers, bloggers, dissidents, petitioners, and others, and restrictions on internet freedom; restrictions of religious freedom; instances of coerced abortions and forced sterilization; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; prohibiting independent trade unions and systematic restrictions on workers’ freedom of association; and significant presence of some of the worst forms of child labor.

The government did not take credible steps or action to identify or punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

There were reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. In many instances few or no details were available. There continued to be no government transparency or public statistics on executions.

In January *China Digital Times* and Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on an article at the news site *Caixin* – deleted within minutes of publication – focused on the November 2023 trial of eight Xinjiang police officers for the torture and ultimate death of a private individual (Sun Renze) while he was in police custody in 2018 in the province’s Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture. Seven hours of detention center surveillance footage reportedly documented the torture Sun endured, including waterboarding and other physical abuse.

In Xinjiang there were reports of custodial deaths related to detentions in the internment camps. There were reports from Uyghur family members who discovered their relatives died while in internment camps or within weeks of their release from causes related to their detention. In February

the Uyghur Human Rights Project reported on the custodial death of imam Abidin Ayup, age 96. He was arrested in 2017 and sentenced to nine years in prison for “promoting religious extremism.”

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

Through law and policy, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government limited the right of parents to choose the number of children they have. The law restricted most married couples to three children (changed from two in 2021) and allowed couples to apply for permission to have a fourth child if they met local and provincial requirements. The law included provisions aimed at increasing the birth rate and “reducing the burden” of raising children.

Enforcement of the decades-old population-control policy, which originally limited parents to one child, relied on social pressure, education, propaganda, and economic penalties, as well as on measures such as mandatory pregnancy examinations, forced contraception, forced sterilizations, and coerced abortions. Penalties for exceeding the permitted number of children were not enforced uniformly and varied by province. The law only mentioned the rights of married couples, which local officials often interpreted to mean unmarried women were not authorized to have children. In addition, social compensation fees could be imposed on unmarried women who gave birth, and they could be subjected to the denial

of legal documents such as birth documents and the hukou residence permit, although local governments rarely enforced these regulations.

Ethnic and religious minority women, particularly Uyghurs, were often subjected to coercive population control measures not applied to Han Chinese. Government targeting of ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang with intensified coercive population control measures resulted in plummeting birth rates in Xinjiang after 2018 when authorities increased coercive population control measures, including forced abortions, forced sterilizations, involuntary intrauterine device insertions, and pregnancy checks occurring at detention centers in the region and targeting minority groups, primarily Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs. Non-Han Chinese parents judged to have exceeded the government limit on the number of children risked being sent to detention centers unless they paid exorbitant fines.

The country's national family planning laws in recent years relaxed some restrictions on reproductive rights. Media outlets for example reported Sichuan Province removed restrictions on the number of children in a family and on registering unmarried women's children; these were formally suspended for five years, beginning in February 2023. According to media reports, the governments of Guangdong, Shanghai, Anhui, and Shaanxi no longer required expectant mothers to provide a marriage license to receive pregnancy-related benefits. Implementation remained inconsistent and unmarried persons often faced official discrimination. Most unmarried

pregnant women continued to face difficulty accessing prenatal care at public hospitals, obtaining insurance coverage for prenatal care, and receiving postnatal employment and other benefits. Media reported assisted reproductive technology, such as in vitro fertilization and egg freezing, was illegal for single women in the country. Rules issued by the National Health Commission, however, allowed single men to freeze their sperm.

### **c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses**

“Deradicalization Regulations” in Xinjiang codified efforts to “contain and eradicate extremism”; since 2017, the government used its broad definition of extremism to detain more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in re-education or detention centers, designed to instill patriotism and erase their religious, cultural, and ethnic identities. Many previously held in these centers were later transferred to the formal prison system, convicted on spurious charges in closed trials, and sentenced to unusually long prison terms.

The government promoted racism and institutional discrimination against minorities, in particular Uyghurs, and disparaged and denied the resulting complaints, cracking down on peaceful expressions of ethnic culture and

religion.

Official state media continued to publish propaganda describing members of minority ethnic or religious groups as violent or inferior. Such propaganda commonly alleged a connection between Islam and violence and described religious adherents as culturally backwards and less educated, and thus in need of re-education.

The government's efforts to assimilate ethnic and religious minority groups culturally, such as its "Sinicization" campaign, resulted in ethnically based restrictions on movement, including curtailed ability to obtain travel documents, greater surveillance and presence of armed police in ethnic minority communities, and legislative and administrative restrictions on cultural and religious practices.

The government continued to promote Han Chinese migration into minority areas such as Xinjiang, which significantly increased the population of Han there.

The government implemented severe restrictions on expressions of minority groups' culture, language, and religious identity, including regulations prohibiting behaviors the government considered signs of "extremism" such as growing "abnormal" beards, wearing veils in public places, and suddenly stopping smoking or drinking alcohol, among other behaviors. The regulations banned the use of some Islamic names and set punishments for

teaching religion to children. Authorities conducted “household surveys” and “home stays” in which officials or volunteers forcibly lived in Uyghurs’ homes and monitored families for signs of “extremism.” Authorities also used a vast array of surveillance technology specifically designed to target and track Uyghurs.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution stated citizens “enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.” Authorities, however, did not respect these rights, especially when their exercise conflicted with CCP interests. Authorities maintained tight control of all print, broadcast, electronic, and social media and regularly used them to propagate government views and CCP ideology. Authorities censored and manipulated the press, social media, and the internet, particularly around sensitive anniversaries and topics such as public health.

