
World Watch Research

China: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024 - revised



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50.....	2
World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78	4
Copyright, sources and definitions	5
Reporting period	5
Brief country details.....	5
Map of country	6
Dominant persecution engines and drivers	7
Brief description of the persecution situation	7
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	8
Specific examples of positive developments	9
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	11
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	12
Position on the World Watch List	12
Persecution engines.....	13
Drivers of persecution.....	15
The Persecution pattern	18
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	19
Violence	28
5 Year trends	31
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	33
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	34
Persecution of other religious minorities	35
Trends Summary	36
Further useful reports.....	47
External Links	47

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

In the table below, the number of Christians shown is an Open Doors (OD) estimate.

China: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
1,425,179,000	96,700,000	6.8%

China: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	96,700,000	6.8
Muslim	28,961,519	2.0
Hindu	20,278	0.0
Buddhist	229,755,067	16.1
Ethnic religionist	73,955,708	5.2
Jewish	3,057	0.0
Bahai	6,827	0.0
Atheist	96,850,206	6.8
Agnostic	459,977,847	32.3
Other	438,948,262	30.8
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024 (Adapted according to OD-estimate)

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

China: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Government officials, Political parties
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

The policy of "Sinicizing" the church has been implemented across the country as the Communist Party is relying strongly on Chinese cultural identity to stay in control, limiting whatever could threaten its hold on power. Sinicization is not just about making Christianity and churches more Chinese, as academic analyses have shown. New restrictions on Internet, social media, NGOs, registration duties and the 2018 regulations on religion (with its extensions in the following years, most recently the [new regulations](#) for religious venues and the activities carried out in them - Radio Free Asia, 3 August 2023) are being increasingly strictly applied and all seriously limit freedom. Likewise, already existing laws are being implemented more strictly and local authorities barely have any leeway to allow for flexibility.

Many of the house church venues, which had been closed due to the pandemic have not been re-opened and many house churches have been forced to split into smaller groups as a result. The old truth that churches would only be perceived as being a threat if they became too large, too political or by inviting foreign guests, has become an unreliable guideline today. Many churches are being monitored and closed down, no matter whether they are independent or belong to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Pastors and church leaders are facing stronger pressure to join the state-approved churches; in recent years accusations of "fraud", "running an illegal business" or "organizing illegal meetings" joined and partly replaced the standard accusation of "picking quarrels and provoking fight". While this continues to be the case (as a growing number of arrests and sentences demonstrate), the main policy is about prioritizing security above all else; this means first and foremost keeping the ruling Communist Party secure. From this perspective, Christians and other religious minorities are perceived as a threat that needs to be controlled.

If a convert from Islam or from Tibetan Buddhism is discovered by community and family, they are usually threatened and physically harmed – all in an effort to win them back to their original faith. Spouses may be pressed to divorce. Neighbors and the local community may report a convert's Christian activities to the authorities or the village head, who would then take action to stop him or her.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

China has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)*
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CAT\)](#)

4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

(*China has signed but not ratified the ICCPR.)

China is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians are monitored by the state, their activities often hindered and disrupted (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Churches are hindered from obtaining legal status and those officially registered are subject to heavy state interference (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian leaders are imprisoned on charges of national security (ICCPR Art. 9)
- Children of Christians have been harassed and discriminated against because of their parents' faith (CRC Art. 2)
- Christian children are hindered from attending religious services and receiving religious education (CRC Art. 14)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **11 September 2024:** Preacher Bai Caiming was [put under](#) residential surveillance at a designated location in Mianning County, Liangshan, Sichuan Province (China Aid, 4 October 2024). He was released two weeks later.
- **16 August 2024:** Three Christians running Xuande school in Wuhu City, Anhui Province, were [sentenced](#) to nine months, respectively, for "illegal business operations" (China Aid, 22 August 2024).
- **24 July 2024:** Elder Zhang Chunlei from Guiyang Ren'ai Reformed Church in Guizhou Province was [sentenced](#) to 3.5 years for "inciting subversion of state power" and "fraud" (China Aid, 29 July 2024).
- **24 June 2024:** House church pastor Du Mingliang from Xinzhou, Shanxi Province was [sentenced](#) to five years because of "organizing illegal border crossing" (China Aid, 24 June 2024).
- **April 2024:** A court in Hohhot, Nei Monggol province, [sentenced](#) Ban Yanhong to five years for illegal business operations by distributing Bibles (at a loss) (Bitter Winter, 29 April 2024).
- **9 April 2024:** A court in Deyang, Sichuan province [sentenced](#) Elders Hao Ming and Wu Jiannan of Sichuan's Qiuyu Qingcaodi Church to three years and a fine each, on charges of fraud (Bitter Winter, 15 April 2024).
- **28 March 2024:** Pastor Zhang Sen from Fuyang Maizhong Reformed Church was [administratively detained](#) for 15 days in Fuyang, Anhui province (China Aid, 10 April 2024).
- **25 February 2024:** Pastor Wu Wuqing was [administratively detained](#) on the charge of "organizing illegal gatherings" in Chengdu, Sichuan province (China Aid, 13 March 2024).
- **14 February 2024:** since July 2023, a house church in Suzhou, Hubei province has been labelled as a "[cult](#)" and several of its members have been arrested (China Aid, 14 February 2024).
- **27 January 2024:** Authorities raided a gathering of non-registered Christians in Xiaotun, Heilongjiang province and [detained](#) more than 200 people (UCA News, 5 February 2024).

- **21 January 2024:** Authorities in Jiangmen, Guangdong province, raided the Sunday service of Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church and [took away](#) Preacher Chen Zuopeng and three other Christians. Their whereabouts were uncertain as of mid-February (China Aid, 12 February 2024).
- **18 January 2024:** Fuyang Maizhong Reformed church in Fuyang, Anhui province was raided and three Christians placed under [administrative detention](#) (Bitter Winter, 23 January 2024).
- **12 January 2024:** Pastor Kan Xiaoyong from a house church in Dalian, Liaoning province was [sentenced](#) to 14 years on the charges of “illegal business practices” the “use of a *xie jiao* [superstition] to undermine the implementation of law” (Radio Free Asia, 16 January 2024).
- **4 January 2024:** Under the pretext of banning “illegal social organizations” civil affairs department of Jiangsu province announced that five house churches and affiliated organizations were now [banned](#) (China Aid, 8 February 2024).
- **2 January 2024:** Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, has been taken into [custody](#) by authorities again (AsiaNews, 3 January 2024).
- **January 2024:** Pastors Lian Changnian, Lian Xuliang, and Preacher Fu Juan from the Church of Abundance in Xian, Shaanxi province, were accused of [fraud](#) face a sentence of up to five years (China Aid, 4 April 2024).
- **19 December 2023:** Christian Chen Yueli, who was involved in the printing of Sunday School materials, was [detained](#) in Shenzhen and the brought to a detention center in Chibi, Hubei province. Eight other Christians were detained with him (China Aid, 15 February 2024).
- **9 November 2023:** A mission center in Dazhou, Sichuan province, has been [raided](#) by authorities and Elder Li Yingquiang and Pastor Di Zhichou were detained for six hours (China Aid, 16 November 2023).
- **7 November 2023:** Preacher Chang Hao has been [detained](#) for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and has held beyond the legally permitted length of detention. When visited by a lawyer after many delays, he also reported of abuse in prison (China Aid, 18 March 2024).
- **30 October 2023:** A police raid towards the end of October in Chengdu left deacon Jia Xuwei with a [broken rib](#); during an interrogation, a national security agent assaulted him (China Aid, 5 December 2023).
- **25 October 2023:** Chen Wensheng was [arrested](#) by authorities in Shenyang, Hunan province charged with “organizing and funding illegal gatherings” (China Aid, 2 April 2024).

Specific examples of positive developments

- **30 September 2024:** After being detained and held under “residential surveillance at a designated location” for two years, Wang Qiang from Linfen Covenant House Church, Shanxi Province, was [released](#) and re-united with his family (China Aid, 8 October 2024).
- **16 September 2024:** After more than 18 years imprisonment, Pastor David Lin has been [released](#) and left for his home in Texas (BBC News, 16 September 2024).
- **5 March 2024:** After imprisonment for 7 years, Pastor John Cao has been [released](#) from a prison in Kunming, Yunnan province (5 March 2024).
- **January 2024:** Authorities in Hong Kong approved the [first Catholic university](#) in the city (UCA News, 10 January 2024). St. Francis University has around 2,500 students and offers post-secondary programs in 35 different disciplines.

As can be seen from the percentages listed above, there are more Protestant churches in China than Catholic ones. The Three-Self-Patriotic Movement (TSPM), which is overseen by the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party (UFDW), was founded in 1954 and derives its name from following three principles: Self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. It has branches all across China and runs its own theological seminaries. The TSPM is the subject of a [comprehensive study](#) published in 2021 (China Source, 22 May 2024) and covers the hotly debated topics of Sinicization and of who is ultimately in charge in TSPM churches. The author describes the relationship with the Communist authorities as a balance between domination and circumvention. How this balance plays out in the long term, remains to be seen.

House churches, on the other hand, are more numerous than TSPM churches and are also spread across the whole of China, but they are less connected and organized. They are independent, are not associated with the TSPM or the China Christian Council and often follow a variant of evangelical theology; there are also Baptist, Pentecostal and other groups among them. It is said that the majority of house churches are [Pentecostal](#) in character (China Source, 13 June 2023). They flourished in the 1980s, following the end of the Cultural Revolution, but predate this time. In the 1990s, they experienced a strong trend to urbanization, following the general worker migration in society.

Catholics make up only a small part of the Christian presence in China, but have similar structures to the Protestants. In 1957, the Catholic-Patriotic Association (CPA) was formed, which also comes under the CCP's UFDW jurisdiction. Catholic churches are most numerous in the province of Hebei and in the northern and central parts of China. Apart from the CPA, there are independent Catholic churches and networks, which adhere to the primacy of the Roman Catholic pontiff in Rome. The Vatican [extended its agreement](#) with the Chinese government concerning the appointment of bishops for another two years (AP News, 22 October 2022). Despite all criticism and clearly aware of the agreement's limitations, the Vatican has apparently decided that the benefits outweigh the risks. As the content of the agreement continues to be barred from publication, further details are not available. However, evidence is emerging that the Vatican is not happy with the agreement. In an interview in March 2023, Monsignor Paul Gallagher, Vatican Secretary for the relation with states said it was "[not the best deal possible](#), because of the other party" (UCA News, 15 March 2023). Shortly after this statement was made, Bishop Joseph Shen Bin was transferred to become the bishop of Shanghai in a unilateral move. The Holy See only learned of it from the media, which led Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Secretary of State, remark that "Chinese Catholics, even those defined as 'clandestine,' deserve trust," and should be "[respected in their conscience](#) and their faith.", indirectly acknowledging that there still is an underground Catholic church which should be respected in their decisions (Bitter Winter, 17 July 2023).

Beijing's approach towards Catholicism can be described as 'controlling by diplomacy' and seems to be working reasonably well, as could be seen most recently at a conference in Rome on 21 May 2024 commemorating a landmark meeting in 1924, in which foreign missionaries in Shanghai affirmed the need for local church leadership. The commemoration took place in the Vatican and included a keynote address by the Catholic bishop of Shanghai, Joseph Shen Bin. This has been termed '[the first time in memory](#)' that China's Communist authorities allowed a mainland bishop to participate and even speak at a conference in the Vatican (AP News, 21 May 2024).

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians

Compared to the other categories of Christian communities below, expatriate Christian communities experience more freedom, but they face monitoring and limitations in their contact with local Chinese churches. In 2020, the Chinese authorities published a draft of [new rules](#) for foreigners and their involvement in religious activities in China (CNN, 25 November 2020). These rules are part of a series of tightening laws on religion. Given that the Communist Party (CCP) has always been wary of 'foreign connections' or even 'interference' in religious affairs, it is not surprising that the new rules limit the extent of citizens' contact with foreign worshippers in the country. A country expert summed up the challenges: "Foreign Christian fellowships must be authorized and face restrictions on size, location, frequency of meeting, and activities. Local believers are not permitted to participate unless they hold foreign passports. While foreign Christians may attend TSPM churches, doing so could cause problems for church leadership (heightened surveillance, investigation). Foreign Christians participating in unregistered gatherings may results in their being subject to surveillance, harassment, detention, or expulsion from the country."

