

Religious Persecution in China

General Trends:

- Since Xi Jinping took the helm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012, the authorities have intensified many restrictions on religion, resulting in an overall increase in persecution.¹
- Chinese officials have banned holiday celebrations, desecrated places of worship, and employed lethal violence. Security forces across the country detain, torture, or kill believers from various faiths on a daily basis.²
- Religious prisoners form the largest contingent of prisoners of conscience in China. With each passing day, more Chinese citizens are swept into the party-state's repressive apparatus for engaging in peaceful spiritual practice. Families are torn apart, injuries and psychological damage are inflicted, and lives are lost.³
- Under Xi, the CCP has pushed to Sinicize religion, or shape all religions to conform to the officially atheist party's doctrines and the majority Han-Chinese society's customs.⁴
- To this end, the corporatist "patriotic" associations affiliated with each of the recognized religions form the foundation of the CCP's institutional controls. The CCP tries to exercise control over the full range of religious activities.⁵
- Various modes of electronic surveillance—from video cameras and drones to monitoring of online activity—have expanded dramatically at sites of worship and public spaces frequented by believers, supplementing a vast network of human informants.⁶
- As the use of smart phones and social media applications has increased, authorities have responded with localized blocks on particular apps, imprisonment of users for sharing religious content on platforms like WeChat (owned by Tencent, MLB's distribution partner in China), and

¹ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

² Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

³ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

⁴ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

⁵ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

⁶ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

prosecution of believers for merely downloading or consuming unofficial religious content or information about violations of religious rights.⁷

Muslims:

- In 2021, the United States determined that China's actions constitute genocide and crimes against humanity.⁸
- The Chinese government has imprisoned upwards of 2 million Uyghur and other ethnic minority Muslims since 2017 and subjected those not detained to intense surveillance, religious restrictions, forced labor, and forced sterilizations.⁹
- Those who are detained are sent to "reeducation" camps where they are subjected to tortured and sleep deprivation during interrogations while many women face sexual abuse, including rape.¹⁰
- In Xinjiang, where most Uyghur and other ethnic minority Muslims live, the region has become a surveillance state that relies on cutting edge technology to monitor millions of people. Police closely monitor inhabitants by regularly scanning identification cards, taking their photographs and finger prints, and searching their cell phones. The government also collects and stores biometric data through a required program advertised as Physicals for All.¹¹
- Fasting during Ramadan, growing a beard, wearing a head scarf, attending mosques or having too many children is enough to label anyone an extremist.¹²
- Many women face forced sterilizations, and the children they are allowed to have cannot be given certain names, including Mohammed and Medina.¹³ As a result of the governments forced sterilization program, the birth rate fell by 84 percent in the two largest Uighur prefectures.¹⁴

⁷ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

⁸ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

⁹ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

¹⁰ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

¹¹ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

¹² Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

¹³ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

¹⁴ Jamestown Foundation: <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-REVISED-March-17-2021.pdf?x96727>

- Many mosques have been destroyed.¹⁵

Catholics:

- In Zhejiang Province, over 1,500 churches have had their crosses removed.¹⁶ Additionally, authorities across the country have removed more crosses from churches, banned youth under 18 from participating in religious services, and replaced images of Jesus and the Virgin Mary with pictures of Xi.¹⁷
- Catholic seminarians boycotted their own graduation ceremony to avoid Mass with an illegitimate, CCP-backed bishop.¹⁸
- Online sales of the Bible are banned.¹⁹
- The government continues to harass and detain bishops, including Guo Xijin and Cui Tai, who refuse to join the state-affiliated Catholic association.²⁰
- Nina Shea, an international religious freedom advocate, noted in 2019 that "two popular Marian pilgrimage shrines were demolished. Several underground Catholic priests were detained and forced into Communist Party 'reeducation' sessions."²¹
- In 2020, Cardinal Zen, bishop of Hong Kong, said, "Christmas is forbidden, in the whole country. Even the bible should be re-translated, according to the Communist orthodoxy."²²
- Cardinal Zen added, "On the top of the church they tell you to destroy the crosses, inside the church, they put the image of Xi Jinping – maybe not in the center, but in some place. Now they have to have the flag in the church, they have to sing the national anthem."²³

