



OPEN DOORS
**WORLD
WATCH
LIST**
2023

Kina

LANDSINFORMATION
JANUARI 2023

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OpenDoors

I tjänst för världens förföljda kristna

World
Watch
Research

China: Full Country Dossier

December 2022



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

December 2022

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

Copyright note

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes 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 conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / China

Brief country details

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

China: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
1,448,471,000	96,700,000	OD estimate

Map of country



China: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	77	16
WWL 2022	76	17
WWL 2021	74	17
WWL 2020	70	23
WWL 2019	65	27

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

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. New restrictions on Internet, social media, NGOs and the 2018 regulations on religion (with its extensions in the following years) are or are going to be 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. While venues for meetings had to be closed all over China due to COVID-19 restrictions, in some locations the government continues to forbid registered and unregistered groups from resuming worship. 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.

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

- **15 August 2022:** Authorities [raided](#) a house church meeting of Christians from ERCC in Chengdu, Sichuan Province and physically harmed church members (Radio Free Asia - RFA, 15 August 2022).
- **21 May 2022:** This date marks one year since [the arrest](#) of Bishop Joseph Zhang Weizhu of Xinxiang in Henan province. While the ten priests originally arrested with him were released, Bishop Zhang's whereabouts are still unknown (UCA News, 24 May 2022).
- **11 February 2022:** Echeng District Court in Ezhou in Hubei province [sentenced](#) Pastor Hao Zhiwei to eight years in prison on charges of fraud, as she had refused to join the TSPM (China Christian Daily, 7 March 2022).
- **December 2021:** Chen Yu, owner of the "Wheat bookstore" in Linhai, Zhejiang province, received a [seven-year](#) sentence for alleged "illegal business operations" by printing and selling Christian books. His appeal was rejected (China Aid, 10 January 2022).
- **15 December 2021:** The authorities [closed](#) a church-affiliated school in Shunde in Guangdong province; on 18 December, a school near Fuzhou in Fujian province was closed (China Aid, 21 December 2021).
- **5 December 2021:** Panshi Church in Shizuishan in Ningxia province was [raided](#) and Pastor Geng Zejun was charged with "disturbing social order". Five members of the church were detained as well (China Aid, 22 February 2022).
- **21 November 2021:** Pastor An Yankui and Zhang Chenghao were [detained](#) on charges of "illegally crossing the border", as they had attended the international "Gospel and Culture Conference" with Pastor Steven Tong in Malaysia in 2020, having obtained valid passports and visas (UCA News, 30 November 2021).
- **16 November 2021:** Chang Yuchun and Li Chenhui received a [seven-year](#) sentence from Xian Municipal Intermediate Court, Shaanxi province, for alleged "illegal business operations" by printing and selling Christian books. Their appeal was rejected (China Aid, 22 November 2021).
- **October 2021:** The authorities [closed](#) the church-affiliated Jinweizi school in Beijing, founded by Golden Lampstand Church, affecting 100 students, many of them with special needs (UCA News, 9 November 2021).

- **31 October 2021:** The authorities [raided](#) Daoen Presbyterian Church in Jiangsu province and took Pastor Fang Xiaojun and four other Christians away for interrogation (China Aid, 2 November 2021).
- **25 October 2021:** Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou in Zhejiang province was detained and [taken away "on vacation"](#) by the authorities (Asia News, 26 October 2021). He reappeared on 12 November 2021.

External Links - Situation in brief

- 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: raided - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/earlyrain-raid-08152022075406.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: the arrest - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-bishop-remains-in-detention-one-year-on/97372>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: sentenced - http://www.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2022-03-07/house-church-pastor-sentenced-to-8-years-on--fraud--charges-_11233
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: seven-year - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/01/verdict-upheld-for-christian-bookstore.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: closed - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/12/two-anonymous-church-schools-raided-one.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: raided - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/02/panshi-church-raided-and-preacher.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: detained - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/china-arrests-protestant-pastor-for-joining-religious-conference/95166>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: seven-year - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/11/christian-couples-appeal-rejected.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: closed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/china-shuts-down-christian-school-in-beijing/94900>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: raided - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/11/ccp-raids-chinese-presbyterian-church.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: taken away "on - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Wenzhou-authorities-detain-Bishop-Shao-Zhumin-again-54365.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Wenzhou-authorities-detain-Bishop-Shao-Zhumin-again-54365.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: vacation" - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Wenzhou-authorities-detain-Bishop-Shao-Zhumin-again-54365.html>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / China