Citizens often avoided discussing political matters, leaders, or “sensitive” topics for fear of official punishment. Authorities routinely took harsh action against citizens who questioned the legitimacy of the CCP or criticized General Secretary Xi. Some independent think tanks, study groups, and seminars reported pressure to cancel sessions on sensitive topics. Many others confirmed authorities regularly warned them not to meet with

foreign reporters or diplomats and to avoid participating in diplomatic receptions or public programs organized by foreign entities.

Those who made comments deemed politically sensitive in public speeches, performances, exhibitions, academic discussions, or remarks to media, or who posted sensitive comments online, were subject to punitive measures, as were members of their families. In addition, a high level of electronic surveillance in public spaces, coupled with the shift of many citizens' routine interactions to the heavily monitored digital space, meant the government monitored a significant portion of daily life. Conversations in groups or peer-to-peer on social media platforms and via messaging applications were subject to censorship, monitoring, and action from authorities. These developments further eroded freedom of speech.

In December media reported former *Guangming Daily* deputy editor and columnist Dong Yuyu was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of “espionage.” Dong was taken into custody in 2022 while meeting a Japanese diplomat at a hotel in Beijing and was held incommunicado for six months before being formally arrested.

Authorities arrested or detained countless citizens for “spreading fake news,” “illegal information dissemination,” or “spreading rumors online.” These claims ranged from sharing political views or promoting so-called religious extremism to sharing factual reports on public health concerns.



These abuses were especially stark in Xinjiang, where the government ran a multifaceted system of physical and cyber controls to stop individuals from expressing themselves or practicing their religion or spiritual beliefs.

The government extensively used mobile phone apps, cameras, and other electronics to monitor all speech and movement. Authorities in Xinjiang employed a comprehensive database that tracked the movements, mobile app usage, and even electricity and gasoline consumption of inhabitants in the region.

Control of public depictions of General Secretary Xi was severe, with censors aggressively shutting down any depiction that varied from official media storylines. Censors continued to block images of the Winnie the Pooh cartoon character on social media because internet users used it to represent Xi. Social media sites did not allow comments related to Xi and other prominent CCP and government leaders.

Many journalists and citizens who criticized the CCP's COVID-19 policies remained detained, including Guo Quan, a former Nanjing Normal University lecturer, sentenced in December 2022 to four years in jail on subversion charges after publicly criticizing the CCP's COVID-19 policies. Arrested in 2020, his sentencing came after almost three years in pretrial detention.

## **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

The government frequently impeded the work of members of the press,

including citizen journalists. Journalists reported being subjected to physical attack, harassment, monitoring, and intimidation when reporting on sensitive topics. Government officials used criminal prosecution, civil lawsuits, violence, detention, and other forms of harassment to intimidate authors and journalists and to prevent the dissemination of unsanctioned information on a wide range of topics.

Family members of journalists based overseas also faced harassment, and in some cases detention, in retaliation for reporting by their relatives. Dozens of Uyghur relatives of overseas-based journalists working for RFA's Uyghur Service disappeared or were detained in Xinjiang.

Journalists faced the threat of demotion or dismissal for publishing views that challenged the government. In many cases, potential sources refused to meet with journalists due to actual or feared government pressure.

Journalists noted their contacts, even interlocutors not associated with the government or CCP, in informal settings often refused to discuss even nonsensitive topics. So-called taboo topics included not only Tibet, Taiwan, and corruption, but also natural disasters and the #MeToo movement.

Authorities imprisoned numerous journalists working in traditional and new media. Reporters Without Borders' 2023 *World Press Freedom Index* tallied 108 journalists (professional and nonprofessional) detained in the country as of August. As of August, two foreign journalists of Chinese descent remained detained on "espionage" charges: Swedish publisher Gui Minhai,

founder of a Hong Kong publishing house, who was sentenced in 2020 to 10 years in prison; and Australian journalist Yang Hengjun, arrested in 2019 and in February sentenced to a suspended death sentence for espionage following a closed trial. After the sentencing, news outlets reported his family's confirmation that Yang would not appeal the sentence because there was no reason to believe an appeal would lead to a just outcome and could harm Yang's chances of receiving adequate medical care.

According to the 2023 Foreign Correspondents' Club of China report and survey released in April, COVID restrictions resulted in a "substantive rise in the number of reported incidents of harassment from official and nonofficial sources while reporting around China." A majority of respondents to the survey, 81 percent, said they had experienced interference, harassment, or violence, further limiting the ability of foreign journalists to engage in independent field reporting. Over half of the respondents (54 percent) said they experienced obstruction at least once by police or other officials, with numerous respondents recounting instances where they were detained, or prevented from filing, taking pictures, or conducting interviews. More than one-third of survey respondents (37 percent) reported confirmed reporting trips or interviews were canceled because of "official pressure," a 6 percent increase from 2022.