Historical Christian communities and government-controlled churches

This category highlights a unique factor in Chinese Christianity: There are registered and government-recognized churches – the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) – and non-registered, independent churches. On the Roman Catholic side, these independent congregations are the followers loyal to the Vatican. TSPM and CPA-related churches are government-controlled and even if there is no direct censorship, their leaders will carefully weigh their words. Election of leadership is state influenced. [TSPM](#) and [CPA](#) have each published five-year-plans on how their churches will 'Sinicize' (UCA News, 17 August 2020 and 2 August 2018). Churches have published leadership-level white papers on this topic, e.g., on [Sinicization](#) in a Catholic context (UCA News, 23 July 2018). As one country expert said: "Under the Sinification campaign they are pressured to conform their Christian doctrine and expressions of faith to the Party's requirement that these be in accord with Party ideology and free from foreign influence." However, it is important to understand that, despite growing challenges, there are many faithful Christians in the [state-approved churches](#) (Global China Center, 22 April 2024).

Converts to Christianity

Converts are either from a Muslim background or from a Buddhist (Tibetan) background. Living in ethnic minority regions where some elements strive for independence and which are becoming ever more volatile, converts are facing pressure from two sides - from the government and family and community. While the government restricts any meeting or action it deems political or dangerous (for more on this, see below: *Trends Summary #2*), family, friends and community put converts under pressure to return to the "true faith", because it is an important uniting factor for the ethnic groups, especially in times when the Communist authorities are pushing for homogeneity and imposing an "Ethnic Unity Law".

Non-traditional Christian communities

This category is made up of a multitude of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations under a whole variety of names, frequently not affiliated with denominations. On the Protestant side, these (often unregistered) non-traditional churches are also called house churches or underground churches, sometimes also family churches. Unlike several years ago, when congregations consisted of hundreds or thousands of members and in some provinces met openly in commercial buildings, most house churches have now split up and returned to home gatherings. This category is seriously affected by the intensification of control and 'Sinification'.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Converts from a Muslim or Buddhist background from minority ethnic groups arguably face the most severe violations of religious freedom in China as it is driven by their families and communities as well. Consequently, hotspots are Xinjiang, Tibet and Western China with the provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan, but also Qinghai and Ningxia (where Muslim minorities are mostly found). Many Tibetans are living in the west of Sichuan; Guizhou and Yunnan are home to many ethnic minorities as well. Yunnan, for instance, is also home to the minority of Hui Muslims.

As Protestant Christians are more concentrated in the provinces of Henan, Zhejiang, Anhui and Jiangxi, and the numbers of Catholic Christians in Hebei are high, those provinces might be additionally considered to be hotspots. However, Christians and Christian churches face increasing restrictions and monitoring countrywide and reports are coming from almost all provinces, as can be seen from the selection of reports listed above in "Specific examples of violations".

Position on the World Watch List

China: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	78	15
WWL 2024	78	19
WWL 2023	77	16
WWL 2022	76	17
WWL 2021	74	17

The increase in overall score of 0.3 points in WWL 2025 (after increases of 0.4 points in WWL 2024, 1.1 points in WWL 2023, of 1.7 points in WWL 2022, more than four points in WWL 2021, five points in WWL 2020 and seven points in WWL 2019), shows a continually deteriorating situation and reflects that the strong pressure on churches, no matter whether they are government-affiliated or not, is felt nationwide. It is getting very difficult to avoid having to fall in line with official Communist ideology, especially with the continued flurry of published guidelines and policies affecting churches. Reports are now emerging concerning the effects of ideological education and the history and doctrine of the Communist Party of China (CCP) on state-approved churches in particular. The violence score remained at the same level as in WWL 2024. Churches continued to gather in smaller groups or even moved

completely online. The scores for pressure in the 5 Spheres of life slightly increased across all spheres. Whereas the motive behind all restrictions is the implementation of Communist ideology, the concrete reason for the small increase was a stricter implementation of rules concerning the ideological education of clergy and laypeople. All regulations on religion, introduced from 2018 until 2024, are now being implemented in a strict and uniform manner.

Persecution engines

China: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Very weak
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Very weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Very strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Weak

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Very strong):

The over-arching goal of the CCP is to maintain its power through national unity and by limiting outside influences. The rulers will do everything they deem necessary to reach these goals. Recent years have shown a growing orthodoxy in ideology and in emphasizing Communist values: One country expert explained this phenomenon as follows: "In the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, this varied depending upon the attitudes of provincial authorities, so that some provinces were known to be more severe and hardline, while others were more relaxed. However, under Xi Jinping's leadership, policy on religion has been increasingly centralized and determined at the top, in Beijing, and so the picture is more consistent throughout the country." Clergy and lay-leaders of all state-approved religions face a stronger pressure to participate in seminars on Sinification of religion and in so-called "red tours" to sites of historical importance for the Communist Party.

Secretary General Xi Jinping is arguably the strongest Communist leader since Mao Zedong and the "core of the party". At the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, Xi Jinping achieved a third term of rule and after time limitations had already been abolished in 2018, it is very possible and indeed likely that he will be in charge for much longer than the official term which extends to 2027.

The leadership's goal of maintaining power and social harmony includes the control of all religions (as these are a strong force in society) and hence the control of the Christian minority as well. This is even truer for the volatile regions of Buddhist Tibet and Muslim Xinjiang. In these regions, the government has further tightened its grip, and this is not only felt by ethnic groups striving for independence, but also by the respective groups of converts to the Christian faith and even strongly by Han Chinese Christians. Inner Mongolia has become another ethnic minority region under increasing pressure to Sinicize. In many regions of China, Christian activities have increasingly been hindered (especially concerning activities for children and youth camps) and although house-churches were still targeted the most, government-controlled churches have faced restrictive control as well. A similar pattern can be seen for the Catholic church. The COVID-19 pandemic measures made it possible to "drown out" churches, with the authorities simply not allowing them to re-open.

One country expert shared: "There is evidence that suggests that China and the CCP are pivoting away from traditional Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought in favor of an approach which emphasizes a single totalitarian ruler who can set aside rule by law in times of crisis and reinstate the rule by law when the crises abates. Chinese constitutional scholars who defend the rule of Xi Jinping turn to the work of the German Jurist Carl Schmitt as an alternative to Western Liberal Democracies in favor of a totalitarian framework quite different from those that were established by Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. This places the Church in an ambiguous situation in that if they are identified as 'enemies' to the nation, they risk elimination, but if they offer loyalty and accept the sovereignty of the Sovereign and the CCP they will be allowed to exist."

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

President Xi Jinping has consolidated his power in a manner not seen since Mao Zedong, and under Xi the Communist Party has become almost militant in its efforts to attack any perceived threat to its authority. The main objective of the CCP is to maintain power, increasingly this seems to mean keeping President Xi in power. Given the overarching goal of ensuring 'national security' and the broad definition of that term, it is not surprising that Christians have come under additional scrutiny as well. In some ways, ideology is a tool which serves this purpose rather than being an end in itself. For example, Christianity is seen as a potential threat because it involves people organizing and rallying around something outside Party control, rather than specifically because of its theology. In a situation where strong economic growth is not a natural given anymore and the goal of achieving 'common prosperity' becomes more challenging, falling back on ideology and relying on more repressive politics could almost be described as a natural reflex.

Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism - Buddhist (Very weak):

Disclaimer: *The fact that the strength of the engines Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism is described here as 'very weak' (instead of 'Weak' as in previous reporting periods) does not mean there have been changes for the better on the ground. The new categorization is purely because WWL analysis aims to evaluate countries as a whole and an adjustment was seen as necessary since Xinjiang and Tibet are so sparsely populated (together making up less than 2% of China's total population). In fact, the situation has deteriorated for all citizens in these regions, including Christians, as the authorities intensified their suppression.*

The north-western state of Xinjiang, where the Muslim Uighur minority lives, is under very heavy control, making observers speak of a [police state](#), especially after re-education camps were set up (BBC News, 1 February 2018). Recent examples and reports can be found below (in: *Persecution of other religious minorities* and *Trends Summary #2*). Life for the small number of Christian converts from a Muslim background – most likely a few thousand – is extremely complicated. They suffer from the increased general pressure from the government, but additionally face problems from their own family, friends and neighbors. Any deviation from the Muslim creed and traditions are seen as a disgrace and even as betrayal, since every Uighur is expected to be a Muslim. Although reports on the situation of the converts is difficult to obtain, all information received points to a very harsh situation, sometimes even involving violent incidents such as physical abuse by families.

What has been said about *Islamic oppression* above also applies to the even smaller group of Christians from a Buddhist background in the Chinese region of Tibet (in far western China). Pressure and violence are increasing and the Chinese authorities do everything in their power to curb the Tibetan struggle for independence. On 1 May 2020 a so-called "[Ethnic Unity Law](#)" came into force, undermining Tibetan identity even further (RFA, 1 May 2020). Tibetan Christians face strong opposition from family, friends, neighbors and communities. To have a 'deviant faith' in this region has a high price as conversion to Christianity basically shuts one out of the community.

Drivers of persecution

China: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY WEAK	VERY WEAK				VERY STRONG		STRONG	
Government officials	Very weak	Very weak				Very strong		Very strong	
Ethnic group leaders	Weak	Weak				Very weak			
Non-Christian religious leaders						Weak			
Religious leaders of other churches						Weak			
Ideological pressure groups						Weak		Weak	
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak	Weak				Weak			

China: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY WEAK	VERY WEAK				VERY STRONG		STRONG	
One's own (extended) family	Weak	Weak				Weak			
Political parties						Very strong		Very strong	

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong ". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression

- Political parties (Very strong):** In their efforts to control and guide religious bodies, the Communist Party and government authorities, which are increasingly hard to distinguish, are the main drivers of persecution, discrimination and intolerance against Christians. The Communist Party increasingly boxes Christians in by controlling and acting against them. This is especially because Christians are the largest social body in China not under complete state-control, even though they are not united. It should be kept in mind that there are at least [281 million members](#) of the CCP and its affiliated youth organizations (Pew Research Centre, 23 October 2023), who are officially banned from engaging in a broad range of spiritual activities' (not to forget family members). In strongly Communist families, the family can become another driver since no-one who wants to become a member of the Party or make a career in public service is allowed to be religious. Muslim and Tibetan leaders can be co-opted by the Communist Party to toe the official party line. If they act as Party officials, they can be additional drivers of persecution.
- Government officials (Very strong):** Whoever wants to become a government official at a higher level has to be member of the Communist Party who follows its ideology and directives. Without this, no career is possible. Whether officials at all levels are totally convinced of Communism's superiority is another question, but in order to prove being ideologically trustworthy, the policy against religions needs to be implemented, even more so as it is now the CCP closely watching over it. The degree of implementation of policies used to vary per region, city and even village, but such variations or gray zones are becoming smaller and smaller. The pattern of promotions and demotions as observed at the 20th Party Congress shows that toeing the ideological line and proximity to Xi Jinping are rewarded and this even more so in times where the external environment gets more challenging. As one country expert explained: "The top Communist Party leadership harbors strong anti-religious and anti-foreign sentiment, which translates into policies enacted throughout the entire political system. Legislators in the National People's Congress enact laws that discriminate against Christians. Ministries under the State Council are responsible for policies affecting all areas of life, including media, education and social organizations, that are also discriminatory. The Party routinely uses these various arms of government to prevent the spread of religion and to keep believers under control. Security organs at the national and local levels conduct surveillance and take action against unauthorized religious activities, often in collaboration with officials from the Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD) and State

Administration for Religious Affairs, which is under the UFWD. Under the guidance of the Party, the judicial branch ensures that those apprehended for such activities are punished. The Party itself is officially atheist, as is the military; religious believers are technically not permitted membership in these organizations."