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp.124-130)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	7 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13017877	7 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/CHN	7 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/china/	7 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/china	7 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	7 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	7 June 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, China not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2022	7 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2021 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2021	https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-net/2021	7 June 2022
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/china-and-tibet	7 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#cn	7 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/china	7 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/chn	7 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/CHN	8 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/	7 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20China.pdf	7 June 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview	7 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&b=450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=CHN	7 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp.6-7)	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/c6aceb75bed03729ef4ff9404dd7f125-0500012021/related/mpo-eap.pdf	7 June 2022

Recent history

Xi Jinping assumed office as President in March 2013, although arguably his most powerful position is that of Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a position he has held since November 2012. He extended his presidency to a third term at the 20th Party Congress in October 2022. While his first term in office saw a strong reduction in freedom in all sectors of society, his power became most visible in the abolition of the term-limit for serving as president in March 2018 which gives him a position of authority observers call the strongest since Mao Zedong. At the same time, he faces major challenges, which became more apparent during his second term in office. First and foremost, the main task domestically is to keep economic growth on track, albeit at a lower level than in previous years, especially after the COVID-19 crisis derailed the world economy and China's domestic zero COVID policy was and is being put to the test.

However, there are a number of other issues which are also requiring the government's attention:

- **The US-Chinese "decoupling" process:** This continues even with the new Biden-administration in Washington. The problems here seem to be largely bi-partisan.
- **The Belt and Road Initiative:** Some of the challenges are related to the containment of COVID-19.
- **The Russian/Ukraine war:** China is walking a tightrope, trying to uphold the principle of non-interference and state sovereignty, while supporting Russia without being seen as an official ally. As [one commentator](#) said, China is not particularly worried about what happens to Ukraine: 'For China, if Russia wins, that's great because China gains a stronger ally. If Russia loses, that is also great because China gains a vassal state, which is the second-largest nuclear power in the world. So I think people in the West, in Washington especially, want to see how China is going to lose in this. But in the Chinese framing, it's about how China is winning in this' (Grid News, 15 September 2022).
- **Foreign policy:** For instance, issues concerning the South China Sea, Taiwan, India and North Korea.
- **Population statistics:** China needs to prepare for both a falling population level and an ageing population.

The Church in China is increasingly being affected by the state's much more unified approach of actively interfering with and dominating church affairs (instead of simply acting as a background administrator, as previously). This is happening regardless of whether the churches involved are state-approved or non-registered. Restrictions still come in indirect ways, such as the demand to include Communist ideology and rhetoric in teaching and sermons, but the focus is now clearly on limiting the space in which churches can operate: They are under pressure to adapt their ministry, are more closely watched and some are being simply closed down. The COVID-19 pandemic has helped the authorities suspend the operation of many churches, unnoticed by the majority of the general public. While other sorts of meeting venues were gradually opened to the public again in 2021, many church venues were forced to remain closed, pushing congregations to meet online or dissolve into cell groups. Online space has also been restricted by rules coming into force from 1 March 2022 (see below: *Religious landscape*).

Since the Christian community is arguably one of the largest organized social forces not controlled by the Communist authorities, it is natural that Christians are generally regarded with suspicion by them, especially since religion in general is seen as something which should be overcome by Communism. The steady stream of ever more tightening regulations on religion which began on 1 February 2018 has extended into the WWL 2023 reporting period. These regulations provide the authorities with the legal provisions for strict guidance and intervention.