Reporting from "politically sensitive" areas resulted in significant interference and harassment; 85 percent of surveyed journalists who

attempted to report from Xinjiang experienced problems. Reports of interference declined in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and the border with Southeast Asian countries, but remained high, at 68 percent and 43 percent respectively.

In November international media outlets reported on authorities' efforts to prevent foreign and local journalists from filming, conducting interviews, or reporting from Zhuhai People's Fitness Plaza in Guangdong Province where on November 11, a man deliberately drove his private vehicle into a crowd of persons exercising on the grounds, killing at least 35. A journalist from the Japanese television network TBS reported plainclothes police forced him to delete footage taken at the sports complex; a BBC reporter stated someone tried "aggressively interrupting" his reporting and physically grabbed him. International media also reported authorities were censoring online videos, photographs, and articles on the incident and were preventing anyone from gathering at the sports complex.

### **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

The CCP and government maintained ultimate authority over all published, online, and broadcast material. Officially, only state-run media outlets had government approval to cover CCP leaders or other topics deemed "sensitive." While it did not dictate all content to be published or broadcast,

the CCP and the government had unchecked authority to mandate if, when, and how particular topics were reported or to order they not be reported at all.

The government's propaganda department issued daily guidance on what topics should be promoted in all media outlets and how those topics should be covered. Directives warned against reporting on topics such as COVID-19 outbreaks and the official response to, or international inquiries concerning, them; the reputations of the CCP or officials; health and safety in general; and foreign affairs. There was no indication that orders issued following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine barring criticism of Russia or favorable comments on NATO were rescinded. Chinese reporters working for private media companies confirmed increased pressure to conform to government requirements on story selection and content.

Only journalists with official government accreditation were allowed to publish news in print or online. The CCP constantly monitored all forms of journalistic output, including printed news, television reporting, and online news, including livestreaming. Journalists and editors self-censored to stay within the lines dictated by the CCP. They faced serious penalties for crossing those lines, which were often vague, subject to change at the discretion of propaganda officials, and enforced retroactively.

Authorities continued to suppress information related to the origin of COVID-19 on social media and in the press.

Because the CCP did not consider internet news companies “official” media, they were subject to debilitating regulations and barred from reporting on potentially “sensitive” stories.

Citizen journalists faced a difficult climate, with authorities seeking to control content published through social media, including “self-media” or “we-media” accounts. These were typically blogs operated independently on social media without official backing from established outlets.

Unaccredited reporters could face legal fallout or even criminal charges.

As of November citizen journalist Zhang Zhan was held on charges of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” This followed her release in May after completing a four-year sentence for reporting on the initial COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan.

Newscasts from overseas news outlets, largely restricted to hotels and foreign residence compounds, were censored. Articles on sensitive topics were removed from international magazines. Foreign newscasts were often blacked out when covering sensitive subjects.

Government regulations restricted and limited public access to foreign television shows, which were banned during primetime, and local streaming services had to limit the foreign portion of their program libraries to less than 30 percent. Government rules banned the sale of foreign publications without an import permit. This included sales on online shopping platforms,

which were banned from offering “overseas publications,” including books, movies, and games that did not already have government approval. The ban also applied to services related to publications.

Authorities banned books with content deemed inconsistent with officially sanctioned views. The law permitted only government-approved publishing houses to print books. All books and magazines continued to require state-issued publication numbers, expensive and difficult to obtain. Newspapers, periodicals, books, audio and video recordings, or electronic publications could not be printed or distributed without the approval of central authorities and relevant provincial publishing authorities. Individuals who attempted to publish without government approval faced imprisonment, fines, confiscation of their books, and other punishment. The CCP practice of preemptively classifying certain topics as state secrets applied to the publishing industry.

In January international media reported on the arrest of Chen Pinlin – also known as Plato – after the release of his documentary *Urumqi Middle Road*, which focused on the “white paper” protests in 2022, a series of peaceful nationwide demonstrations against the government’s draconian COVID-19 policies. In February Chen was charged with “picking quarrels and provoking troubles.” In May *The Guardian* reported authorities censored online content linked to the protests and prevented anyone from documenting or commemorating the protests. Chen released his documentary on X and

YouTube near the one-year anniversary of the protests.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law did not provide for freedom of association, and workers were not free to organize or join unions of their own choosing. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), a CCP organ chaired by a member of the Politburo, was the only union recognized under the law. Independent unions were illegal, and the law did not protect the right to strike. The law allowed collective wage bargaining for workers in all types of enterprises. The law further provided for industrial sector-wide or regional collective contracts, and enterprise-level collective contracts were generally compulsory throughout the country. Regulations required the government-controlled union to gather input from workers prior to consultation with management and to submit collective contracts to workers or their congress for approval. There was no legal obligation for employers to negotiate or to bargain in good faith, and some employers refused to do so. Most collective contracts simply restated wage and hour terms already established by law.

The law provided for legal protections from antiunion discrimination and specified union representatives could not be transferred or terminated by enterprise management during their term of office. The law provided for the reinstatement of workers dismissed for official union activity and



penalties for enterprises that engaged in antiunion activities. The law did not protect workers who requested or took part in collective negotiations with their employers independent of the officially recognized union.