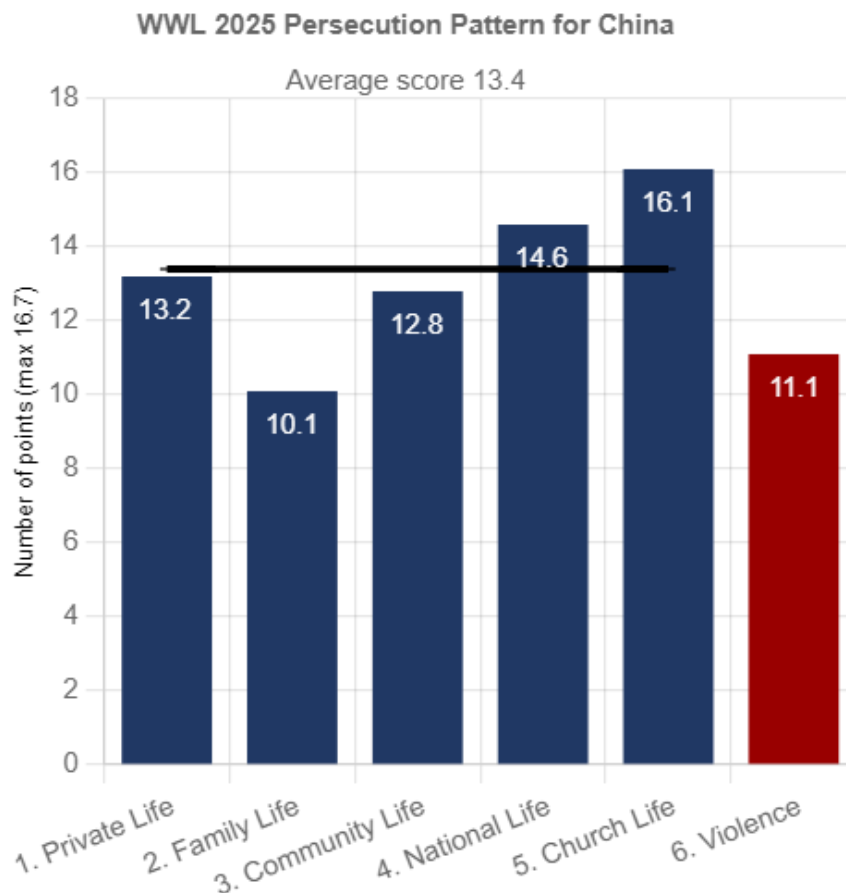
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Political parties (Very strong):** In their effort to stay in power, the Communist Party and the government authorities have carefully studied what led to the downfall of Communism elsewhere. One factor is the control of social groups such as Christians, who are still seen as alien and connected with foreign (mainly Western) powers and their potential to organize a significant percentage of the population independently from the Communist Party. The role of the Communist Party has grown stronger over the years, culminating in the old slogan "east, west, north, south, center - the party rules over all!".
- **Government officials (Very strong):** An official's own position depends on the Communist Party continuing to hold onto power and on how satisfied superiors are with their work. Therefore, most government officials will do everything possible to secure their position and career, no matter whether they are personally convinced by Communist ideology or not. A standardized implementation of national policies throughout the vast country is a challenge, but the CCP puts a lot of pressure on officials to get policies implemented and also provides incentives, especially since the 'better management' of religious groups is one of the Party's top priorities.

Drivers of Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism - Buddhist

- **Ethnic group leaders (Weak):** The small convert communities from a Muslim and Buddhist background face difficulties from Muslim and Buddhist religious leaders. These are still influential in Xinjiang and Tibet, as in many cases they also serve official functions in administration and the Communist Party. Although the CCP is taking back the control from religious leaders, some of them remain influential as they perform the rituals for local people like weddings or funerals. Converts will face difficulties in all of these cases, if their conversion is known. Often such leaders are wearing several hats, as they double as Party members and/or village heads. Whereas nationwide, their influence on pressure on Christians is very weak, locally and regionally, their influence is strong.
- **Extended family and Normal citizens (Weak):** Converts also face a lot of pressure to return to their old faith from the community they live in and their own parents and family. Conversion is seen as more than just changing religion; it is regarded as betrayal of the family and local community. Whereas nationwide, their influence on pressure on Christians is very weak, in certain locations and regions their influence can be strong.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for China shows:

- The average score for pressure on Christians in China rose from 13.3 in WWL 2024 to 13.4 points in WWL 2025. The score for pressure increased in almost all spheres of life, showing that the increasing restrictions over the years are having broad consequences. Pressure for implementing the new regulations on religion from 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 came directly from the national state level and the implementation has been rolled out over all provinces and implemented according to the will of the Communist Party, directly implemented by the United Front Work Department (UFW), not the government. The legal and administrative environment became even more difficult, not just for the so-called house churches, but also for churches belonging to the Three Self Patriotic movement as well. The pressure to fall in line with and repeat the prevailing ideology of praising the achievements of the Communist Party in sermons and other areas of teaching has become much stronger (especially with more systematic efforts to get clergy and laypeople on board). This poses arguably one of the greatest risks for Christians in the long term.
- Pressure is strongest in the *Church* and *National spheres of life* (with extreme scores of 16.1 and 14.6 respectively). While pressure in these spheres is typical for countries where *Communist and post-Communist oppression* is active, the pressure in the *Private sphere* (13.2) points to the problems Christian converts with a Muslim or Buddhist background are facing, but is increasingly mixed with pressure on individual believers - not just churches - to adhere to Communist beliefs

and on limitations concerning the revealing of one's Christian faith, including on social media. This is also true for the *Family sphere*, which still has the lowest score of all spheres with 10.1 points. Pressure from *Islamic oppression* and *Religious nationalism* is present not just in the *Private sphere*, but also in the *Family* and *Community spheres*. But increased pressure resulting from *Communist and post-Communist oppression* is felt more strongly in these spheres as well, for example in questions dealing with education or with employment. For instance, this is the case where Christians are teachers or medical staff and/or are members (or have family who are members) of the Communist Party.

- The score for violence against Christians remained at 11.1 points. Reporting from China decreased over the last two reporting periods in general and has become more complicated since house churches have had to split up and are no longer able to meet in the ways they used to prior to the COVID-19 crisis. China has again crossed the threshold for scoring maximum points for churches being closed (which has been the case for many years already). There were no killings reported, but an increasing number of Christians continue to be imprisoned or detained, often under accusation of "illegal business operations", fraud or of acting against state security. The authorities - and the CCP in particular - do not seem to care much about negative international headlines in this respect or, in fact, in any human rights-related issue.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2025 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.75 points)

For converts with a Muslim or Buddhist background from minority ethnic groups, it is virtually impossible to talk with others about their faith. If a convert dares to do so and is reported, he or she would be warned by local authorities and – depending on the case – could even be detained for a few days. Christians among Communist Party members, military staff, government officials or educators practice self-censorship, since being seen as religious carries a risk. The increasing overall pressure on churches and Christians discourages them from speaking about their faith and leads them to adapt to the tightening circumstances and to more self-censorship in general.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.50 points)

This is especially true for three groups of Christians, which will face different levels of opposition. 1) Members of ethnic minorities, especially Muslims and Tibetans, will face the strongest pressure against conversion, up to being physically harmed in some cases. 2) Party and military members and applicants for these positions (more than 281 million people, plus, to a lesser extent, family members) as well as civil servants. They will also face pressure to keep their conversion a secret. However, depending on

their family, they may at least be able to be open about it at home. 3) Finally, young Christians (under 18 years of age) will face opposition. This is a group of about 20% of the population (and partly overlapping with the number mentioned above, although numbers are disputed) and they are legally not permitted to attend any religious meetings. This law aims at hindering young people from converting to any faith, including Christianity. As one country expert shared: "Increased atheistic education in schools is aimed at discouraging young people from believing in religion." At the same time, indoctrination by the Communist Youth League is growing.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)

Although the implementation of online regulations was only starting to be rolled out in 2022, at least 15 different social media channels run by Christians on WeChat have already been shut down. The times where one account would be able to reappear under a different name, after it had been closed down, seem to be over. This is not to say that sharing one's faith via such media is impossible, but it has become riskier and more difficult and the authorities have grown more sophisticated at - what one correspondent involved in this work called - playing a "game of cat and mouse". There are still differences being observed whether an account has a large viewership or not, and the authorities seem to be facing manpower limitations, but the general trend of a higher risk is clear. This leads to added caution and more self-censorship on the part of Christians.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points)

Access to Christian content on the Internet is possible in general and communication on social media can also take place, leading some observers not long ago to speak of a "vibrant online Christian community". However, all this is strictly monitored by the government and is becoming increasingly restricted. 'Audible' and Bible apps in the Apple store have been [banned](#) as have Quran apps (AP News, 15 October 2021). Jonah Home, a well-known Christian website for sharing resources, has [shut down](#) after 21 years of service (Christianity Daily, 2 May 2022). The authorities are also quick to act against what they see as "illegal activities" in the Internet, including religious activities (UCA News, 3 August 2020); several of those in contact with Christian websites have been visited and interrogated. Overall, especially with the new regulations, Christians have become much [more cautious](#) in accessing and sharing Christian material on the Internet, although it is still done (Christianity Today, 3 March 2022). One country expert summed up the situation: "There is a decided push to eliminate the use of the internet to download any Christian materials over the internet." For converts to Christianity in Xinjiang and Tibet it has been especially risky to access Christian content, but they only number a few thousand..

TSPM churches are allowed to have websites, once they register, and many have good evangelical content of these websites. Christians are already preparing for more restrictions and a good deal of self-censorship is practiced. The government increasingly blocks website content and limits the space of available content, e.g., by blocking Bible apps. While it is still common for Chinese Christians to use VPN to obtain resources on the Internet, the risk for doing this is increasing as authorities are checking and frequent users of VPN would catch the attention of the authorities.

For converts with a Muslim or Buddhist background from minority ethnic groups, it is far too dangerous to wear Christian symbols such as a cross or indicate Christian faith by displaying Bible verses at home. Young people under the age of 18 are legally prohibited from attending religious meetings and are also not supposed to display any Christian symbols. But also for other Christians, there have been some reports from areas such as Beijing, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Jilin, Shaanxi, Shanxi and Sichuan, where the authorities have threatened Christians. For Christians who are Communist Party members or who serve in the armed forces, as well as for teachers and students, this can be risky, as they are not supposed to belong to any religion, let alone show it. Hundreds of Christians have been subject to varying degrees of detention and house arrest in the WWL 2025 reporting period, including "Residential surveillance in a designated location".

Muslim Uighur and Tibetan Buddhist converts have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only Christians in their family. Bibles and other Christian materials have to be hidden carefully and can only be read with much caution since devout Muslim or Tibetan-Buddhist families will not accept this. Meeting with other Christians is a special challenge in these circumstances as on the one hand it is dangerous for the converts themselves, and on the other hand it may endanger other Christians at the meeting. Meeting with high-profile church leaders, especially those known for having connections abroad, is very risky as well. Known converts are closely monitored and will face threats and in some cases even physical or mental abuse.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)

Children of all categories of Christian throughout the country are forced to study anti-biblical and anti-religious teachings as the atheist education system discourages religious belief (this is a campaign which was re-started in 2018). Children of Christians have been put under pressure to reveal their parents' religion, which indicates the levels of pressure teachers' superiors and the CCP are exercising, but not necessarily about the teachers' own attitudes. The introduction of the "Children speak in unison" plan led one observer to state that the educational reforms contained in that plan "aim to mold model citizens from pre-school" (Jamestown, 10 September 2021). The Young Pioneers and Young Communist League actively recruit in schools, putting strong pressure on Christian students to declare loyalty to the Party.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points)

As indicated above, in some parts of China, children have been set under pressure to tell teachers (who in turn have been pressured by their superiors, see Question 2.8) and the local authorities if their parents are active adherents of a specific religion. The CCP goes to great lengths to encourage an anti-religious mindset in children and warns that religious activities are to be regarded as illegal behavior. Strong atheistic education and promotional opportunities based on a young person's loyalty to the CCP, as well as restrictions on minors attending church, make it difficult for Christian parents to raise their children according to their Christian beliefs.

Another area where the CCP places a lot of emphasis is on influencing the younger generation to fully take on board Communist culture. It is therefore of no surprise that [home-schooling](#) is totally illegal, as is religious instruction for minors under the age of 18 (Christianity Today, 7 April 2022). Christian parents looking for ways for their children to avoid imbibing CCP ideology in the state education system have no real options. For converts from Muslim or Buddhist background, members of their wider family will try to influence the education of their children. One country expert summed up: “Atheistic education in schools discourages children from believing, particularly for students who want to advance socially and academically by joining the Party-run Young Pioneers or Young Communist League. Most Christian-run private schools have been closed down due to the state's crackdowns on private education and on religious activity for children.”

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 points)

If children remain strong in their Christian faith, despite being constantly taught otherwise, teachers (and peers) often discourage them from attending Christian activities in order to avoid pressure from superiors. Religious books are seen as "reactionary readings" and students are strongly discouraged from reading them. By law, all children are required to attend state school education according to the 9-year free education scheme. This policy has been very strictly implemented by the authorities. Reportedly, a [survey](#) form investigates the religious affiliation of college students and graduates in China and prohibits them from expressing any religious convictions (China Aid, 27 May 2022). Young people in some areas have been threatened with not being allowed to graduate or with not being accepted for further studies. This pressure is even stronger on children of known converts.

Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)

For converts, baptisms cannot be held in public, and even baptizing them "low profile" to avoid being exposed carries a risk. While the authorities would detain a pastor who baptizes converts of Muslim and Buddhist background from minority ethnic groups, in most cases they would be released after a few days with a stern warning. Likewise, it is not permitted to baptize Christians under the age of 18 or a Party or Youth League member, a limitation which is felt more strongly by the TSPM churches as they are more visible and much better known to the authorities. Technically, TSPM and Catholic Patriotic Movement churches are the only ones which are allowed to conduct baptisms, and the number of baptisms should not be noticeably high. As a country researcher for China said, house churches are no longer able to baptize publicly and especially not in the open.

In Tibet and Xinjiang, the situation is volatile and the more pressure the government places on society in these provinces, the more a conversion is seen as being a disgrace to the family and as a betrayal of the close-knit community life. Therefore, converts are very cautious and tend to hide their new-won faith. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce (if married) and may lose their inheritance rights. It is difficult for them to organize Christian weddings or funerals. Converts are expected to hold a traditional wedding ceremony and can therefore celebrate a Christian wedding only in hiding, if at all. But even house church Christians can face problems in that respect, as the ongoing challenges of the Early Rain Community Church and its daughter churches in Chengdu, Sichuan, show. One reason that the score in the Family sphere is lower than that for the other spheres is that the registration of births etc. is not a problem (see Questions 2.1 and 2.2).

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)

Converts, mainly of Muslim and Buddhist background from minority ethnic groups, are put under pressure by family, friends and neighbors to renounce their Christian faith, and their children face discrimination and bias from Muslim or Buddhist teachers and pupils at school. Monitoring (e.g., by school authorities and neighborhood committees) is ubiquitous in the whole country and affects Christians as well as other citizens. One country expert plainly called surveillance "a fact of life" in China. Targets for monitoring are places where people meet, but also "high-profile" Christians who come under special scrutiny as they are either outspokenly critical of the administration or are seen as being connected to foreign groups. However, the criteria are not always so clear-cut. The Communist Party operates a system of rewards to encourage security guards in the community to report any irregularities; this grid management system is tight and used for several purposes, including monitoring neighborhoods.

Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.75 points)

Meetings organized by Communist Party groups on a frequent basis (most commonly at the workplace), can be regarded as being quasi-religious. They invoke the Communist spirit and serve to align every part of society with Communist ideology. Civil servants, and staff in other public institutions and most workplaces, are required to attend and participate in community events organized by the local Communist authorities. In many cases, these events include singing Communist hymns and chanting slogans. The Young Pioneers and Young Communist League in schools are further examples; but also TSPM churches are required to celebrate Communist Party anniversaries. Communist ideology is ever present, be it in the media or in hoardings dotting the landscape and cities.

Muslim and Buddhist converts can be forced to participate in religious ceremonies and Christians of all backgrounds can be pressured to join rituals of ancestor worship, depending on family customs.

Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

In public employment, discrimination against Christians is more common than in private employment, but with the growing emphasis on Communist ideology in companies, not unheard of. It also has to be kept in mind that the state-owned enterprise sector is much larger than in most other countries, so public and quasi-public employment is more the norm than in other countries. However, there are cases where the government has interfered in employment matters and pressed private employers to terminate contracts with religious believers. Private employers are required to have an active Party Cell and all religious believers are excluded from government positions which require Party membership.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

In Xinjiang and Tibet, interrogation by the police is highly common, but Christians are a particular target since they are regarded as being potential "troublemakers". This is also true for Han Chinese church leaders in these regions. But even throughout China, church leaders and ordinary (often: key) church members are increasingly being called in for interrogation at police stations and offices of the Religious Administration. The former, well-known invitation to church leaders "to meet for a cup of tea" with the authorities has now been widely replaced with open monitoring and direct interrogation, often taking place after raids. One country expert stated: "Police keep tabs on all known religious leaders (registered or unregistered)." There have been numerous reports of cases concerning high-profile and less well-known churches (e.g., from the provinces of Anhui, Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Henan, Nei Mongol, Shanxi and Sichuan), and it is more than likely that most cases go unreported.

In an effort to fulfil the new Party regulations dealing with religion, local authorities do not shy away from switching their mode of operation from monitoring to indoctrination, intimidation and swift implementation. This may be a reflection of the fact that it is the Communist Party which has taken control of all religious affairs via the already mentioned UFD in concert with local government agencies. There are hardly any gray areas left for local authorities in dealing with religious communities and especially house churches. One Christian shared: "For Han Christians, you may not be successful in doing business with government entities, because the government generally avoids getting involved with people of faith (if they know they are Christians)."

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)

While China does recognize freedom of religion in its Constitution, the implementation of this freedom is a far cry from having any real or even concrete meaning. The Constitution makes this freedom contingent upon the priorities of the state, which has the power to define what constitutes "normal" religious activity. As the article "Freedom in handcuffs: Religious Freedom in the Constitution of China" explains, this right is limited by five restrictions described in Article 36 of the Constitution: i) Atheism is the official ideology of the state; ii) freedom of religion is just a legal not a fundamental right; iii) the Constitution enumerates citizen's obligations limiting the right; iv) Article 36 protects the inner freedom to have a particular religion, but not the freedom to outwardly live according to its rules of faith; and v) Article 36 speaks of "normal" religious activity (Professor Songfeng Li in: [Journal of Law and Religion](#) 35, No. 1/2020, pp. 113–137). One country expert put it more simply: The Constitution is interpreted in such a way as to generally exclude religious practice and self-administration.

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (4.00 points)

The laws for both Chinese and overseas NGOs forbid organizations from engaging in religious activities. The space for Christian NGOs is therefore shrinking. Nevertheless, some Chinese NGOs still try to find some remaining space to operate in but have to do this under CCP supervision. China does not allow any political parties independent of the Communist Party and any political activity outside the CCP is

forbidden; thus, any Christians attempting to set up an organization for political purposes will be dealt with swiftly by the authorities.

Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (4.00 points)

Courts in China serve the purposes of the Communist Party. They are not impartial, do not follow the rule of law principle and do not have juries. As a result, in cases in which the defendant is a Christian and the prosecutor is the state, once cases get to court, the verdict has already been decided by the Party and the prosecutors and the courts will decide accordingly. In the WWL 2025 reporting period, there have been a number of cases of Christians being sentenced, sometimes to long prison sentences (see above: Specific examples of violations). It is notable that Christians are increasingly being sentenced on charges seemingly unrelated to matters of religion, such as taking part in illegal business operations, fraud or offences against national security.

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

All Communist Party members are by definition expected to be atheists. So it is clear that Party members, army staff and civil servants are not allowed to have any religious belief and even their family members are not supposed to be religious in any way. If their Christian faith becomes known, they will immediately face pressure to give it up. If they refuse, they may be demoted or lose their job. Equally likely is that they cave in to the pressure and leave their public occupation. The ban on holding religious beliefs in public employment has been extended to schoolteachers and medical staff. Christian youth seeking public employment do not stand a chance if their faith is known.

Publicly displaying religious symbols is risky for all Christians in the Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous regions. As one country expert said: "Officials routinely discriminate against Christians." In the media, Christianity is depicted as being a tool of Western aggression and is consequently warned against.

The March 2018 White Paper made it clear that "actively guiding religions in adapting to socialist society" not only means "guiding religious believers to love their country and compatriots, safeguard national unity [and] ethnic solidarity", but also expects all religious bodies to "be subordinate to and serve the overall interests of the nation and the Chinese people. It also means guiding religious groups to support the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system; uphold and follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics; develop religions in the Chinese context; embrace core socialist values; carry forward China's fine traditions; integrate religious teachings and rules with Chinese culture; abide by state laws and regulations, and accept state administration in accordance with the law."

One goal of this White Paper is to uncover any foreign contacts sponsoring church activities; its aim is therefore to promote the 'Chinafication' of churches. This goal has been spelled out in detail in regulations for Christian clergy and religious institutions and, most recently in the WWL 2025 reporting period, in the regulations for "patriotic education", which also apply to religious clergy and laypeople.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)

As mentioned above, the government's interest is in maintaining a "harmonious society", in "managing religion" and in only protecting "normal religious activity". In terms of religion this means not just 'managing' registered and non-registered churches but actively steering them. All communities of Christians are being monitored. In general, many church activities are not just monitored by the presence of agents, but also by CCTV cameras watching the pulpit, congregation and surrounding church compound. A country expert explained: "The preaching in Sunday services needs to be approved for TSPM churches, but situations still vary." More and more house churches experience harassment and obstruction once their activities have been discovered. Most have been forced to split up into small groups and gather in different and frequently changing locations, keeping a low-profile so as not to be detected by the sub-district officer or neighborhood committee.

The [full text of the regulations](#) for religious venues and the activities carried out in them has been translated and published (Bitter Winter, 7 August 2023). Certain articles stand out as being particularly significant:

Article 27: *Members of the management organization of places of religious activity shall have the following basic conditions: (i) Love the motherland and support the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system; (ii)...*

Article 30: *The management organization of a place of religious activity shall perform the following duties: (i) To unite and educate religious citizens to love the motherland, support the leadership of the CCP, practice socialist core values, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of China's religions, and abide by the Constitution, laws, regulations, rules and regulations and the relevant provisions of the management of religious affairs; (ii)...*

Article 36: *Places of religious activity shall establish a study system, and regularly organize the personnel of the place to study the guidelines and policies of the CCP, national laws and regulations, Chinese excellent traditional culture, religious knowledge, and so on.*

Article 39: *Religious activities shall be conducted in places of religious activity in compliance with national laws, rules and regulations, and the content of sermons and teachings shall be suitable for the characteristics of China's national conditions and the characteristics of the times, and shall be integrated with the excellent traditional Chinese culture and reflect the core socialist values.*

Article 40: *Places of religious activity shall, in the course of religious activities, strengthen the publicity and education of the sense of community of the Chinese nation, strengthen the use of the commonly used languages and scripts of the state, promote national unity and progress, guide religious citizens to enhance national consciousness, civic awareness, awareness of the rule of law, correctly distinguish between national customs and religious beliefs, and shall not use religion to interfere in the administration, judiciary, education and social life.*

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points)

The regulations on religion (February 2018 and February 2020) continued to be implemented in a very strict way which has led to churches being under tighter control and monitoring. At the same time, [new](#) regulations for religious institutions were made public in May 2021 (China Aid, 19 May 2021) and started being implemented from 1 September 2021 onwards. Beginning in the WWL 2023 reporting period, pressure increased on TSPM churches in rural areas to merge. One observer stated for his region in the WWL 2024 reporting period: "In the past, there were more than 30 church venues, but later many were cracked down. Now less than one third remain. Those closed down all qualified as official locations, having all the necessary permits." In some areas, house churches have not simply been closed down but have been placed under pressure instead to join TSPM churches. These policies seem to be continuing in the WWL 2025 reporting period and beyond.

Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points)

Monitoring is extremely strict. As part of the Sinicization campaign, pastors in registered churches are increasingly under pressure to promote CCP teaching in the churches. Training courses for preaching the Sinicization of religion have been [rolled out](#) in the three provinces of Guangdong, Liaoning and Shanxi (CCD, 15 August 2022). While such courses are still the exception and not the rule, they invite and lead to an increasing mindset of self-censorship. As part of the "patriotic education", clergy are not just attending courses, but they are also brought on so called "red tours", visiting important sites of CCP history. Reports of this come from cities and provinces like Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Liaoning, Shandong and Shanghai. At the same time, the Communist Party has introduced "[Administrative measures](#) for religious staff" for creating a national database of recognized and authorized church leaders, as well as of other religious leaders (Bitter Winter, 11 February 2021). The new rules for religious venues and the activities carried out in them have consequences for Christian teaching, preaching and published materials as well, especially with the articles quoted under 5.1 above.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)

In the highly controlled political environment that China has become under the Communist Party, foreign organizations or individuals that criticize government policies are likely to be censored and/or expelled. Christian citizens who speak out against government measures are likely to be arrested and charged with disrupting social order, spreading rumors, or endangering national security, as several Christians experienced in the WWL 2025 reporting period. The Communist Party reacts harshly against anyone who provides foreign news sources with information about persecution, which together with a drop in the number of foreign journalists has resulted in a significant reduction in independent media reporting. Since the sentencing of Pastor Wang Yi from the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan, in December 2019, many pastors have decided to avoid speaking out against the authorities, saying that it is not worth the risk. One country expert even extended the scope of this observation: "Whereas in the past there were some channels for voicing dissatisfaction with religious policies, today no dissenting voices are allowed. Christians who attempt to speak out publicly or who participate in efforts to raise awareness of the plight of persecuted believers are subject to prosecution. The risk

exists not only for those residing in China, but also elsewhere. China now has the capacity to silence critics worldwide."