Cardinal Joseph Zen was interrogated on national security charges by the Hong Kong police and was released [on bail](#) after a few hours (Reuters, 11 May 2022). The emeritus bishop of Hong Kong, who turned 90 in the reporting period, was arrested with other prominent members of civil society on charges of 'collusion with foreign forces'. The charges go back to 2019 when those arrested were trustees of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund providing legal aid for protestors who had been arrested in the course of the pro-democracy movement. The Fund

closed down operations in 2021. In September 2022, Cardinal Zen stood trial for the [first round](#) of accusations (The Conversation, 19 September 2022).” Just a few days earlier, on 15 September 2022, Pastor Garry Pang stood trial on [sedition charges](#) for his support of the pro-democracy movement. In the trial Pang, who is defending himself, called Hong Kong's legal system “a hole in the dam”, and has been denied bail four times, according to reports (UCA News, 20 September 2022).

Political and legal landscape

The Communist Party (CCP) has tightened its grip on society (including all religious activities) and increasingly uses Maoist rhetoric and ideology in order to keep citizens in line. One of the biggest challenges China faces is its need for structural reforms: Both the demographic path the country is on and the increasing inequality (despite claims of poverty eradication) demand new answers (see below: Economic landscape and Social and cultural landscape). The economy was already slowing down before the arrival of COVID-19, but the strict domestic zero COVID policy and the continued US-Chinese decoupling process have made things worse. The CCP has its hands full trying to fulfill the tacitly agreed social contract of trading a lack of freedom for growing prosperity. However, the main CCP goal is not to bring happiness to the Chinese people or bring them prosperity, but first and foremost to stay in power. Consequently, the WWL 2023 reporting period was marked by efforts to avoid any ruptures in society, as the CCP faced its 20th Party Congress in October 2022. Peace, security and harmony in society are key words in this respect and any source of power perceived as posing a danger to the CCP's goal will be opposed, including religion.

One example how the COVID-19 restrictions and the app controlling health status and movement can be abused, happened in June 2022, when protests against a banking scandal (see below: Economic landscape) were hampered by the authorities using the COVID-19 tracking app to hinder citizens from traveling to Henan capital, Zhengzhou: Once they tried to board trains or find other ways of entering the city, they found that the health app on their phones had been [switched to red](#) (BBC News, 14 June 2022). After a public outcry, even the state-run Global Times weighed in with an editorial saying that health code information should [never be misappropriated](#) (Sixth Tone, 15 June 2022).

1) The repeated emphasis on Communist ideology is needed for staying in control

The CCP's main method for reaching the overarching goal of staying in control is to repeatedly emphasize Communist ideology. There is rarely a public statement or meeting in which the importance of heeding Communist values is not mentioned. This has been an emphasis from the beginning of President Xi's rule in 2012, but really took off when his name and ideas were officially [incorporated](#) into the CCP's Constitution (under the title “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era”) at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 (Washington Post, 24 October 2017). A change in the Constitution made him the first leader since Mao Zedong to be able to extend his state leadership beyond the two-term limit.

Although universities have dedicated whole academic centers for studying 'Xi Jinping Thought', the basics are not that complicated: Having predominantly Communist Party members and civil servants in mind, it boils down to the understanding that whoever does not toe the Party line closely, is in high danger of being replaced. And whichever groups do not embrace Communist ideology (e.g., most churches), they risk getting into serious trouble at various levels; at the very least they will be given a strict reminder of Communist principles.

While President Xi has been described as the 'core' of the Party in countless articles, one challenge is to embed Xi Jinping's thinking into the hearts and minds of all citizens and this is where much effort is being made, for instance, through media and censorship (see below: *Technological landscape*). At least 37 universities have set up a [course](#) on "Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era" (China Scope, 6 October 2020). Academia is not just following President Xi but is also becoming increasingly [nationalistic](#) (China Digital Times, 15 December 2020) and the room for debate is [shrinking](#) (Merics, 2 July 2021). (Liberal) [dissenters](#) still exist, but they must be very careful how they express their opinions (CSIS, 10 February 2022). The Communist Party Committees at the country's universities are to exercise "[comprehensive leadership](#)" over teaching, scientific research and administration, according to revised rules (RFA, 30 April 2021).