All union activity had to be approved by and organized under the ACFTU. The ACFTU and its provincial and local branches continued to establish new constituent unions and add new members, especially among workers in technology companies and in the transportation and service sectors. The law gave the ACFTU financial and administrative control over constituent unions empowered to represent employees in negotiating and signing collective contracts with enterprises and public institutions. The law did not mandate the ACFTU to represent the interests of workers in disputes directly. The only legally specified roles for the ACFTU in strikes were to participate in investigations and to assist the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in resolving disputes.

The ACFTU and the CCP used a variety of mechanisms to influence the selection of trade union representatives. Although the law stated trade union officers at each level should be elected, ACFTU-affiliated unions appointed most factory-level union officers, often in coordination with employers. Official union leaders were often drawn from the ranks of management. Direct election by workers of union leaders continued to be rare, occurred only at the enterprise level, and was subject to supervision by higher levels of the union or the CCP. In enterprises where direct election of

union officers took place, regional ACFTU officers and local CCP authorities retained control over the selection and approval of candidates. Even in these cases, workers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed concern regarding the credibility of elections.

The ACFTU constituent unions were generally ineffective in representing and protecting the rights and interests of workers. Workers generally did not view the ACFTU as an advocate, especially migrant workers, who rarely interacted with union officials. The government effectively maintained the primacy of the ACFTU and prevented the emergence of independent labor organizations.

Labor inspectors lacked authority to compel employers to bargain with the union. Penalties were limited and never applied against employers who violated the law. Workers who tried to exercise their rights outside of the official unions were subject to penalties.

While the law outlined general procedures for resolving disputes, procedures were lengthy and subject to delays. Local authorities in some areas actively sought to limit efforts by independent civil society organizations and legal practitioners. The law did not expressly prohibit work stoppages and did not prohibit workers from striking spontaneously. Although some local authorities tolerated strikes protesting unpaid or underpaid wages, reports of police crackdowns on strikes continued throughout the year. In cases where local authorities cracked down on

strikes, they sometimes charged leaders with vague criminal offenses, such as “inciting subversion of state power,” “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” “gathering a crowd to disturb public order,” or “damaging production operations,” or detained them without charges.

Coordinated efforts by governments at the central, provincial, and local levels, including censorship, surveillance, harassment, detention, and travel restrictions on labor rights defenders and restrictions on funding sources for NGOs, disrupted labor rights advocacy. The government continued to target labor activists, students, and others advocating for worker rights. In 2023, the International Labor Organization’s Committee on the Freedom of Association noted concern regarding reports of government harassment, intimidation, arrests, and physical abuse.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

In February the NGO Jamestown Foundation’s *China Brief* published findings that Xinjiang’s coercive labor transfer program exceeded state quotas in 2023, continued into the year, and would continue at least through 2025. The report found that Xinjiang “significantly expanded the scale of the Pairing Assistance program, which facilitates cross-provincial labor transfers, aiming to increase transfers to other Chinese regions by 38 percent – levels

exceeding those of any year since the mid-2010s.” In August 2023, the Helena Kennedy Centre at Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom reported that government labor transfer programs had increased in scale, with companies continuing to accept “surplus laborers” transferred from predominantly Uyghur or Turkic Muslim-minority regions of Xinjiang. Research published in June 2023 concluded agricultural labor transfer programs continued at a significant scale through at least 2022. NGO reporting, academic research, and survivor accounts assessed that labor transfer programs involved significant state coercion and presented serious indications of forced labor.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

There was no national minimum wage, but the law required local and provincial governments to set their own minimum wage rates according to standards promulgated by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. Minimum wages were above the poverty level. By law employees were limited to working eight hours a day and 40 hours per week; work beyond this standard was considered overtime and had to be paid at a premium.

Blacklists posted by multiple provincial and municipal authorities and other reports indicated continuing widespread violations of overtime pay laws,

indeed of an increase in the problem. *China Labour Bulletin* tracked numerous wage arrears protests across the country during the year; it reported more collective actions by workers in the first half of the year than in the same period of 2023.

Provincial and local governments at various levels continued efforts to prevent arrears and to recover unpaid wages and insurance contributions. According to the Ministry of Justice, legal aid organizations across the country investigated approximately 480,000 migrant worker cases and helped 540,000 migrant workers recover almost 6.8 billion yuan (\$952 million) in wages and other benefits in 2023.

Subcontracting made rural laborers susceptible to delayed payment or nonpayment for their work, prompting them to join in collective action. Even with contracts, migrant workers had less access to benefits, especially social insurance.

According to monthly figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics, workers worked an average of nearly 49 hours per week every month since February 2023, suggesting six-day workweeks were the norm.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations were set and enforced by the Ministry of Emergency Management (safety) and the National Health Committee (health). The law required employers to provide free health

checkups for employees working in hazardous conditions and to inform the employees of the results. The law also provided workers the right to report violations or remove themselves from workplace situations that could endanger their health without jeopardy to their employment.

According to media reports, occupational diseases were prevalent and underreported. Patients came from many industries, including coal, chemical engineering, and construction.