While Christian material is still available online, the scope is decreasing and accessing it is becoming increasingly difficult. Messages posted by high profile Christians on public message boards for the People's Congress have been [deleted](#) (China Aid, 23 February 2022), as has the [social media account](#) of the Presbyterian Church of Shanghai (China Aid, 13 May 2022).

TSPM churches are applying for the new religious online licenses and reportedly the first (TSPM) churches in Jiangsu province were issued with the [license for "Internet Religious Information Services"](#) in March 2022 (CCD, 11 March 2022). It should be noted that there seems to be no national regulation containing any provision about minors and their 'exposure' to religion. However, there is an increasing number of [provincial regulations](#), such as in Guizhou, Hubei, Shanxi, Qinghai, Xinjiang and Yunnan (China Zentrum, 24 November 2021). The local authorities are mainly responsible for implementing the new regulations and now that the Communist Party is in control of religious matters, a more unified and strict approach is being taken. Christians in China still experience differing levels of freedom today, but most observers agree that freedom is shrinking fast.

It seems that the aim is to 'suffocate' unregistered churches out of existence, while co-opting and strictly monitoring the TSPM churches. But according to a country expert, even TSPM churches are facing difficulties in erecting new church buildings and struggle to grow.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*

- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. The use of symbolic numbers:

- In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

China: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	10000 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	10 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100 *

China: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100 *

For the WWL 2025 reporting period (see also the cases mentioned above in: Specific examples of violations):

- **Christians attacked:** Often the arrest of Christian leaders and beatings went hand in hand with attacks on churches. Incidents have been reported from the provinces of Guangdong, Liaoning, Nei Mongol, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Sichuan and Yunnan.
- **Christians arrested or detained:** Church leaders were often detained as part of actions targeting churches. These incidents could span any length from a few hours to years. In cases of 'administrative detention', this was usually not longer than 15 days. A report entitled '[Home as prison](#)', published by NGO Safeguard Defenders on 6 September 2022, shows how much the number of house arrests in China has increased. This 'Residential Surveillance' (RS), as it is also termed, does not necessarily take place in one's own home; the location can also be a rented room in a hotel or on government premises, for example. However, the most appealing feature for security forces and prosecutors is that this tool is not under judicial review. From 2019 to 2020, the most recent years for which full data was available, the number of RS cases increased by 13%. Compared with 2013, the first full year after Xi Jinping became Secretary-General, the number has increased by more than 700%. Those are only the cases which have been officially recorded. RS is a tool which has also been frequently used against Christians, especially prominent Christian leaders. The number of reports of Christians being arrested or detained is growing and they come from all over the country, as from Anhui, Beijing, Guangxi, Guangdong, Guizhou, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jilin, Liaoning, Nei Mongol, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Shanghai, Shanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan and Zhejiang
- **Churches attacked/closed:** It is impossible to give a concrete number of incidents where churches have been attacked. One reason for this is that authorities go to great lengths to prevent reports being made. As explained throughout this dossier, in most cases, the government did not need to execute a discernable action. Many churches and meeting places have simply vanished and TSPM churches were often forced to merge and build larger units. (However, when house church gatherings have vanished, it often means that the Christians have decided to simply split up and

now meet in smaller groups at other and often changing locations.) One country expert estimated that in the reporting period of WWL 2022, up to 15,000 house churches and 5,000 TSPM churches and meeting points were closed. While the estimated minimum number for WWL 2023 was set at 1,000, for WWL 2024, the estimation was put at 10,000. As one country expert explained: "Increasingly specific regulations and some high profile cases in recent years have had a chilling effect on Christian gatherings. Unregistered churches have generally stopped public gatherings and gone to smaller meetings in order to avoid disruption. Thus, while the number of groups being shut down remains relatively small, the government has made it clear that it has the tools to go after any group should it choose to do so." For WWL 2025, the number is estimated at 1,000, as the times are over when house churches could gather publicly in venues like hotels, shopping lots and office buildings and numbered in the hundreds or even thousands at a single meeting. Additionally, connecting with the church in China from abroad became much more difficult, so concrete numbers are hard to come by.

- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Homes of Christians have been raided. Some Christians were evicted and removed by force from their homes.

5 Year trends

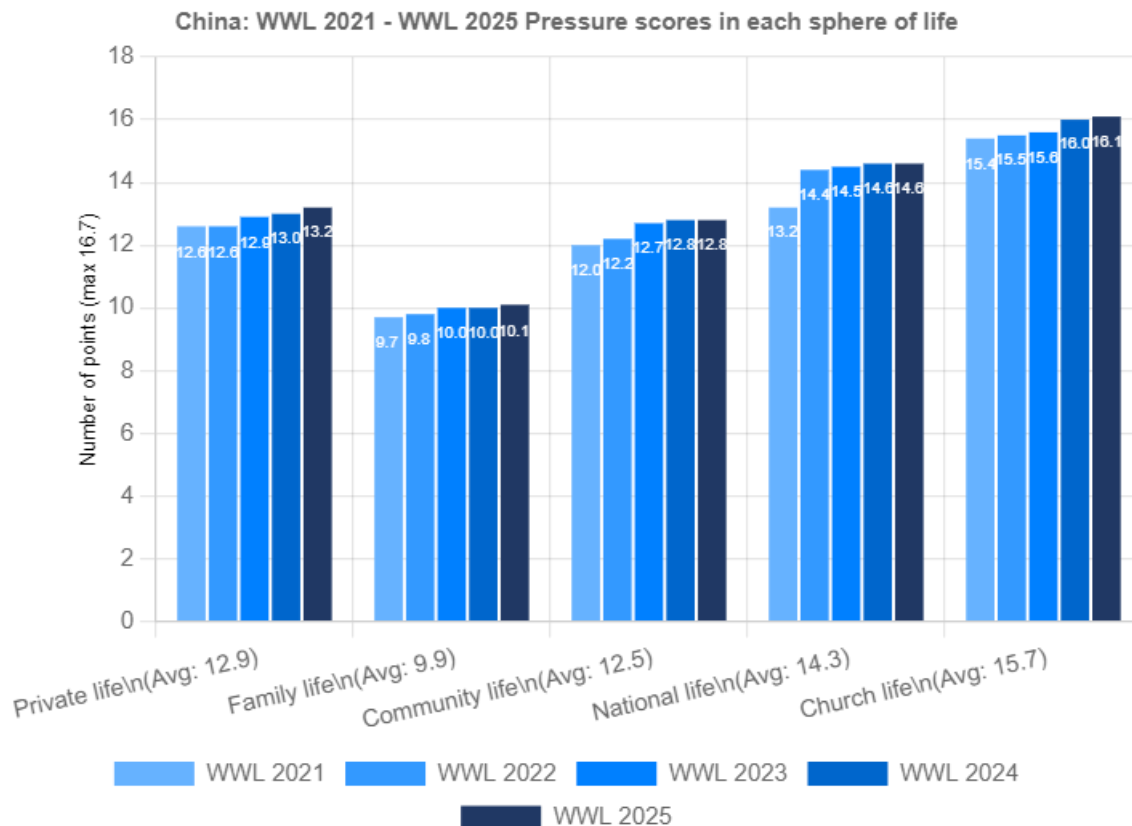
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

China: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	13.4
2024	13.3
2023	13.1
2022	12.9
2021	12.6

The score for average pressure further increased to the very high level of 13.4 points in WWL 2025, showing a period of pronounced increase after starting at 11.9 points in WWL 2020. This reflects how strict the implementation of the law on religion and related laws has been, and also includes the introduction of new laws and restrictions, up to the time of the WWL 2025 reporting period. It also indicates a consistently deteriorating situation for Christians in more and more regions of China, in both house churches and TSPM churches.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

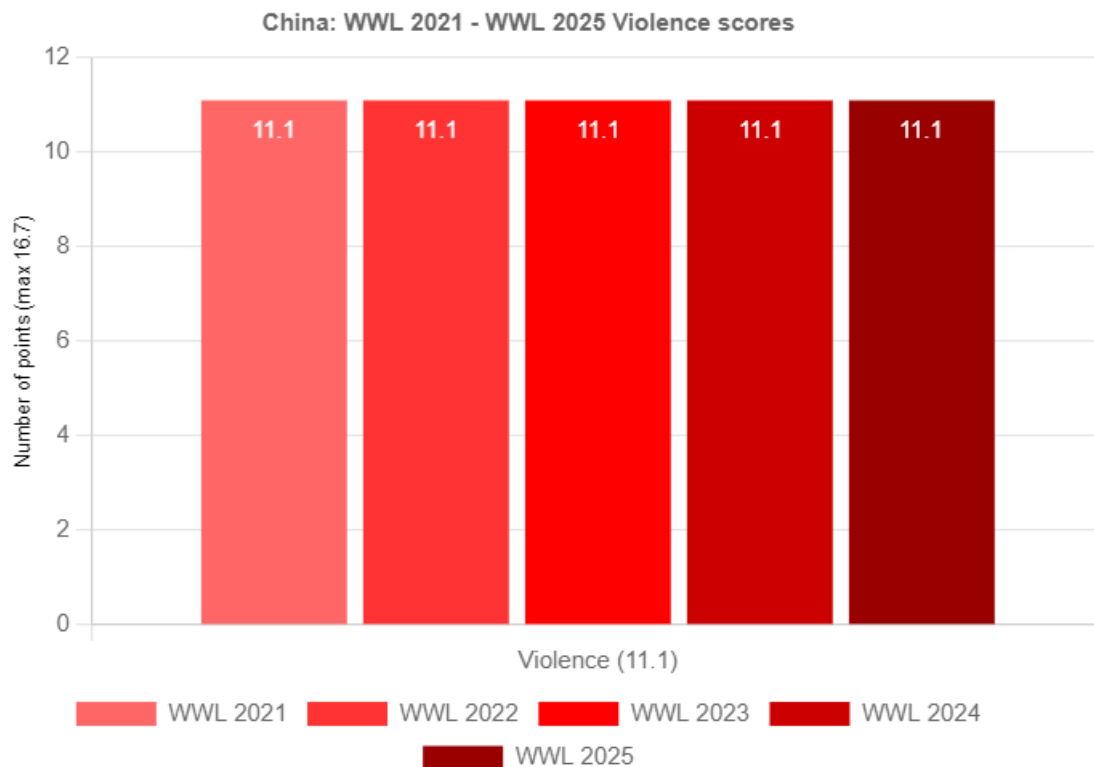


It can be seen in the chart above that all five *spheres of life* show marked increases in score over the last five reporting periods and now - in WWL 2025 - pressure has never been at a higher level in the past five years. The fact that the level of pressure in the *Family sphere* is not higher may be surprising at first sight. It should be kept in mind, however, that the situation of converts in Xinjiang and Tibet in particular has become increasingly difficult to monitor as reporting from these provinces is heavily restricted. Not surprisingly, the scores for *National life* have increased particularly significantly over the last reporting periods, reflecting the ever stronger pressure caused by the authorities bringing everything and everybody into the framework of Communist ideology.

The high scores for *Church life* have been in the category 'extreme' all through the five reporting periods, reflecting how life for all churches has become much more difficult, no matter how big or small they are or whether they are TSPM or (unregistered) house churches. That is not to say that all churches have already been targeted, but that all churches need to be cautious and have come under increasing pressure, especially when dealing with the authorities.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The scores for violence against Christians - consistently in the category "very high" - have now levelled off at 11.1 points (which is borderline to the category "extremely high"). However, there have not been any reports of Christians being killed for their faith.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

China	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<p>Forced marriage</p> <p>Trafficking</p> <p>Violence – sexual</p>

In China Christian women face similar persecution pressure to Christian men, with both subjected to psychological violence, surveillance, threats and imprisonment. However, Christian convert women and girls are more likely to experience sexual violence, trafficking and forced marriage, especially in the context of the gender imbalance.