In what observers have called the "[largest mass-education drive](#) since the Mao era" (Wall Street Journal, 15 June 2021), only the CCP's version of Chinese [history](#) is to be told and any dissenting voices are to be reported (Channel News Asia, 11 April 2021). The CCP guides teachers in what should be taught through the content of history textbooks, e.g., about the "century of humiliation" and the infallible role of the Party (MEMRI [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#), 7/8 June 2022). The "century of humiliation" is a time spanning from 1839 (marking China's defeat in the first Opium War) up to the second Chinese-Japanese War ending in 1945. In this period, China was fragmented, lost almost all of its wars and was forced to accept concessions of territory and pay reparations. Students in today's China are being taught that this time of bullying is finally over, and that China is taking back its rightful place in the world. All of this is, of course, only possible under the rule of the Communist Party which has saved China from this humiliation and is the sole guarantor that this will never happen again.

Another example is a [new textbook](#) entitled 'The Principles of Scientific Atheism' which has been distributed in colleges and among Communist Party cadres (UCA News, 2 February 2022). In this book, the author claims to explain 'What God is' and prove that 'God does not exist'. He goes on to discuss 'The Gods and their Effects' and finally sets out 'The Communist Party's Religious Theory and Religious Policy'. The author is Li Shen, one time Director of the Confucianism Research Office at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. This shows that Confucianism is seen as being more genuinely Chinese and more easily adaptable to Communism than other religions. Reportedly, Shen even saw Confucianism as a form of atheism.

Party members are special targets: In order to help keep them in line with Communist doctrine and – more importantly – with Xi Jinping's thinking, the CCP [released a special app](#) (The Guardian, 15 February 2019). All Party members are required to complete lessons on the app and to stick to the [thoughts of Marx and Lenin](#) (Reuters, 27 February 2019). President Xi Jinping even claimed that '[Xi Jinping Thought](#) on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era'

is nothing less than 21st century Marxism (Trivium China, 28 February 2019). This is remarkable: No state leader has ever before dared to view his own political theory as an updated version of Karl Marx's thought. Those apps are [monitoring and copying user data](#) as well (BBC News, 14 October 2019). With the fourth volume of Xi Jinping Thought ("The governance of China") being [published](#) in July 2022 (China Daily, 3 July 2022), more study sessions for cadres and aspiring party members are guaranteed.

A [crucial channel](#) for implementing all these ideological terms and slogans are the so-called 'New Era Civilization Practice Centers' (China File, 31 January 2022). These have been developed since 2019 as neighborhood centers for encouraging citizens to "feel the warmth of the Party and the government", according to an explanation by The People's Daily. A 2019 Communist Party directive proposed that these centers should enlist 13% of permanent county residents to serve as volunteers. While the effectiveness of this policy is as unknown as the total number of volunteers, such a strategy may also serve the Party's goal of maintaining social stability and quenching the people's thirst for becoming active on social or political issues. According to the '2019 Implementation Plan' issued jointly by the Party's Central Propaganda Department and its Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization, the centers should model the kind of behavior the Party deems "civilized" and help "truly open up the last mile in terms of propagandizing to the masses, educating the masses, leading the masses, serving the masses". This aptly shows the main priorities: Propaganda and guidance come first; service last.

2) The president is displaying new-found self-confidence

The 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took place on 1 July 2021 and [Xi Jinping's speech](#) received well justified attention (BBC News, 1 July 2021). However, other speeches held by him around that time are just as revealing. Apart from the CCP's own brand of Chinese history, it was one particular phrase used by Xi Jinping in his anniversary speech which caught the attention of observers: "Anyone who tries to do so will find their head broken and blood flowing against a great wall of steel built with the flesh and blood of more than 1.4 billion Chinese people!" While it is true that the translation of idioms always has to be viewed with caution, the wording has been used before and it is clearly meant as a [warning](#) to both internal and external audiences (China Digital Times, 2 July 2021). Maybe less vivid than the 'wall of steel' picture, is another phrase Xi Jinping has frequently used in other speeches: "[Time and momentum are on our side](#)" (Merics, 9 July 2021). This slogan claims that the West is in irreversible decline, making way for China's equally unstoppable rise to glory.