Workplace accidents were widespread. Workplace accidents and injuries were particularly common and deadly in the coal industry, according to media reports. Media and NGO reports attributed accidents to a lack of safety checks, weak enforcement of laws and regulations, ineffective supervision, and inadequate emergency responses.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The government inconsistently enforced its wage, hour, and OSH laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar laws such as fraud or negligence. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced visits and could initiate sanctions.

By law identifying unsafe conditions was the responsibility of OSH experts, not workers.

The government seldom enforced overtime laws, and 48-hour workweeks

were common for a wide range of workers. Companies that violated wage, hour, and OSH regulations faced various penalties, including suspension of business operations, rescission of business certificates and licenses, or entry onto publicly available “blacklists” maintained by local governments.

Inspections, however, were generally inadequate and the penalties and other compliance mechanisms were only sometimes enforced.

Inspectors did not operate in the informal sector. Workers in the informal sector worked longer hours and earned less than comparable workers in the formal sector. Workers in the informal sector often lacked legal and social benefits covered under labor contracts. Informal work was particularly prevalent for internal migrants and domestic workers; 90 percent of an estimated 38.5 million domestic workers lacked formal work agreements and protections.

Workers in the gig economy, estimated to number 200 million, were considered contract workers. Gig workers at online platforms were covered by the 2002 Work Safety Law. There were reports of delivery drivers injured or killed on the job. Companies sometimes cut the per-package commission pay for couriers arbitrarily and there were numerous delivery-worker protests against heavy workloads or low wages.

## c. Disappearance and Abduction

### Disappearance

Enforced disappearances through multiple means continued at a nationwide, systemic scale.

The two primary means by which authorities forcibly disappeared individuals for sustained periods of time were “Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location” (RSDL) and *liuzhi* (retention in custody). RSDL codified in law the longstanding practice of detaining and removing from the public eye individuals the state deemed a risk to national security or intended to use as hostages. The primary disappearance mechanism for public functionaries was the *liuzhi* detention system managed by the National Supervisory Commission-Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (NSC-CCDI). These were government and party bodies charged by law with rooting out corruption; they frequently, but not always, cooperated. Numerous reports suggested individuals forcibly disappeared by RSDL and *liuzhi* were subject to various abuses, including but not limited to physical and psychological abuse, humiliation, rape, torture, starvation, isolation, and forced confessions. According to a 2022 report by human rights NGO Safeguard Defenders, between 55,977 and 113,407 persons were placed into RSDL (and later faced trial) from 2015 to 2021. In a separate March 2023 report, Safeguard Defenders estimated that the government placed



approximately 60,000 individuals in liuzhi between March 2018 and the end of 2021.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs alleged many detentions of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and members of other Muslim and ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang amounted to enforced disappearance, since families were often not provided information concerning the length or location of the detention. In June UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor called on authorities to provide information on the status of retired Uyghur doctor Gulshan Abbas, believed to be serving a 20-year sentence on terrorism-related charges. Her family had no contact with her since her arrest in 2018, less than one week after her sister, a Uyghur activist in the United States, spoke out against the mass detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

In December 2023 the Committee to Protect Journalists called on authorities to account for the whereabouts of Minnie Chan, a Hong Kong senior journalist with the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP). Multiple international outlets reported on her enforced disappearance in October 2023 when she traveled to Beijing to cover the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, a security conference. The SCMP's statement that Chan was on personal leave in Beijing did not alleviate concerns over her safety. She did not publish for the SCMP or on her X (formerly Twitter) social media account since her suspected enforced disappearance.

Protester Peng Lifa was not seen or heard from following his detention in 2022 after he unfurled banners on a bridge in central Beijing calling for an end to the country's zero-COVID policy and one-party authoritarianism. Foreign media reported Peng's wife and daughters were under house arrest in Beijing; the extended families of Peng and his wife, who lived in a village in Heilongjiang Province, were under police watch. There were reports that at one point, police sealed off the entire village, blocking journalists and supporters from entering.

The government still had not provided a comprehensive, credible accounting of all those killed, missing, or detained in connection with the violent suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. Many activists involved in the 1989 demonstrations and their family members continued to suffer official harassment. The government made no efforts to prevent, investigate, or punish such harassment. In addition, in April a 1989 student leader, Xu Guang, was sentenced to four years in prison for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" after he protested outside a local police station in 2022, demanding the government acknowledge the massacre.

## **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

Arbitrary arrest and detention remained systemic. The law granted public security officers broad administrative detention powers and the ability to detain individuals for extended periods without formal arrest or criminal charges. Lawyers, human rights activists, journalists, religious leaders and

adherents, and former political prisoners and their family members continued to be targeted for arbitrary detention or arrest.

UN human rights bodies found the system of Residential Surveillance (RS), a form of house arrest used to detain an individual under investigation, constituted arbitrary detention and called for its repeal. In 2022 Safeguard Defenders published a report on RS. Unlike the RSDL system, which allowed police to place a suspect into secret detention at undisclosed locations, RS took place at the suspect's home. In some cases, persons were allowed to receive visitors and use their telephone; in other cases, they were isolated and barred from all communication, visits, and from leaving the house. The report estimated RS was used on between 560,000 and 860,000 persons since 2012.

