

KEY FINDINGS

In 2020, religious freedom conditions in China deteriorated. The government intensified its “[sinicization of religion](#)” policy, particularly targeting religions perceived to have foreign connections, such as Christianity, Islam, and Tibetan Buddhism. The authorities also continued their unprecedented use of [advanced surveillance technologies](#) to monitor and track religious minorities, and the [Measures on Managing Religious Groups](#) became effective in February, further constricting the space in which religious groups can operate.

In September, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute [identified](#) 380 detention centers across the Uyghur region (otherwise known as Xinjiang), including new facilities built in 2019 and 2020. This indicates that the Chinese government has continued to detain Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims despite claiming to have released all detainees. Since 2017, authorities reportedly have sent millions of Muslims to these camps for wearing long beards, refusing alcohol, or exhibiting other behaviors deemed signs of “religious extremism.” Former detainees reported torture, rape, [sterilization](#), and other abuses in custody. Experts raised concerns that the Chinese government’s ongoing actions in Xinjiang could amount to [genocide](#) under international law. Reports also highlighted the use of Uyghur [forced labor](#) in internment and prison camps, factories, and industrial parks in the region. Moreover, authorities continued to carry out large-scale closures and [destruction](#) of Uyghur religious sites, including mosques and shrines important to that community’s religious, ethnic, and cultural identity.

The Chinese government continued its pervasive control and suppression of Tibetan Buddhism. In August, at the Seventh Tibet Work Forum, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping [emphasized](#) the importance of sinicizing Tibetan Buddhism to make it compatible with Chinese socialism and mobilizing Tibetans to “fight against separatism.” Subsequently, local authorities organized seminars at Tibetan Buddhist monasteries to

[indoctrinate](#) monks and nuns on these policies. They placed tight restrictions on monasteries and temples—including the [Yachen Gar Buddhist center](#) in Sichuan Province—[barring](#) worshippers from entering these sites. Authorities broadly [banned](#) Tibetans, including students and government workers, from participating in traditional religious gatherings, and they [detained and punished](#) Tibetans for listening to the Dalai Lama’s teachings or possessing his portrait.

Despite the Vatican-China agreement on Bishop appointments, Chinese authorities continued to harass, detain, and torture underground Catholic bishops—such as [Cui Tai](#) and [Huang Jintong](#)—who refuse to join the state-backed Catholic association. They also harassed, detained, arrested, and imprisoned members of Protestant house churches who refuse to join the state-sanctioned “Three-Self Patriotic Movement.” In April, authorities arrested and charged house church pastor [Zhao Huaiguo](#) for “inciting subversion of state power,” and in October, local authorities in Taizhou city, Zhejiang Province, sentenced Christian bookseller [Chen Yu](#) to seven years in prison and fined him roughly \$30,000 USD for “illegal business operations.” The government also continued to demolish both [Catholic](#) and [Protestant](#) church buildings and crosses under its “sinicization of religion” campaign. In addition, there were [reports](#) that authorities across China demolished Mahayana Buddhist, Daoist, and folk religion temples.

According to [reports](#), thousands of Falun Gong practitioners were harassed and arrested during 2020 for practicing their faith, and some likely [died](#) due to abuse and torture while in custody. Credible international [reports](#) also suggested that organ harvesting, including from Falun Gong practitioners, likely continued.

In October, 39 United Nations (UN) member states [condemned](#) the Chinese government’s abusive policies toward ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, including the use of internment camps, violations of religious freedom, forced labor, and forced birth control measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Redesignate China as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Enforce to the fullest extent existing U.S. laws—such as the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act and Tibetan Policy and Support Act—and continue to impose targeted financial and visa sanctions on Chinese government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom;
- Urge like-minded countries to independently investigate and formally determine whether the abuses in Xinjiang meet the definitions of genocide and/or crimes against humanity under international law, and work together to take measures to hold China accountable;
- Publicly express concerns about Beijing hosting the 2022 Winter Olympic Games and state that U.S. government officials will not attend the games if the Chinese government’s crackdown on religious freedom continues; and
- Continue and intensify efforts to counter Chinese government influence operations in the United States—including the Confucius Institutes—that suppress information or advocacy regarding religious freedom violations in China.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Support legislation to promote religious freedom in China, including the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act ([H.R.6210/S.3471](#)).

Background

Approximately 18 percent of China's [estimated](#) 1.4 billion people are Buddhist, including Tibetan Buddhists; 5 percent are Christian; and 2 percent are Muslim. Other significant religious traditions include the Falun Gong, Daoism, and indigenous practices.

Although the CCP has long repressed religious freedom, in recent years it has become increasingly hostile toward religion, resulting in campaigns to “sinicize” Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, and Christianity to rid the religions of alleged “foreign” influences. These policies require religious groups to support CCP rule and its overall objectives and interests, including by altering their teachings to conform to CCP ideology and adopting architectural and other changes to their sites and symbols. Both registered and unregistered religious groups and individuals who run afoul of the CCP face harassment, detention, arrest, and imprisonment.

The 2018 [Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs](#) effectively ban all “unauthorized” religious teachings and expand the role of local authorities in controlling religious activities. Under Article 300 of the [Chinese Criminal Code](#), simply belonging to certain religious movements, such as the Falun Gong or the Church of Almighty God, is punishable with three to seven years’ imprisonment—or up to life imprisonment for cases the authorities deem more serious.