The CCP and its leader have been sounding self-assured and assertive, along with a newly published Party History book, all serving to hype up the country's patriotic mood. The book follows how Chairman Mao made China 'rise up', the reformer Deng made the country 'rich' and now Xi Jinping is leading China to its historical destiny by making it 'strong', thus justifying his goal of absolute power. It cannot be expected that the country's strong economic development will automatically bring about more democratic freedom; this potential consequence (observed elsewhere) is more than outweighed by the country's [growing totalitarianism](#), as a country expert has shown (Minxin Pei, China: Totalitarianism's long shadow, Journal of Democracy, Volume 32 No.2, pp 5-21, 2 April 2021).

This increasing self-assurance received a blow in the WWL 2023 reporting period when the Ukraine War began, which seems to have come as a surprise to the Communist leadership: It would most certainly have preferred not to have had to deal with an international conflict prior to a politically sensitive period with the upcoming 20th Party Congress and President Xi Jinping's unprecedented third term. Nevertheless, the CCP made the most of it in claiming its neutrality while benefiting on discounted oil and gas (notwithstanding other challenges mentioned below, see: Economic landscape). The government is watching the war closely, especially for lessons to be learned concerning the possible 're-unification' of Taiwan.

The 25th anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong by the United Kingdom on 1 July 2022 was another significant event. Its importance was underlined by the fact that Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first trip 'abroad' since January 2020 to attend. He met with members of the policing services as a sign of "appreciation for restoring law and order after the turmoil of 2019" and claimed in his key speech that Hongkong had "[risen from the ashes](#)" (South China Morning Post, 30 June 2022). However, the outgoing unofficial Vatican envoy to Hong Kong, Monsignor Javier Herrera-Corona, had a different view. He told a gathering of 50 Catholic organizations in Hong Kong that the freedoms they had enjoyed for decades [were over](#) (Reuters 5 July 2022). He was quoted saying "Change is coming, and you'd better be prepared. Hong Kong is not the great Catholic beachhead it was." He warned that closer integration with China in coming years could lead to mainland-style restrictions on religious groups.

3) The CCP is making an assertive stand against (perceived) adversaries and neighboring countries

Coinciding with this newly found confidence is a much more assertive stance in the foreign policy realm. According to the classic Maoist view, there are friends of China who understand and accept what is being said by the CCP, and there are enemies who are hostile and insist on criticism, instead of learning about the inherent 'goodness' of the Communist Party's policies. It is worth reading the [translation](#) of a Politburo-speech (provided by Neican, 4 June 2021). An excerpt reads:

"It is important to strengthen the propaganda and interpretation of the [CCP], and to help foreign peoples realize that the [CCP] is truly fighting for the happiness of the Chinese people and understand why the [CCP] is capable [of success], why Marxism works, and why socialism with Chinese characteristics is good."

Consequently, Communist Party foreign policy has continued to be something of a challenge to the country's competitors' and neighbors: Apart from the already mentioned tense relationship with the USA, the EU also sharpened its stance by referring to China as "an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership and a [systemic rival](#) promoting alternative models of governance" (Politico, 12 March 2019). After meeting for consultations in mid-2022, the EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs was quoted as saying: "The dialogue was everything but a dialogue. In any case, it was a [dialogue of the deaf](#)" (CNN, 18 July 2022). NATO, too, declared China as a "[security challenge](#)" in its Strategic Concept, stating that Beijing's policies were challenging its "interests, security and values" (Al-Jazeera, 30 June 2022). This downward spiral in China's foreign policy has accelerated with the increasing bloc-building after the Ukraine war started.

