

KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, religious freedom conditions in China remained among the worst in the world. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Xi Jinping continued to lead efforts to update and enforce China’s [“sinicization of religion”](#) policy, which requires the complete loyalty and subordination of recognized religious groups to the CCP, its political ideology, and its policy agenda. February amendments to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Religious Affairs Regulations reinforced sinicization policy and continued to impose stringent restrictions. In March, Ma Xingrui, CCP secretary of Xinjiang, insisted on sinicizing Islam in that province, calling it an “inevitable trend.”

China continued to use [high-tech surveillance](#) outside places of worship and other means to repress religious freedom throughout the country. It also weaponized transnational repression and disinformation by using emerging technologies to quash voices critical of the country’s religious freedom and related human rights violations. Chinese authorities threatened Uyghur and Tibetan diaspora communities with surveillance, blackmail, and threats against their families living in China to force them into silence. Authorities further promoted tourism to Xinjiang to whitewash its genocidal violations there and dismiss international criticism.

In August, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [acknowledged](#) the lack of progress on human rights for religious minorities in Xinjiang, citing existing problematic laws and policies, limited access to information, and fear of reprisals against individuals cooperating with the United Nations (UN). Authorities continued to imprison Uyghur Muslims for their religious activities, including for charitable contributions and religious instruction. In February, 96-year-old Imam Abidin Damollam died in prison while serving a nine-year sentence for allegedly “promoting religious extremism.”

Officials persisted in restricting religious activities of Tibetan Buddhists. Authorities reportedly banned admission of new monks at a monastery in Chamdo prefecture, prohibited religious activities during Saga Dawa in Lhasa, and forced residents to remove religious symbols displayed outside their homes in Sichuan Province. Authorities closed Tibetan monastery schools and enrolled students in state-run boarding schools to forcibly assimilate them, while police arrested and imprisoned Tibetan Buddhists for public and private [mentions](#) of the Dalai Lama. Authorities indicated that they intend to interfere in the Dalai Lama’s succession process and punish Tibetans who oppose.

Chinese authorities detained, forcibly disappeared, or refused to disclose the [whereabouts](#) of underground Catholic clergy who declined to join the state-controlled Catholic organization. Independent house church Protestants faced similar retribution from law enforcement for refusing to join the state-controlled Protestant organization, as police raided house churches and harassed, detained, fined, and imprisoned members on reportedly fabricated charges, including “fraud” and “subversion.” In January, a court sentenced Protestant Pastor [Kan Xiaoyong](#) to 14 years in prison on groundless allegations.

The government continued to target [Falun Gong practitioners](#), the Church of Almighty God (CAG), and other unrecognized religious groups as illegal “cults.” Falun Gong and CAG sources documented thousands of adherents—including Falun Gong practitioner [Xu Na](#) and CAG member [Mo Xiufeng](#)—who faced arrest, imprisonment, and mistreatment, including deaths resulting from abuse in custody.

Human rights activists continued to express concerns about Hong Kong’s new national security law, Article 23, and its impact on religious freedom. Some imprisoned Hong Kong activists have alleged that prison authorities deny them access to religious materials.

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);
- Coordinate with international partners to sanction Chinese officials and entities responsible for severe religious freedom violations, including those engaging in transnational repression against religious minorities on behalf of the Chinese government as well as CCP officials who interfere in the Dalai Lama’s plan of succession; and
- Work with like-minded partners to address China’s use of technology to

commit religious freedom violations by establishing binding multilateral export controls to counter China’s economic coercion, reduce economic and trade dependence on China, and diversify supply chains, including rules governing the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies such as genetic sequencing and collection.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Consider legislation to tighten restrictions on China’s use of technologies that facilitate human rights abuses and suppression of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB),

including through amendments to the Uyghur Forced Labor Act and the Export Control Act of 2018;

- Ban paid lobbying in the United States by agents representing the Chinese government and its state-affiliated commercial entities that undermine religious freedom and related human rights; and
- Raise China’s religious freedom conditions through delegation visits, meetings, and hearings, including through the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, and Select Committee on the CCP.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Factsheet:** [Sinicization of Religion: China’s Coercive Religious Policy](#)
- **Factsheet:** [Misinformation and Disinformation: Implications for Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2**

Background

According to U.S. government [estimates](#), 18 percent of China's 1.4 billion population are Buddhist (including Tibetan Buddhist), five percent are Christian, and two percent are Muslim. Other significant religious traditions include Taoism, Falun Gong, and folk religious practices. Although China is officially an atheist state, the government formally recognizes five religions—Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism—and regulates them through state-controlled religious organizations.