In March 2023 the UN high commissioner for human rights said his office documented large-scale arbitrary detentions and family separations in Xinjiang. Also in March 2023, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention rendered its opinion that the deprivation of liberty of Uyghurs Qurban Mamut, Ekpar Asat, and Gulshan Abbas was arbitrary.

There were no statistics available on the number of individuals in the liuzhi detention system. The NSC-CCDI published partial statistics in relation to its campaign targeting law enforcement officials, including that CCDI placed 2,875 individuals in liuzhi between February and July 2021. In previous years, several provinces published these numbers, including, in 2020,

Heilongjiang (376) and Jilin (275). One provincial official heading the liuzhi detention system stated suspects averaged 42.5 days in detention before being transferred into the criminal justice system.

Authorities detained or arrested persons on poorly defined allegations of revealing state secrets, subversion, and other crimes to suppress political dissent and public advocacy. Any piece of information could be retroactively designated a state secret, such as information on criminal trials, commercial activity, and any government activity. Authorities also used vaguely worded charges of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and “incitement to subvert state power” broadly against many civil rights advocates.

On October 22, the Suzhou Intermediate Court sentenced lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan to three years and 21 months in prison, respectively, both for “incitement to subvert state power.” Beijing police arrested them in April 2023 as they were en route to the diplomatic mission of the EU; they were tried on August 28 (Yu) and August 30 (Xu). Yu was previously released in 2022 after serving a four-year prison term for his civil society efforts.

A counterespionage law granted authorities the power to require individuals and organizations to cease any activities deemed a threat to national security. Failure to comply could result in seizure of property and assets. Revisions to the counterespionage law broadening the definition of espionage went into effect in July 2023, accompanied by a significant public

awareness campaign discouraging a range of interactions with foreigners.

There were multiple reports authorities arrested or detained lawyers, religious leaders or adherents, petitioners, and other rights advocates for lengthy periods without officially issuing a charge or providing a reason. Authorities subjected many of these individuals to extralegal house arrest, denial of travel rights, or administrative detention in different types of extralegal detention facilities, including “black jails.” Conditions faced by those under house arrest varied but sometimes included isolation in their homes under guard by security agents. Security officials were frequently stationed inside the homes. Authorities placed many citizens under house arrest during sensitive times, such as during the visits of senior foreign government officials, annual plenary sessions of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, the anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, and “sensitive” anniversaries in Tibetan areas and Xinjiang. Security agents took some of those not placed under house arrest to remote areas on so-called vacations.

On July 29, the father of Wang Mo, a civil rights activist from Jiangsu Province, reported his son was under RSDL in Huai’an, Jiangsu Province on suspicion of “provoking a disturbance.” Wang was forcibly disappeared on July 3 in Hangzhou and reportedly taken by security officials to a hotel in his home town where his cell phone was confiscated and he remained under the watch of guards. In 2023 authorities detained Wang four times for his

peaceful activism, including for holding up a banner in Guangzhou in support of Wang Aizhong, an activist tried and sentenced in May 2023.

Pretrial detention could last longer than one year. Defendants in “sensitive cases” reported being subjected to prolonged pretrial detention. Statistics were not published or made publicly available, but lengthy pretrial detentions were especially common in political prisoners’ cases.

Many political prisoners remained either in prison or held under other forms of detention, including writer Yang Maodong (pen name Guo Feixiong); Uyghur scholars Ilham Tohti, Rahile Dawut, and Hushtar Isa, brother of former World Uyghur Congress president Dolkun Isa; retired Uyghur medical doctor Gulshan Abbas; Uyghur entrepreneur Ekpar Asat; Uyghur journalist and former editor of *Xinjiang Civilization* Qurban Mamut; Uyghur TV producer Erkin Tursun; Uyghur writer Yalqun Rozi; Tibetan Buddhist monks Go Sherab Gyatso and Tenzin Khenrab; Tibetan entrepreneur Dorje Tashi; Tibetan singers Lhundrub Drakpa and Trinley Tsekar; activists Wang Bingzhang and Qin Yongmin; Shanghai activists Chen Jianfang and Huang Qi; pastors Zhang Shaojie and Wang Yi; Falun Gong practitioners Zhou Deyong, Chen Yang, and Cao Zhimin; Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai Thaddeus Ma Daqin; rights lawyers and activists Xia Lin, Gao Zhisheng, Xu Zhiyong, Ding Jiayi, Xu Yan, and Yu Wensheng; journalist Yang Zewei; protester Peng Lifa; Shanghai labor activist Jiang Cunde; and others.

## **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

# **Section 3. Security of the Person**

## **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The law prohibited the physical abuse and mistreatment of detainees and forbade prison guards from coercing confessions, insulting prisoners' dignity, and beating or encouraging others to beat prisoners. There were credible reports that authorities routinely ignored prohibitions against torture, especially in politically sensitive cases.

Former prisoners and detainees reported they were beaten, raped, subjected to electric shock, forced to sit on stools for hours on end, hung by the wrists, deprived of sleep, force-fed, forced to take medication against their will, and otherwise subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

Although prison authorities abused ordinary prisoners, they reportedly singled out political and religious dissidents for particularly harsh treatment.