As already listed in last year's Full Country Dossier, the CCP has continued creating hard facts in a range of key areas of contention (see also below: *Security situation*):

- **South China Sea:** It was discovered that eight years ago China had already [trademarked](#) hundreds of South China Sea landmarks with Chinese names (Benar News, 13 April 2021). China has continued to show a strong physical presence in contested areas (for instance, in disputes with the Philippines, but also with Japan) and has introduced a new [Coastguard law](#) which would make it easier to use violence against foreign vessels intruding on its claimed national sovereignty (Benar News, 22 January 2021). While encounters between Chinese forces and foreign military ships and aircraft continued to be recorded in the WWL 2023 reporting period, the US government took a significant step in publicly denouncing the [legality](#) of Chinese claims in the South China Sea (US State Department, 24 January 2022).
- **Tibet Autonomous Region:** Another tightening of the screw could be seen in the Tibet Autonomous Region, where a new [“Ethnic Unity Law”](#) has been implemented (RFA, 1 May 2020). Xi Jinping [visited](#) the province for the first time in his tenure in July 2021 to witness the progress these and other policies were making (AP News, 24 July 2021).
- **The Uighur minority in Xinjiang:** While the CCP continues to deny the scale of the crackdown against the Uighur minority in Xinjiang (despite all evidence to the contrary - see Jamestown's report on [coercive labor and forced displacement](#) published in March 2021, Human Rights Watch's article on [systematic suppression](#) published on 19 April 2021 and ASPI's report on how the repression is governed, published on 19 October 2021), in a rare report it was shown that even in Xinjiang [church buildings](#) have to be closed when they fail to follow the policy of Sinicization (China Aid, 23 February 2021). In the wake of the UNHCHR's visit to China and Xinjiang in May 2022 (see below: Trends analysis), another investigation called the [“Xinjiang Police Files”](#) was published, documenting the depth and breadth of the human rights violations against the Uighurs (Adrian Zenz, The Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies Volume 3, 2022, pp 1-56). A possible signal for a coming re-orientation of policy could be seen in President Xi Jinping's visit to Xinjiang for the first time in eight years, when he emphasized the importance of [economic development](#). Just before that visit, in June 2022, Governor Chen Quanguo, who had been the architect and overseer of the crackdown against the Uighur minority, was replaced by a technocrat and economic specialist (Nikkei Asia, 16 July 2022).
- **Border issues with India:** China and India made efforts to [disengage](#) and avoid further military conflicts along its highly disputed 3,500km border (in contrast to the year 2020 with the [stand-off](#) reported by The Diplomat on 15 May 2020), but it remains to be seen how sustainable these efforts are (First Post, 9 September 2022).
- **Border issues with Bhutan:** China has claimed a large piece of [Bhutanese state territory](#) as its own, amounting to around 11% of the whole of Bhutan (The Diplomat, 6 July 2020). Apart from the delicate implications for tiny neighbor Bhutan, the true addressee of this claim seems to be India. Since the claimed territory would be an enclave with no direct con-

nection to the rest of China, it would make the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh the next candidate to be disputed. In the meantime, China has been building complete village infrastructures on [Bhutanese territory](#), thus tacitly claiming ownership of land for the Tibet Autonomous Region (Foreign Policy, 7 May 2021). China and Bhutan announced the [resumption](#) of border talks (The Diplomat, 18 November 2021), but so far, no new developments have been reported. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, China allegedly [accelerated](#) the construction process along its border with Bhutan (Jamestown Foundation, 11 February 2022). Meanwhile, Bhutan tries to [engage more](#) with China, so far without any concrete results (RSIS, 28 September 2022).

- **The Pacific Islands:** The Pacific Islands are going through a phase of [political disunity](#), potentially increasing the chances for China's influence to deepen (RSIS, 1 March 2021). Apart from the very relevant geostrategic implications, which cannot be dealt with here, these frictions also highlight how China is actively competing and winning more and more influence in this part of the world. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, China concluded a [security pact](#) with the Solomon Islands (The Guardian, 14 July 2022) and offered similar pacts to other countries in the region, too. Apart from a flurry of diplomatic activity from Western countries, this led to the Pacific Island Forum being even [more deeply split](#) (The Diplomat, 12 July 2022).