Generally speaking, converts from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds face the greatest pressures if their faith is discovered; their husbands may be pressured into divorcing them because they are seen as traitors to their ethnic group.

China's (now abandoned) one-child policy is notorious for having created a gender imbalance. The consequences of this policy are interacting with the vulnerability of Christian communities in

neighboring countries, as well as creating additional pressure on Chinese women. Female Christians from neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Myanmar caught in China’s network of trafficking may be sold as brides in predominately rural areas, although Chinese repression of media and control of the internet makes it difficult to document cases ([HRW, 7 June 2022](#)). Ethnic and religious minorities from neighbouring states seem to be especially targeted for bride trafficking, including the Hmong women from the northern provinces of Vietnam ([Humanium, 15 November 2022](#)).

In addition, women who have defected from the North Korean regime are also vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. Many North Korean women and girls flee to the border regions of South China for safety, but are then subjected to continuous cycles of violence, rape and sexual slavery in China’s “Red Zone” ([DW, 27 March 2023](#), “North Korean Girls exploited in China’s Red Zone”).

Christian leaders are a target in China. Since many churches, especially house churches, are led by women, women are also affected by persecution, discrimination, and intolerance, and may be imprisoned if their religious activities are discovered.

As marriage and birth rates fall in China, women are seeing an erosion of equal opportunities and are now encouraged to “respect social morals....and family virtues,” with pressure to focus on child-rearing and caregiving roles ([HRW 2024 country chapter China](#)). The Zhejiang county government has introduced cash rewards for brides aged 25 or younger, and several Chinese cities have introduced birth subsidy plans ([Reuters, 29 August 2023](#); [China Daily, 5 September 2023](#)). It is too soon to tell how these dynamics will impact persecution, but it represents the possibility of increasing restrictions and vulnerability for Christian women.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

China	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	Abduction Imprisonment by government

Christian men face similar pressure to Christian women, with both subjected to psychological violence, threats and imprisonment. Christian leaders are particularly targeted for government surveillance. A country expert shared: “Pastors and lay leaders as well as their families are the first line of being attacked”, with the harassment and arrests of leaders being intended to spread fear among the remaining Christian community. Catholic priests and high-profile house church leaders have been abducted.

Female Christian leaders may also be arrested and sentenced for their faith, especially in cases where they lead a church or a school, but reports indicate that Christian men experience this more

frequently. An expert explains: “In general, still more men are being interrogated, illegally detained or arrested. This is because men still occupy most of churches’ leadership”.

Men under prolonged detention experience traumatic treatment and are unable to provide financially for their families, especially in the cases where the family does not know if/where the husband/father is detained or for what reasons. A country expert describes how “families suffer when men are arrested, as financial support disappears...[and] children are affected by the loss of a father.”

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department’s IRFR 2023 China:

- "There were reports authorities continued to remove 'Arab' architectural features such as domes and minarets from Hui mosques in multiple provinces. Authorities continued to require CCP members and members of the armed forces to be atheists and forbade them to engage in religious practices. Leaders of the state-sanctioned religious groups and government officials worked together to inculcate religious personnel with party ideology and to eliminate and, in some instances, defrock 'dissident' clergy whom authorities deem insufficiently 'patriotic'. The government prosecuted unregistered clergy for 'fraud' In some instances, it withheld social welfare benefits from individuals who refused to reject folk religions."
- "The government continued to label many religious groups, including the CAG, Shouters, All-Sphere Church, Guanyin Method, and others as cults or '*xie jiao*' organizations. It outlawed membership in such groups and continued to conduct anticult campaigns in public venues and schools. For example, the government newspaper Guangxi Daily reported that in April [2023], the Ningming County Political and Legal Affairs Committee held an anti-*xie jiao* lecture attended by more than 1,300 teachers and students at a primary school in Chengzhong Township in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region."

Besides Christians, Muslims in Xinjiang and Tibetan Buddhists face strong pressure from the government, as does Falun Gong. Details can be found in the still valid Freedom House Special Report of February 2017: "[The Battle for China’s Spirit](#)".

Meanwhile, several internal documents on the treatment of the Muslim minority of the Uighurs in Xinjiang have emerged, revealing not just the strict political and ideological drive of the CCP's policy, but also the industrial scale of detention and "re-education". Among those reports, the "[China Leaks](#)" published by an international consortium with the New York Times on 16 November 2019, were particularly revealing. Other [reports](#) by Adrian Zenz and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) have added to the knowledge of what is going on in Xinjiang (China Digital Times, 27 November 2019). Another series of reports from BuzzFeednews used satellite images to give an [overview](#) of the scale of detention (Buzzfeednews, 27 August 2020). The Chinese government is openly defending its policy of detaining up to one million Muslim Uighurs and ethnic Kazakhs in detention centers in Xinjiang, claiming the fight against radical Islam makes such measures necessary. Typically, the [United Nations](#) is the main forum for battles on this subject: In October 2020, a coalition of 39 member states demanded an international investigation; however, China managed to bring together a coalition of 45 countries, opposing such a move and praising China for its minority policy (Catholic News Agency, 7 October 2020). The control of the Uighur population remains very high, as was

illustrated by a [phone search program](#) by which searches against a master-list of 50,000 files deemed as violent and terrorist are performed and mobile phone owners are then punished when a file is found (Human Rights Watch, 4 May 2023). The "[Ethnic Unity Law](#)" applying to Tibet shows that assimilation is a wider policy of the CCP now (RFA, 1 May 2020). The plight of other groups like the "[Church of the Almighty God](#)" (CAG) also belongs here (Bitter Winter, 20 August 2020). There have also been reports that members of religious minorities being detained in the labor camps (such as Uighurs and members of the CAG) have been killed.

In Guangxi province, authorities are relocating and repressing members of various folk religions, termed as *xie jiao* ([Guangxi: Religious Repression Increases Among Zhuang Minority, Bitter Winter](#), 25 May 2022). In particular, members of the Zhuang minority are targeted and the operation is aimed at an allegedly large infiltration of illegal religion from neighboring Vietnam, where their worship is tolerated.

Trends Summary

1) The fight against internal threats

The fight against perceived and real internal threats for the Communist Party has several dimensions.

a) Ideology

Although [Xi Jinping thought](#) is ubiquitous, some observers still see reason for hope: "Chinese identity is still multiple, not monolithic, and Chinese thought has always best contributed to China's flourishing when it has been free and disputatious, not closed and sterile. This is the aspect of Chinese tradition that today's CCP cannot afford to ignore." (Professor Rana Mitter in Foreign Affairs, 20 February 2024).

Xi is "[faithfully](#) implementing the policies of his predecessors". And this is true for the increasing limitations on civil society actors such as churches, both the state-approved and independent varieties (Professor Frank Dikötter in Radio Free Asia, 24 February 2024). However, Xi Jinping is [not a second Mao](#), as Wall Street reporter Chun Han Wong, who has been based in Beijing for many years, says (China File, 1 February 2024). In fact, Xi seems as much a "prisoner of the party and its history as its leader". He says: "Reading Xi Jinping Thought, there's nothing essentially Marxist or Leninist about it. A lot of it is just about what makes China a strong country, and the things we must deliver to make China the great nation that we know it is. The student's ability to regurgitate the mantras is key. Xi's ideological emphasis is not so much making people good Marxists, it's making people good cogs in the Leninist machine, showing willingness to participate in these rituals."

Asked about the legacy Xi Jinping wishes to leave, Wong thinks it is anybody's guess. But he explains: "There is a saying that Mao Zedong achieved *jianguo* [建国, founding the new Chinese republic], Deng Xiaoping *fuguo* [富国, enriching China], and Xi has presided over *qiangguo* [强国, strengthening China]. If we say Xi's objectives are for China to be economically powerful, militarily powerful, internationally respected, you can argue he's done much of these three elements, especially the last two."

Such ideological considerations aside, the foremost goal is the Communist Party has to stay in power, so it consequently always has to be right. This was very visible in the effort to keep the zero-COVID policy. This was not a question about health, economy or the well-being of the people, but about

[ideology](#) (Neican, 26 April 2022). At the end of November 2022, [protests](#) started across the country and some were not only demonstrating against the zero-COVID policy, but against CCP rule itself (Reuters, 28 November 2022). While the immediate answer was to quash the protests, on 7 December 2022, the CCP announced major changes in the policy in what was called "[dynamic optimization](#)" (Reuters, 8 December 2022). This change may have been inevitable, but it comes at the cost of two risks: 1) Citizens may be encouraged by seeing that their protests changed the course of CCP policy and potentially ideology and 2) even a gradual opening could have led to a surge in COVID infections with the risk of many deaths, especially among the older population. Both consequences did not sit well with a party which can do no wrong. The [true number](#) of COVID deaths in China may never be revealed, but according to calculations and extrapolations by experts it may be between one and one-and-a-half million people (New York Times, 15 February 2023). In a reminder that the authorities do not really need the COVID Health App for tracking people down, some protest leaders heading the November 2022 demonstrations were reportedly found and [taken away](#) even after the App had been switched off (RFA, 18 December 2022).

As the Party Congress in October 2022 made clear, at a time when criticizing or speaking out against political decisions becomes tantamount to criticism of Xi Jinping (China File, 31 January 2023), no change to putting Communist ideology front and center can be expected. Consequently, out of the 20 highest-selling books in May and June 2023, [seven](#) were writings and speeches by Xi Jinping (RFA, 28 June 2023). And while at a time of growing economic challenges the true belief of many citizens may be called in doubt, the Communist leadership still [firmly believes](#) that they are on the ascent (PRC Leader, 31 August 2024) and thus double down on ideological education and propaganda.

b) History - and the art of re-writing it

According to the CCP's "paradigm of continuity", the 5000-year history of China is presented as one seamless development culminating in the emergence of the CCP. This view of history thus instills the Chinese with national pride and confidence in the Party. Xi Jinping considers Marxism as being the "soul" of China and the country's "fine traditional culture" as its "root". Only Confucianism is meant by the reference to traditional culture; Islam and Christianity are regarded as imported religions. Wedding Confucian principles with Communism is convenient, but still surprising, given that Communists have opposed and actively fought against many Confucian traditions. At the same time, qualifying Marxism as the soul of China conveniently omits thousands of years of Chinese history preceding Marxism. The reason for President Xi to call archeologists to a politburo study session in the WWL 2022 reporting period may indicate that he perceives dangers ahead and wants to make sure there is an undeniable "historical truth", also called "[party historiography](#)" (Neican, 5 October 2020). It fits this narrative, when the CCP authorities in Shanxi destroyed [historical evidence](#) of Swedish missionary work in the province (Bitter Winter, 16 October 2020).

Terms like "socialist spiritual civilization" and the "epic history of the CCP" as the source of spirituality needed by the Chinese people (as explained above in: Political and legal landscape) serve as the link between ideology and a history, where only victories are included. Perhaps as a testimony of modern Chinese society's hollowness, this interest in spirituality can be seen in how much room social media gives to online horoscopes, fortune tellers and astrology. The followers of such 'services' have reached their millions and the numbers further increased in the crisis year 2020. The numbers of Chinese youth suffering from anxiety and depression and looking for a sense in life is growing, as can be seen in the

growing number of downloads of [spirituality apps](#) (Rest of the World, 20 December 2023). As such, they are unlikely to be convinced by the CCP's efforts at instrumentalizing history (as it did in the run-up to its 100th anniversary). In Marxism, history serves a political purpose and the CCP is trying to create a sense of [historical destiny](#) (Neican, 20 April 2021). Even President Xi Jinping has been using [religious terms](#) like “miracle”, “belief”, “faith” and “soul”, when urging the nation to study Party history (Bitter Winter, 7 April 2021). It would seem that the soil is fertile for the Christian message as a liberating answer to society's growing needs.

c) The Social credit system

China's much-discussed Social Credit System (SoCS) is still more fragmented and patchy than a consistent tool for social monitoring. This was [confirmed](#) by a 24 page report by Merics, published on 3 March 2021. The sheer number of institutions involved in the report (47) and the number of documents relating to SoCS in the Merics database (1456) is impressive. Despite the difficulties, a draft Social Credit Law was prepared for internal review in China in December 2020 and it remains to be seen whether a final law will be implemented. It is particularly important to keep in mind what the authors of the Merics report write on page 18 under the heading “The Party State's growing surveillance eco-system”: “The Social Credit System is often incorrectly conflated with China's surveillance state. In practice, it is a public, relatively transparent system and increasingly curtailed in its reach. But the Chinese party state has other, much more invasive projects at its command. These projects often operate more covertly and act beyond the confines of laws and regulations, in a relatively clear division of labor. These include Golden Shield, Skynet, Safe Cities and Police Clouds, Project Sharp Eyes, and the Integrated Joint-Operations Platform (IJOP) in Xinjiang.”