Members of the minority Uyghur ethnic group reported systematic torture and other degrading treatment by law enforcement officers and officials working within the penal system and internment camps.

The treatment and abuse of detainees under the liuzhi detention system, which operated as an extrajudicial tool for the government and the CCP to investigate corruption and other offenses by officials, featured extended solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, beatings, and forced standing or sitting in uncomfortable positions for hours and sometimes days, according to press reports.

The law stated psychiatric treatment and hospitalization should be “on a voluntary basis,” but the law failed to provide meaningful legal protections for persons who could be involuntarily committed, such as access to a lawyer or other advocate or the right to communicate with those outside the psychiatric institution.

Official media reported the Ministry of Public Security directly administered 23 psychiatric hospitals for the criminally insane. While many of those committed to mental health facilities were convicted of murder and other violent crimes, there were also reports of activists, religious or spiritual believers, and petitioners being involuntarily subjected to psychiatric



treatment for political reasons. Public security officials could commit individuals to psychiatric facilities and force treatment for “conditions” that had no basis in psychiatry.

In April the NGO Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) published a report on the practice of collective punishment of human rights defenders’ families, highlighting the mistreatment of health rights activist He Fangmei’s three young children. Police detained He and her husband in 2020 following her public calls for accountability and compensation in the paralysis of her daughter, who at the age of 10 months received a defective vaccination. Authorities placed five-months pregnant He, her then age-six son, and then age-four daughter in Henan Xinxiang Gongji Psychiatric Hospital. After she gave birth in 2021, authorities arrested He and placed her in a detention center while leaving her three children at the psychiatric hospital. CHRD reported He’s son was eventually moved to foster care while her two daughters were forcibly disappeared; they were not seen since psychiatric hospital officials left them at the Hui County Chengguan Town mayor’s office on April 1.

Impunity was a significant problem in the security forces, including the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of State Security, and the Ministry of Justice, which managed the prison system.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited the employment of children younger than 16. It referred to workers between ages 16 and 18 as “juvenile workers” and prohibited them from engaging in certain forms of dangerous work, including in mines. Where there were reports of child labor in the private sector, the government reportedly enforced the law.

The law specified administrative review, fines, and revocation of business licenses as possible sanctions against enterprises that illegally hired children. The law required underage working children be returned to their parents or other custodians in their original place of residence. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes such as kidnapping, but a gap remained between legislation and implementation, despite annual inspection campaigns launched by local authorities across the country. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

There were reports of children younger than 16 working illegally. Such children were reportedly found working at many types of businesses, including a bar that served alcohol.

## **Child Marriage**

The legal minimum age for marriage was 22 for men and 20 for women; authorities effectively enforced the law.

## **c. Protection to Refugees**

Although it restricted access to border areas, the government regularly cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which maintained an office in Beijing.

### **Provision of First Asylum**

The law did not provide for granting refugee or asylum status. The government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees but tracked UNHCR-registered refugees in the country for record-keeping purposes. Asylum applicants and refugees remained in the country without access to education or social services and were subject to deportation at any time.

UNHCR reported that officials continued to restrict UNHCR access to border areas. Authorities sometimes detained and prosecuted citizens who assisted North Korean refugees and asylum seekers, as well as those who facilitated illegal border crossings.

## **Resettlement**

The government largely cooperated with UNHCR when dealing with the local settlement in China of Han Chinese or members of ethnic minorities originally from Vietnam and Laos but living in China's border areas since the Vietnam War era. The government and UNHCR continued discussions concerning the granting of citizenship to these long-term residents and their children, many of whom were born in China.

### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

The government did not recognize Judaism as an ethnicity or religion. The World Jewish Congress estimated the Jewish population at 2,500.

Antisemitic online content and sentiment surged following Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023; posters propagated antisemitic tropes apparently without facing censorship. For example, a widely viewed post on Weibo from the social media account of the government-controlled CCTV (China Central Television) falsely claimed that 3 percent of Jews in the United States controlled 70 percent of American wealth. In the wake of the attack, Chinese individuals posted numerous comments online calling for the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum to be demolished.

### **e. Instances of Transnational Repression**

The government and its agents engaged in acts to intimidate or exact

reprisals against individuals outside the country, including against Uyghurs and other ethnic minority group members, religious and spiritual practitioners, dissidents, foreign journalists, and Chinese students and faculty members on campuses and in academic institutions overseas.

In December 2023, Freedom House released research that indicated the country committed approximately 250 direct, physical acts of transnational repression from 2014 through 2022. The report concluded that China “conducted the most comprehensive and sophisticated campaign of transnational repression.” In April 2023, Freedom House’s transnational repression report stated the country engaged in transnational repression, including physical and digital threats and intimidation, coercion by proxy, technical espionage, unexplained disappearances, and the abuse of INTERPOL procedures. Freedom House reported the government co-opted other countries into conducting renditions on its behalf.