¹⁵ Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>

¹⁶ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

¹⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom:

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf

¹⁸ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

¹⁹ Aid to the Church in Need:

[file:///C:/Users/Comm1/Downloads/RFR%202018%20Exec%20Summary%20Web%20version%20\(1\).PDF](file:///C:/Users/Comm1/Downloads/RFR%202018%20Exec%20Summary%20Web%20version%20(1).PDF)

²⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom:

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf

²¹ Wall Street Journal: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/inside-chinas-war-on-christians-11559256446>

²² Catholic News Agency: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-vatican-lost-everything-got-nothing-an-interview-with-cardinal-zen-80278>

²³ Catholic News Agency: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-vatican-lost-everything-got-nothing-an-interview-with-cardinal-zen-80278>

- Cardinal Zen also observed that "They legitimize seven illegitimate bishops –schismatic bishops, excommunicated bishops. But it happened that, in two of those seven dioceses, there are also two legitimate underground bishops."²⁴ He went on to describe the government affiliated bishops in China as "more officials of the government than shepherds of God's flock."²⁵

Protestants:

- Two state-controlled Protestant bodies announced they would be pursuing a new "secularized" version of the Bible compatible with "Sinicization" and socialism.²⁶
- A Christian pastor was sentenced to 14 years in prison for opposing the cross-removal campaign.²⁷
- In 2019, Chinese authorities raided or closed hundreds of Protestant house churches.²⁸
- In 2019, Shea stated, "In Henan province, 10,000 Protestant churches were ordered shut, even though most were registered with the state. During 2018, more than one million Christians were threatened or persecuted and 5,000 arrested."²⁹
- Steven Mosher, former director of the Claremont Institute's Asian Study Center and member of the US Commission on Broadcasting to China, pointed out that in some instances that "the Ten Commandments [were] painted over with quotes from Xi."³⁰

Buddhists:

- The Chinese government continues to pursue a strategy of forced assimilation and suppression of Tibetan Buddhism, as demonstrated by the

²⁴ Catholic News Agency: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-vatican-lost-everything-got-nothing-an-interview-with-cardinal-zen-80278>

²⁵ Catholic Weekly: <https://www.catholicweekly.com.au/exclusive-interview-with-cardinal-joseph-zen/>

²⁶ Aid to the Church in Need:

[file:///C:/Users/Comm1/Downloads/RFR%202018%20Exec%20Summary%20Web%20version%20\(1\).PDF](file:///C:/Users/Comm1/Downloads/RFR%202018%20Exec%20Summary%20Web%20version%20(1).PDF)

²⁷ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

²⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom:

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf

²⁹ Wall Street Journal: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/inside-chinas-war-on-christians-11559256446>

³⁰ New York Post: <https://nypost.com/2020/02/01/how-chinas-xi-jinping-destroyed-religion-and-made-himself-god/>

laws designed to control the next reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and those of other Tibetan eminent lamas.³¹

- Mosher notes that "Buddhist temples are being turned into shrines celebrating Xi.... His picture adorns the walls, his recorded voice booms out of the loudspeakers, and it is his 'Thought'—not Buddha's—that the monks are now required to meditate upon."³²
- Monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama have been expelled from their monasteries, imprisoned, and tortured.³³

Falun Gong:

- In the case of Falun Gong, the party's stated goal is total eradication of the group and its adherents' beliefs, and official action has focused on "transformation."³⁴
- This process of ideological reeducation employs any means necessary—including physical torture, psychological manipulation, and repeated writing of "thought reports"—to compel adherents to recant their beliefs and promise to cease practicing.³⁵
- Human rights advocates and scientists have presented evidence that the practice of harvesting organs from prisoners – many of whom are believed to be Falun Gong practitioners – continue on a significant scale.³⁶

³¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom:

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf

³² New York Post: <https://nypost.com/2020/02/01/how-chinas-xi-jinping-destroyed-religion-and-made-himself-god/>

³³ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom:

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf

³⁴ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

³⁵ Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2017/battle-chinas-spirit>

³⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom:

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