A [first evaluation](#) of (corporate) Social Credit data from Zhejiang province shows the potential of using the system to further align businesses with the priorities of the CCP: One indicator, called “Social Responsibility” consists of the sub-categories of donations, volunteer work and obtaining awards from the government. Investing into improving this indicator promises the largest payoff in terms of Social Credit Score. Thus, the authors conclude: “Perhaps not coincidentally, these are precisely the areas of emphasis in President Xi Jinping's current campaign to reduce income inequality, promote pro-social contributions by wealthy individuals and private corporations and increase loyalty to the Party.” (Lin LY-H, Milhaupt CJ (2023). China's Corporate Social Credit System: The Dawn of Surveillance State Capitalism? The China Quarterly 1–19). Should the system ever be used beyond the business world, similar incentives and indicators for “well-behaving” can be easily imagined. In 2022, the Social Credit Law, which aims at credibility and reliability in the business world, was [still under discussion](#) (MIT Technology Review, 22 November 2022). The authorities are well aware of the system's limitations. Local governments are benefiting from rapid advances in artificial intelligence. In what is frequently referred to as [‘one person, one file’](#), systems are being developed and implemented which can sort through a variety of data and databases and provide the authorities with a single comprehensive file on every resident (Reuters, 8 April 2022). Although initial teething problems are to be expected, once overcome, this is a trend to watch.

At the Two Sessions meetings in March 2023, the creation of a [‘National Bureau for Data’](#) (NBD) was announced by the leadership (The Messenger, 13 March 2023). While this new department may sound harmless enough, it will serve to oversee all data the government and private companies are collecting from citizens. While details still need to emerge, this new bureau has the potential to centralize all

data for further analysis, something that has been feared for a long time. In this respect, it should be noted that even China's infamous health app did not run on a centralized system, but was only a form of data-collection at local government level with no interaction between the various data-gathering centers. With the emergence of the NBD, data-collection and analysis is likely to lead to an easier and more seamless way of monitoring and controlling citizens, including Christians. This does not mean that the NBD will definitely be used in this way, but for a ruling party putting ever more emphasis on Communist ideology, security and regime safety, it is likely to prove too tempting to leave such a treasure-trove of data untapped.

d) Surveillance

In a wide-ranging investigation in 2022, the New York Times analyzed more than 100,000 Chinese government tenders and found that tools developed and used for [surveillance](#) are increasing at an unprecedented rate (New York Times - NYT, 21 June 2022). Right at the beginning, the authors of the NYT article are clear about the Chinese government's goals as stated in the documents: Systems are to be designed which "maximize what the state can find out about a person's identity, activities and social connections, which could ultimately help the government maintain its authoritarian rule."

One of the features high in demand were CCTV cameras with facial recognition features, which store gathered data on police servers for feeding into extensive analytical software. The intention, as exemplarily stated by Fujian province police, is clear - "controlling and managing people". For the same reason, phone-trackers have become ubiquitous, all of China's 31 provinces and regions are using them, collecting data on the whereabouts (and more) of individuals. Voice prints, iris scans and DNA samples are other items the government authorities are increasingly collecting. However, the authorities are aware of their limitations as well. One of the biggest problems identified is that the data has not been centralized. Consequently, one emphasis has been the consolidation of data scattered across different databases so that a single personal dossier can be created which is available for all agencies across the government. This is where the "one person, one file" system has to be watched. As Maya Wong, researcher at Human Rights Watch, is quoted by NYT (see link above, 21 June 2022): "This is an invisible cage of technology imposed on society, the disproportionate brunt of it being felt by groups of people that are already severely discriminated against in Chinese society." These tools can easily be used against the Christian minority as well, especially those who refuse to align with the Communist Party.

Another instrument in the surveillance toolbox is China's "[Grid Management](#)" (GM), although the capabilities of the current system should not be overstated (China Leadership Monitor, 1 March 2021). This GM system, implemented some years ago, basically divides the whole country into parcels of 10,000 people or clusters of a thousand residents to oversee security and improve the delivery of services. In reality, the implementation has been patchy and one major impediment has been the lack of funds at the provincial and local level. However, the changes made to the system in the wake of COVID-19 will undoubtedly increase the possibilities of such surveillance.

e) The demographic threat

Closely linked with the challenge to keep the economic growth on track is the double threat of a demographic decline and a rapidly ageing country. However, it is important to note that demography is [not destiny](#), as one observer wrote (Bert Hofman Blog, 19 January 2023). The CCP can counter these

trends, e.g., by raising the pension age, by supporting families and especially mothers more, by permitting more social work by religious entities and by increasing and facilitating migration. It will be interesting to see if the CCP is willing to adapt accordingly. So far, the signs are not encouraging. It may well find that social engineering is easier when it comes to imposing punishments (e.g. for having too many children) than when incentives need to be offered for changing behavior. In that respect, it is interesting to note that the very association which was responsible for a policy of forced sterilizations and abortions, the “Family Planning Association”, is now responsible for propping up the birthrate. Although recent analysis shows that a slowing economy and demographic trends are not yet connected, a link is expected to become increasingly visible after 2035, when China’s [process of urbanization](#) is projected to be complete (PRC Leadership Monitor, 30 May 2024). Another challenge connected with demography are the plans to [raise the retirement age](#) (CNN, 23 July 2024), which may not go down well with Chinese citizens.

2) The fight against external threats

a) Competing with liberal democracies

China's relationship with the USA is highly contentious and deteriorated further in the years 2022-2024. The Ukraine war deepened this rivalry and although China does not want to be seen as invariably tied to Russia, it did little more than watch the war develop and support Russia in words, if not deeds. The Israel/Gaza war multiplied the challenges, as it prompted stronger reactions from the Global South and strained US capabilities even further.

At a time when it is said that the CCP simply [does not “get” democracy](#) (The Diplomat, 25 March 2021), misunderstandings can easily lead to wider consequences. It is however very likely that the CCP understands democracy well enough to realize its danger to its Communist rule. The Party is now looking to [law and order](#) as a promising possibility to legitimize its hold of power (Foreign Affairs, 27 February 2023). Security and rule by law (but not rule of law as in liberal countries) is regarded as a promising avenue for a new source of legitimacy and has the advantage of also keeping the large number of government cadres and party members under control, especially at the local level. Consequently, the CCP Central Committee issued a statement to [law schools](#) on 26 February 2023 (Bitter Winter, 2 March 2023), saying that erroneous concepts like the independence of the judiciary and Western constitutionalism (including the separation of powers with its checks and balances) should not be taught anymore.

China is gaining more and more influence around the world and, although it will not happen in the short term, it is worth thinking about what happens if and when China leads the world in the future. In a cue from China’s foregone dynasties and history, an analysis entitled “[China leads the world](#)” made the following points (The Atlantic, 5 October 2020): China will not be a pacifist power; China will insist on its own world order; China will export its values; China only tolerates relationships it can dominate. The conclusion, however, is worth quoting in full: “What becomes clear from an examination of China’s history is that the Chinese don’t just want to be a great power—they believe they deserve to be. In centuries past, the Chinese thought their sovereign had a right to rule ‘everything under heaven’. Due to the realities of technology and distance, China’s reach usually remained regional. But now, in the age of globalization, Beijing’s influence may achieve that lofty goal.”

While this analysis is still prescient, more and more countries seem to be [analyzing](#) how far all the initiatives started by China are really in their best interest and how much is just lofty rhetoric, hiding hard politics (Foreign Affairs, 23 April 2024). On the other hand, it may be a delusion to think of or even wish for "[Peak China](#)", meaning that China has reached its zenith, and thus see the increasing polarization challenging all countries ending (Foreign Affairs, 24 April 2024). And while the strategic space of China may have arguably shrunk (i.e., "the West" may not be in constant decline while "the East" is rising), it may be too early to talk about the end of China's [period of strategic opportunity](#) (NBR, 19 December 2023).

One field in which China is investing to gain more influence is in exporting its technology and know-how about ways it can be used. The country has been increasing its activity in organizations which are [setting the global technological standards](#) according to which an increasingly digital world is running (NBR, "China's Digital Ambition: A global strategy to supplant the liberal order", 1 March 2022). However, China's much discussed model of surveillance [cannot be easily exported](#) (Foreign Affairs, 6 January 2024), as it relies heavily on human manpower.

b) Influencing the United Nations

Another field where China is trying to gain more influence is international diplomacy, with a particular focus on the United Nations. This does not just mean taking up a position fitting to the growing economic and political power of the country, but it also means efforts in [re-defining](#) the United Nations' tasks and influencing important questions such as who is allowed to participate in debates and how human rights should be shaped in the future (The Diplomat, 1 October 2021). Whether China is on its way to introduce a [new world order](#) with its flurry of initiatives and setting of new standards (ChinaFile, 7 December 2023), remains to be seen. The Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and, most recently, the Global Civilization Initiative do find an interested international audience, but it is an open question so far if other countries are paying more than mere lip service, especially when funds do not flow as plentifully as they used to.

In one of the strongest signs showing how influential China has become, the May 2022 visit of UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to Xinjiang surprised observers in its timing and content. However, her visit was characterized "by photo opportunities with senior officials and manipulation of her statements by Chinese state media, leaving an impression that she walked straight into a highly predictable [propaganda exercise](#) for the Chinese government" (Amnesty International, 28 May 2022). Shortly after returning to Geneva, Ms. Bachelet announced that she would [not be seeking](#) a second term as High Commissioner, stating however that her decision was not connected to the much-criticized meetings in China (Reuters, 13 June 2022). The fact that the UNHCHR accepted the Communist Party's condition that it had to be a '[friendly visit](#)' (WWR, 30 March 2022) came under serious criticism from Human Rights observers. As could be expected, the Chinese authorities controlled Ms. Bachelet's movements and there were no confidential meetings with civil society actors or members of ethnic or religious minorities. Amnesty International did highlight the fact that the UN and China agreed to set up working groups to hold follow-up discussions on various issues, including the rights of minorities, counterterrorism, legal protection and human rights. However, the plans lacked clear goals and timelines.

During the UNHCHR visit, President Xi was quoted as saying that human rights are developing along the lines of Chinese history and culture. According to Xinhua, Ms. Bachelet expressed her [admiration](#) for China's efforts and achievements in eliminating poverty, protecting human rights and realizing economic and social development (Xinhua, 26 May 2022). It should be noted that the state media and authorities were merely [doing their job](#) by presenting the CCP as infallible, as one observer noted (Bitter Winter, 1 June 2022). This 'merely doing one's job' is also true in the way the authorities handle other targeted groups, including religious minorities such as Christians. According to official sources, the Communist Party can do no wrong.

China had been putting [pressure](#) on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and on Michelle Bachelet personally not to publish the official report on violations in Xinjiang which had been finalized for publication back in 2021, arguing that it would "intensify politicization and bloc confrontation in the area of human rights, undermine the credibility of the OHCHR and harm the cooperation between OHCHR and member states" (Reuters, 20 July 2022). However, on 31 August 2022, the long-awaited 46-page report on the [Human Rights situation in Xinjiang](#) was published. A summary of the main points was made available in a press release ([OHCHR Press release, 31 August 2022](#)). China responded with a 131 page '[note verbale](#)', of which a link was made available at the end of the UN report. Throughout the report, the official Chinese position is referenced in the footnotes. The report found indications that authorities committed crimes against humanity. The exact wording in the UN report is: "The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups, pursuant to law and policy, in context of restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity" (paragraph 148).