## **Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, or Violence or Threats of Violence**

The government, CCP, and their agents continued to use violence and threats of violence against individuals outside the country for political purposes, including to repress dissent. A July report released jointly by the Hong Kong Democracy Council and Students for a Free Tibet, reporting in August by RFA, and a detailed September article in the *Washington Post*,

described how pro-CCP counterprotesters attacked, threatened, and intimidated those protesting in favor of democracy in China and against the country's human rights record during President Xi's visit to San Francisco for the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in November 2023. The counterprotesters and pro-Xi groups were reportedly arranged by the CCP's United Front Work Department's foreign-influence program, and by pro-CCP Chinese diaspora leaders. Intimidation against protesters reportedly included threats, physical attacks with flagpoles and chemical spray, stalking, and stealing cell phones.

### **Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, or Coercion**

In April Safeguard Defenders released a report analyzing 283 cases of individual forced returns to the country from at least 56 other countries since 2014 (although the report did not distinguish between criminals and victims of transnational repression). These cases comprised a fraction of the 12,000 forced returns – identified as returned fugitives by Chinese authorities – from more than 120 countries and regions under Operations Fox Hunt and Sky Net since 2014, as reported by the CCDI. The report determined that, in some cases, Chinese authorities abused international judicial and police cooperation mechanisms as well as immigration laws and administrative procedures to coerce targets into returning to China, and used threats against and collective punishment of family members and contacts in the country, direct surveillance, harassment and intimidation of

targets overseas, and outright kidnappings abroad as necessary.

In February media reporting of a leak of more than 500 documents from cybersecurity firm i-Soon, also known as Aixun, which counted the Ministry of Public Security, 11 provincial-level security bureaus, and approximately 40 municipal public security departments as clients, revealed the government's targeting with cyber attacks of overseas organizations linked to ethnic minorities, primarily Tibetans and Uyghurs (such as Uyghurs in Central and Southeast Asia and the Tibetan administration in exile in Dharamshala). Other targets comprised hospitals in Taiwan and 14 foreign governments, including those of India, Indonesia, and Nigeria.

In May the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's investigative journalism documentary television program *Four Corners* aired an exposé on a former undercover agent with the Political Security Protection Bureau (under the Ministry of Public Security), or the 1st Bureau. Between 2008 and 2023, he claimed he was ordered to target Chinese dissidents in Australia, Japan, Thailand, and Burma; he said he was often tasked with luring these targets to Cambodia or Laos, countries suspected of allowing the Chinese government to freely operate.

In June Reporters Without Borders reported a French journalist and a French filmmaker received threatening and harassing telephone calls and text messages from a number in China following the May 1 airing on French public television of a documentary on the attempt by overseas Chinese

police to forcibly repatriate Chinese dissident Ling Huazhan. Following the broadcast, the Chinese embassy in France protested, claiming the report was “based on lies and a fabricated story.”

Media reported the China Student and Scholar Association functioned as an overseas monitoring mechanism and information network for authorities, suppressing independent academic activity in third countries. This institution allegedly tracked and reported on Chinese students abroad with prodemocracy views, leading to intimidation and bullying.

Media reported Chinese students studying abroad expressed heightened concerns regarding returning home due to the counterespionage law, which raised fears of potential surveillance and reprisals. The law required the country’s citizens, including students abroad, to assist with intelligence work if requested by the government. Some students worried that their academic activities or contacts abroad could be deemed suspicious, leading to potential legal troubles upon their return.

## **Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools**

There were credible reports authorities attempted to misuse international law enforcement and judicial cooperation tools for politically motivated purposes as a reprisal against specific individuals outside the country or to force wanted citizens overseas to return to China or to persecute human rights defenders and members of ethnic or religious minorities.



Safeguard Defenders' May report found that Chinese authorities exploited international judicial cooperation mechanisms to force the return of wanted overseas Chinese targets under the guise of the CCDI's fugitive recovery operations, known as Fox Hunt and Sky Net. Safeguard Defenders highlighted numerous reports that denounced Chinese authorities' abuse of international judicial and police cooperation mechanisms, including INTERPOL, to persecute human rights defenders and members of ethnic or religious minorities. While most reports of forced returns using INTERPOL Red Notices were recorded between 2014 and 2022, Safeguard Defenders stated in another report that data on China's use of INTERPOL was increasingly scarce, and that China reportedly changed its policy to refrain from making Red Notice requests public.

## **Efforts to Control Mobility**

There were reports authorities attempted to control mobility to exact reprisal against citizens abroad. Authorities refused to renew passports for Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other Chinese citizens living abroad.

## **Bilateral Pressure**

There were credible reports that China pressured other countries aimed at forcing those countries to take adverse action against specific individuals or groups.

In June the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported the Australian

Federal Police (AFP) told a Senate committee during a May parliamentary hearing that the AFP would no longer allow Chinese police to operate in Australia due to concerns over foreign interference threats in Australia. The AFP's change in policy followed a 2019 incident, exposed by the network's *Four Corners* television program, in which the AFP allowed Chinese police to travel to Australia and take a person, a resident in Australia suspected of fraud, back to China, in contravention of bilateral security agreements.

In October media and NGOs reported human rights lawyer Lu Siwei was formally arrested for “illegally crossing a border” and his case was transferred to the state prosecutor's office in Chenghua District of Chengdu. Lu was detained by Laotian authorities in July 2023 and returned to China in September 2023.