Sinicization

Religious groups who refuse to submit to the government's all-encompassing control over religious affairs face widespread [persecution](#). State-controlled religious organizations implement sinicization through intrusive oversight and "Five-Year Sinicization Work Plans" which emphasize loyalty and conformity to CCP ideological requirements. Authorities used sinicization as a pretext to commit gross religious freedom violations against ethnoreligious minorities, including predominantly Muslim Uyghurs, Hui Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists. Authorities forcibly sinicized many Hui Muslim mosques by replacing domes and minarets with Chinese-style pagodas and other CCP-approved architecture, including the Grand Mosque of Shadian. In Xinjiang, the government reportedly turned religious occasions into celebrations of communism, and it banned Muslims from fasting and breaking fasts collectively during Ramadan. State-controlled churches continued to push similar CCP subordination on Christian places of worship and religious activities among both clergy and laity. China also continued to prohibit minors from engaging in religious activities or receiving religious education.

International Accountability

In 2024, the UN Human Rights Council conducted its [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) of China. UN member states [urged](#) China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; respect FoRB; allow UN Special Procedures to visit Xinjiang and Tibet; repeal policies persecuting, discriminating against, and forcibly assimilating ethnoreligious minorities, including in Xinjiang and Tibet; and implement the OHCHR's 2022 [recommendations](#) for Xinjiang. In March, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called on China to implement the OHCHR and other UN bodies' recommendations to address fundamental rights violations, including in Xinjiang and Tibet. Human rights organizations accused several Western and Chinese companies of complicity in employing government-backed Uyghur forced labor in their supply chains.

Transnational Repression and Malign Activities

The Chinese government continued to engage in transnational repression against diaspora religious communities and activists with ties to China. In September, reporting emerged that pro-CCP diaspora groups with ties to the United Front Work Department and support from Chinese diplomats engaged in strategic, coordinated, and violent suppression of Uyghur, Tibetan, and Hong Kong activists protesting President Xi's 2023 visit to San Francisco. Chinese authorities

sought to crack down on diaspora activists and dissidents through collective punishment, such as targeting their families in China with intimidation, forced evictions, travel bans, and criminal proceedings.

Key U.S. Policy

U.S. officials across the government regularly elevated religious freedom and other related human rights issues in China. In July, the U.S. Department of State [imposed](#) visa restrictions on unnamed Chinese officials involved in repressing marginalized religious and ethnic communities in China. Both the State Department and Congress [condemned](#) China's persecution of Falun Gong and called for the release of FoRB prisoners, including [Jimmy Lai](#), [Ilham Tohti](#), [Gedhun Choekyi Nyima](#), and [Gulshan Abbas](#).

In January, the United States [participated](#) in China's UPR, joining its call for an end to transnational repression, forced assimilation, genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, and human rights abuses in Tibet and Inner Mongolia. Then U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken [raised](#) similar concerns during his trip to China in April. Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) [urged](#) then Secretary Blinken to impose a Level 4 travel advisory to Xinjiang due to China's ongoing genocide against Uyghurs and its promotion of tourism in the region.

Congress raised concerns about ongoing violations of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [blacklisted](#) additional China-based companies for [violating](#) the UFLPA. In September, the administration of then President Joseph R. Biden [placed](#) new rules on the de minimis exemption following requests from [Congress](#) to curb such exemptions from China that violated the UFLPA. The administration also issued new [export controls](#) on advanced technologies to protect "national security and foreign policy interests." In December, Congress [renewed](#) the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act for another five years.

In July, federal prosecutors [indicted](#) U.S. citizen Ping Li for providing information to a Chinese state security official about U.S.-based Falun Gong practitioners. That same month, U.S. residents John Chen and Lin Feng [pleaded](#) guilty to charges in relation to similar Falun Gong targeting. In September, federal prosecutors [charged](#) Linda Sun, a former high-ranking New York State government employee, with several crimes, including failure to register as a foreign agent for China. The accused reportedly [prevented](#) the governor of New York from publicly addressing China's mass incarceration of Uyghurs based on feedback from a Chinese government official.

In March, the U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva highlighted China's efforts to [erode](#) the "unique linguistic, cultural, and religious identity of Tibetans." In June, members of Congress met with the Dalai Lama in India, and U.S. administration officials met with him in New York in August. In July, then President Biden signed into law the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act ([S. 138](#)), which instructs the State Department to combat Chinese propaganda and disinformation about Tibetan institutions, including the Dalai Lama.

On December 29, 2023, the State Department last [redesignated](#) China as a CPC under IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.