In a reminder that it is hard even for China to keep all criticism under wraps, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata, found '[reasonable](#)' [evidence](#) for slavery taking place in Xinjiang (Bloomberg, 17 August 2022). These findings are particularly embarrassing as China recently signed ILO convention No.105, which prohibits state-sponsored forced labor for political aims and economic development. And the new Commissioner for Human Rights at the UN, Volker Türk, has frequently criticized the human rights situation in China and published a statement saying that his office has documented cases of [arbitrary detentions](#) of Uighurs, Tibetans and other minorities as well as the separation of children from their families (RFA, 8 March 2023), illustrating that trying to reshape areas of UN activity is an uphill battle for China. Likewise, while the Communist Party continues to paint China as being a "developing country" and as "being part of the Global South", other countries in those categories are not automatically [on China's side](#) in all agenda items (Foreign Policy, 10 October 2024).

c) Serious risk of miscommunication

China's growing influence in the United Nations and on many countries worldwide does not mean, however, that it is opening up. On the contrary, [contacts with foreigners](#) are becoming increasingly restricted and rare (China File, 3 February 2022). Deng Xiaoping famously quipped: 'If you open the window for fresh air, you have to expect some flies to blow in.' The author of the article in China File shows that "at least since the time of Marco Polo, China has managed cultural diversity by ring fencing". Thus, contacts with foreigners were already perceived as being 'us against them' centuries before the Communist Party came into power. According to the author, a recent position paper by the

EU Chamber of Commerce in China reported that there were currently more foreigners living in Luxemburg than in China and concluded: "The number is diminishing. COVID-19 in some ways has come as a boon to Chinese leaders who tend towards xenophobia: It provides an excuse to keep foreigners out and, to a large extent, to keep Chinese in. And so, China has come full circle, from the bewildered sleeper that emerged from the Cultural Revolution rubbing its collective eyes to the isolated Middle Kingdom it has historically preferred to be, from the Open Door to the nearly closed." Likewise, Global Times editor and Renmin University Dean Wang Wen spoke at an official seminar on Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy on 9 May 2023, calling for a "[comprehensive opening-up](#) to the outside world" (Pekingology, 11 June 2023). According to Wang, the proportion of foreign residents in China is stated as being approximately 0.05% (a mere 700,000). This is very low for the world's second-largest economy and many of that number come from the developing world or from countries one might call the 'China orbit'. Such a low proportion can only increase misunderstandings about China and multiply the challenges involved in international cooperation.

At the same time, reporting from and about China became steadily more difficult in 2022. This has been made abundantly clear in the chilling [annual report](#) published by the Foreign Correspondents Club in China (FCCC, 1 March 2023). To an increasing extent, the CCP is making it clear how it wants reporting about China to be done and the number of resident foreign correspondents is shrinking, especially from countries with a history of independent and critical press. This does not bode well for the future. Another interesting aspect in the FCCC report is the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on journalism. As of March 2022, [151 countries](#) from all continents had an official 'Memorandum of Understanding' with China (Green FDC, accessed 8 May 2024) and China has been keen to invite and train up journalists from African and Latin American countries, who then report on Chinese affairs in apparent independence. While it would be wrong to claim that no information coming from China and its statistical offices can be trusted, outright distortions of numbers still happen (as with statistics concerning the COVID-19 outbreak). However, according to Professor Jeremy Wallace from Cornell University, it is more frequently the case that a [gentle massaging](#) of numbers takes place in order to make things look better, especially in the economic sphere (The Messenger, 7 March 2023). In any case, this "[walling off](#)" of China, as one long-term observer named it, is a worrying trend and may only increase, if the economic slowdown is prolonged or even accelerating (Foreign Affairs, 22 August 2023).

One striking example in 2022 - 2024 was the demise of "Sixth Tone", a Chinese state online magazine which had once been a source of surprisingly [independent and critical reporting](#) (The Wire China, 25 February 2024). The mere existence of Sixth Tone baffled observers, as it went against many existing stereotypes. Founded under the state-owned Shanghai United Media Group in April 2016, the magazine published reports on relevant and critical issues, not shying away from calling out failures and criticizing local authorities. While some topics and outcomes were off-limits, like criticizing the central government, Sixth Tone enjoyed a surprising freedom under the imperative to "tell China's story well" – and in such a way that non-Chinese speakers would be interested to listen to in the first place. One reason the site enjoyed more freedom was arguably its publication in English only. Its reporting became so strong that well-respected media entities like the BBC started to quote them. However, this freedom was not to last. While in earlier cases editors and journalists were able to negotiate with censors and in most cases, small adaptations to the texts had to be made, this changed with a year-end piece on 2022, written by its Nepali journalist Bibek Bhandari. The Wire writes:

Several weeks before, on one of the last days of December 2022, the Shanghai-based outlet had run a year-end review, reflecting on the year's biggest headlines. There were highlights, such as the Winter Olympics in Beijing, but overall, it was a tough year for China. Bhandari, Sixth Tone's head of news at the time, had mostly selected buzzwords like "baby bust," "housing crisis," "gender violence," "climate catastrophe," and "COVID" to represent the year.

The article had to be taken offline and Sixth Tone came under a new management and strict guidelines were implemented to tell positive stories about China. This fitted the CCP's general drive to curb debate and stifle any passing on of negative information to the outside world. As The Wire reports:

The growth of the personality cult [of Xi Jinping] is basically sucking the oxygen out of the system," says Phil Cunningham, who writes about CCTV's daily evening broadcast in his newsletter China Story. "More and more time is devoted to puff pieces about the supreme leader and the supreme thinking of the Communist Party. Everything good is attributed to the Party and everything bad is tinged with being somehow connected to the outside world, especially the U.S., the U.K. and Japan.

Beijing's growing hostility towards foreign countries has trickled down to affect the foreign press as well, culminating in China's expulsion of over a dozen reporters, including Johnson, in 2020. While some individuals were allowed to return, access was never fully restored, leaving many mainstream outlets reporting from afar.

The foreign journalists that are left "are under heavy surveillance, they are threatened, they are being followed in the street, and there is constant blackmail on their visa renewal," says Cedric Alviani, Asia-Pacific bureau director for Reporters Without Borders, which ranked China at the second lowest out of 180 countries in its press freedom index last year.

Fewer sources, be they scholars, businessmen or ordinary people, are willing to even speak to foreign press on the record for fear of being accused of aiding foreign forces — or di daozi (遞刀子), 'passing the knife', as it's known among the public. Foreign correspondents have even been confronted by angry mobs.

Fewer sources not only leads to less information being made available, but also causes reporting to become more and more one-dimensional, where the central focus is always to tell China's story well.

In an extensive report titled "The increasing challenge of [obtaining information](#) from Xi's China", Merics (15 February 2024) highlights the growing scarcity of sources within the country, especially in fields considered sensitive (such as human rights), and concludes:

The implication for stakeholders is that there needs to be an even bigger premium on interpretative skills of the remaining information. Observers cannot understand any piece of information in isolation; they must have a very keen awareness of the context in which it is produced and made available as well as what is missing. This has realistically always been the case but is becoming even more crucial now.

With less access to reliable sources of information, risks to global stakeholders will inevitably increase. Some large companies might be able to overcome specific restrictions

on foreign access, such as through Chinese partners or subsidiaries, but there are few workarounds if information is never shared with the public in the first place. Moreover, China's amended Anti-Espionage Law appears to target entities finding creative workarounds, which might present unacceptable risks especially in the fields like due diligence research.

Global discussions of China will increasingly coalesce around a narrowing set of source materials. One likely consequence is an amplification of extreme viewpoints, especially the beliefs that China is about to collapse and take over the world at the same time. The government will show observers the big plans but not the (often messy) implementation, while protests will continue to make headlines abroad but the mixed perceptions that many citizens have of the state may remain veiled. With fewer sources at our disposal, finding a middle ground will become increasingly difficult.

3) Observations from the 20th Party Congress in October 2022 are still relevant

Decision-making within the CCP remains an opaque process judging by the chosen line-up of the Standing Committee: Macro Polo thinktank invited 1,000 China experts to predict the outcome and not a single one guessed correctly. It will of course take time until policies unfold, but it is already clear that [old influential factions](#) such as the Chinese Youth League have lost out, not even making it to the 24-member strong Politburo anymore (Reuters, 26 October 2022). All seven members of the Standing Committee appear to have been chosen in such a way that neither their accomplishments nor their advanced age make it likely that they would be able - let alone willing - to challenge Secretary-General Xi Jinping's rule or even voice meaningful alternative views. At the same time, this brings a certain risk. No commentator forgets to mention the long list of challenges the country's leadership is currently having to tackle. With the Secretary-General being surrounded by a group of 'Yes-men', it will be harder for him to [deflect the blame](#) for any problems or policy blunders on anyone else (NBR, 25 October 2022). This became a self-fulfilling prophecy faster than expected when a mere year after hand-picking them, Xi Jinping dropped two of his ministers.

One catchphrase in Xi Jinping's report to the 20th Party Congress was '[national security](#)', which he mentioned 89 times, up from 55 times in 2017 (Grid News, 24 October 2022). It remains to be seen if blaming 'the West' will be enough in the long term. But the problem with 'Yes-men' goes deeper: There is evidence to show that even [internal documents are being heavily censored](#) causing China's powerful leaders to 'live in a cocoon' (AP News, 31 October 2022). If no one dares or is able to tell the truth without massaging numbers etc., China is in trouble - and so is the world. Given how much Chinese politics are centered around the person of President Xi, aged 70 at the time of writing (December 2023), it will become increasingly important to think about [succession scenarios](#) with each passing year; similarly, as time progresses, a certain jockeying for the best positions is likely to become increasingly visible (CSIS, After Xi, 21 April 2021). This will add to Xi Jinping's and the CCP's paranoia.

A good overview of how the recent changes can be interpreted and how difficult forecasts are was recently provided in a [Blog](#) (Andrew Batson, 8 February 2023). He identified four different modes of interpretation:

- "Don't get fooled again" – there are no real changes and the Communist Party is following its priorities as it always has;

- “A more benevolent dictator” – Ideology is not trumping everything and the Party is able to react flexibly and prioritize the economy;
- “The new technocrats” – As rank and file are following Secretary General Xi Jinping now, he trusts them to implement all necessary policies, even if this means some embarrassing changes;
- “A quiet revolt” – There is genuine opposition to Xi Jinping’s leadership and his position is not as strong as it looks.

Only time will tell which interpretation (or combination) comes closest to the truth.”

4) What the current situation in China means for Christians

The October 2022 Party Congress could be summed up by the [equation](#): ‘High Ambition + Deep Insecurity = Tighter Controls’ (USIP, 26 October 2022). The last paragraph of this USIP commentary is worth being quoted in full, as it also illustrates the situation for Christians: “The citizens of China can expect a continuation of current hardline policies and greater centralization of power; other countries should anticipate an assertive and combative PRC led by an activist dictator and an energetic party-military-state obsessed with seeking to control all aspects of human activity and to dominate all arenas both inside and outside its borders.”

Thus, the push for control looks set to increase and, judging from experience, Christians are more likely to be seen as a threat to security than an asset.

The new laws and regulations for foreigners and their involvement in religious activities in China as well as the draft paper entitled “Administrative measures for religious clergy”, the rolling-out of tests like the “Smart Religion App” and the policy on showing Communist signage on religious buildings, show that the situation for Freedom of Religion and Belief in general (and for Christians in particular) is getting worse. Christians are and will continue to be most affected by the Persecution engine *Communist and post-Communist oppression*; the Communist Party behind the Beijing government has continued to create a negative climate for all forms of religion and put pressure on them.

Christians are trying to adapt to the changing circumstances. In an attempt at ‘[reading the tea leaves](#)’, one author tried to make sense of what President Xi Jinping said at the National Religion Work Conference in 2021 (China Source, 4 February 2022), where he spoke of strengthening the “self-education, self-management and self-discipline” of religious leaders, defining the autonomy of religion as being limited by the rules and needs of the Communist Party. It is therefore clear that Christians in China will have to adapt to a new and much narrower environment, especially the Christian groups who are not affiliated to state-approved churches.

According to a survey of a wide spectrum of pastors asking i) how they were coping with the [situation](#) in early 2022 and ii) what trends there were in Chinese church life since the 2020 pandemic, the current trends can be summed up with the keywords ‘group-based’, ‘family-based’ and ‘digitalization’, and are not limited to house churches (China Christian Daily, 6 June 2022): “Group-based” refers to small group gatherings. “Family-based” means that meetings and worship services take place in a believer’s home. “Digitalization” refers to worship, meetings, and training programs held online. Actually, the three changes began years ago, but the 2020 COVID pandemic sped things up. One other trend picking up

speed is that state-approved religions are included in the drive for "patriotic education" which has become ubiquitous in daily life, with study sessions and tourist visits to sites relevant to CCP history.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.
- China blog 2021 - 2024: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/articles/>

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: new regulations - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/religion-controls-08032023122520.html>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: put under - <https://chinaaid.org/news/bai-caiming-a-disabled-rural-evangelist-in-sichuan-transferred-to-residential-surveillance/>
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