Religious Freedom under Hong Kong’s National Security Law

In June, the National People’s Congress Standing Committee passed the new National Security Law for Hong Kong amid large-scale protests. The law contains broad and vague provisions that punish “secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces.” In December, Hong Kong authorities charged Jimmy Lai with “collusion with foreign forces,” making him the first high-profile figure to face charges under the law. Lai, a devout Catholic, has advocated for religious freedom in China and expressed concern over the future of religious freedom in Hong Kong. In December, USCIRF Commissioner Johnnie Moore [adopted](#) Lai as a Religious Prisoner of Conscience (RPOC) through USCIRF’s RPOC Project. The law could be invoked by authorities to suppress religious freedom in Hong Kong, especially as many political activists and protest participants, leaders, and groups have religious backgrounds and affiliations.

Uyghur Forced Labor in Supply Chains of U.S. Companies

In 2020, [reports](#) continued to highlight labor abuses in the supply chains of U.S. companies. Forced labor involving Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims took place in reeducation and prison camps, factories, and industrial parks in the Xinjiang region, and is often connected to government-sponsored “[poverty alleviation](#)” and “mutual pairing assistance” programs. In July, four U.S. government agencies issued a joint [Xinjiang Supply Chain Business Advisory](#), warning businesses with potential supply chain exposure to forced labor to consider the reputational, economic,

and legal risks of involvement with entities that engage in human rights abuses in the region and to conduct due diligence accordingly. Some companies responded by [severing](#) ties with suppliers suspected of using Uyghur forced labor, while others claimed to have conducted third-party audits to ensure no forced labor is used in their supply chains.

Key U.S. Policy

In 2020, senior U.S. government officials continued to [condemn](#) deteriorating religious freedom conditions in China, including then Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo in his address at the 2020 Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief in November. Then Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Samuel D. Brownback [raised](#) particular concern over the Chinese government’s use of artificial intelligence and facial recognition to oppress Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, many of whom are detained in internment camps for religious reasons. On December 2, the U.S. Department of State [redesignated](#) China as a CPC under IRFA and reimposed as the relevant presidential action existing restrictions on exports to China of crime control or detection instruments or equipment. In January 2021, after the reporting period, the State Department [designated](#) China’s treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang as genocide and crimes against humanity.

In May and July, the U.S. Department of Commerce added in total 19 Chinese companies and one government entity to the Entity List due to concerns about forced labor and other human rights violations in Xinjiang. In July, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed [sanctions](#) against Chinese government entities and senior Chinese officials, including Chen Quanguo, Communist Party Secretary for Xinjiang; the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau; and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), which has [directly participated](#) in the surveillance, mass detention, and forced labor of Uyghurs.

In May, Congress passed the [Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act](#) by an overwhelming, bipartisan vote, which then President Donald J. Trump [signed](#) into law in June. This law authorizes the U.S. government to impose sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for the persecution of Uyghur and other Muslims. In December, as part of an omnibus pandemic relief and government funding package, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate passed, and the President signed, the Tibetan Policy and Support Act ([H.R.4331](#)), which promotes the human rights of the Tibetan people, including the right to select and venerate their own religious leaders. USCIRF had recommended the enactment of both the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act and the Tibetan Policy and Support Act.

In September, the House of Representatives passed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act ([H.R.6210](#)), which would bar imports of textiles, cotton, and other goods produced using forced labor from Xinjiang. In October, six U.S. senators [introduced](#) a bipartisan resolution to designate human rights abuses perpetrated by the Chinese government against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang as genocide.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Hearing:** [Technological Surveillance of Religion in China](#)
- **Factsheet:** [The 2019 Regulation for Religious Groups in China](#)
- **Op-Ed:** [Being Muslim Means You’re Never Safe from China](#) (in *The Hill*)
- **Op-Ed:** [China’s war on religion – What US must do to support freedom](#) (in *Fox News*)

Individual Views of Commissioner Gary L. Bauer

Of the countries named each year by USCIRF as egregious violators of religious liberty, one is in a category by itself.

Communist China doesn't only deny its citizens basic human rights, including the right to seek and worship God. It is also asserting itself as a new authoritarian model for developing nations around the world. It is actively engaged in undermining international human rights standards. It utilizes its growing military power to intimidate and threaten its neighbors.

China's Communist Party (CCP) believes the United States is in inevitable decline. They believe the growth of their economic and military might cannot be stopped. They think the 21st century will be the Chinese Communist Century. If they are right, the 21st century will be a time in which human freedom and dignity shrinks while oppression grows.

USCIRF policy recommendations are made annually to U.S. government officials. But in a constitutional republic like ours, public opinion is everything. I appeal to my fellow citizens to act now, individually. To U.S. corporate CEOs, stop putting your desire for greater profits in China ahead of the interests and values of our country. To the presidents of our great universities, stop accepting Chinese Communist money that will inevitably threaten academic freedom. To American consumers, don't buy products made by suffering workers in Communist China's slave labor camps and factories. You are subsidizing their persecution and strengthening an adversary of our country.

The United States has faced and defeated great threats to human liberty before, including Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Communist Chinese don't think we have the same courage today. They will be proven wrong, but only if each of us stands for American values.

Individual Views of Commissioner Johnnie Moore

China is relapsing to its cultural revolution, but with the aid of technology Mao could have only dreamed of—all of which it is using to pursue and enable genocide. Communist China is not a "strategic competitor." The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is a hostile actor whose actions imperil the world, and its abuses have been made possible by inexcusable policies endorsed by Congress and the White House over many administrations.

It is time that the United States and its allies embrace a clear-eyed view of the CCP, recognizing that it is singular and distinct in its disregard for human life—not just human rights and religious freedom. It aids and abets similar activities by other countries all around the world. We cannot allow the international order, in pursuit of self-interest, to continue to let China play by its own rules. Those nations around the world that ignore the CCP's malevolence will eventually find themselves subservient to it. It is past time for our world bodies and our liberal democracies to stand up to the CCP.