Gender issues

In relation to gender, China's laws are - on paper - relatively balanced. [The Marriage Law](#) mandates that both parties must be consenting in entering a marriage (Article 4) and forced marriages are prohibited in [Article 44](#) of China's 1992 Revised Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women. Women have the same legal rights as men to be recognized as head of the household and both genders have equal rights in relation to divorce (Marriage Law, Article 31). China ratified the Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 and in 2015 passed its first-ever national law to address domestic violence. Despite these positive legal provisions, gender inequalities persist, and the effective implementation of legal frameworks is lacking, partly inhibited by the longstanding influence of Confucian family principles.

The government's hesitancy in protecting women's rights, not found in its attitude towards critics, is believed to also play a significant role in the [trafficking of child brides](#) (Human Rights Watch, 7 June 2022). Furthermore, the domestic violence law does not cover all situations, such as divorced or separated couples, or instances of sexual or financial abuse ([Asia Foundation](#), April 2020). According to [media reports](#), cases of domestic violence surged amid the COVID-19 lockdowns – [tripling](#) in February 2020 alone – which critics say points to the ineffectiveness of the 2015 law (The Diplomat, 6 April 2020; Usta et al, August 2021)

Military service is [technically obligatory](#) for men, with a service obligation of two years (World Population Review, accessed 12 August 2022). Due to the size of the population, however, this is rarely enforced as there are usually enough volunteers. This is likely to remain the status quo, considering the current economic climate and the increasing number of jobseekers ([Bloomberg](#), 25 July 2022).

Religious landscape

China: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	96,700,000	6.7
Muslim	25,279,248	1.7
Hindu	19,785	0.0
Buddhist	239,374,075	16.5
Ethno-religionist	60,673,021	4.2
Jewish	2,927	0.0
Bahai	7,066	0.0
Atheist	97,000,520	6.7
Agnostic	469,705,644	32.4
Other	459,708,385	31.7
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)
(Adapted according to OD-estimate)

As a Communist country, China is - at least in theory - against all religions, since Marxist teaching states that “religion is the opium of the people”. According to its Constitution, China is atheist. But, as in all Communist countries, the government finds that citizens often tend to be religious and so it tries to use traditional religions and ethics as a means of controlling and steering society. Therefore, traditional Chinese culture in general (and Confucianism in particular) are praised as being truly Chinese, the message being: “If one needs to have a faith, it should be Confucian”, a move which brings around 40% of the population on the side of the government. And since Confucianism is more a philosophy than a religion, it is quite flexible and can accept all kinds of rulers, including Communist. Confucianism can thus “serve as an ethical resource for the state constitution, as well as a resource for [social governance](#)” (Journal of Law and Religion 35, No 1, Abstract, see also pp. 138-148). As one country observer said: The goal of the CCP is to co-opt religion into Communist society.

At the same time, the Chinese government is conducting a pilot project in selected regions, mobilizing citizens into reporting crimes (including illegal Christian activities) by giving them rewards. The strong warnings against religious groups are bearing fruit: Citizens organized in neighborhood committees are beginning to regard religious groups as 'troublemakers' and do not want them in their neighborhood. As always in China, this sentiment is not felt in the whole country. Xu Xiaohong, head of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, said in June 2021 at an exhibition in Shanghai entitled 'One Heart, One Virtue, One Path: Chinese Christianity Loves the Party, the Country, and Socialism Theme Exhibition': “History fully proves that without the CCP, there is no religious policy that is

supported by both believers and non-believers, there is no social environment for the healthy development of religion in China, and there is no good situation where all religions in China can live in harmony.” (Bitter Winter, 29 June 2021). It may be more accurate to use the term ["Chinafication"](#) instead of "Sinification", as the real goal is not to gain cultural uniformity but to ensure political conformity and obedience to China's government (China Source, 3 February 2020). But in any case, religions have to [serve the goals](#) of the Communist Party (The Globe and Mail, 30 June 2021).

Tibetan Buddhism and Islam (especially in the province of Xinjiang) face particularly harsh restrictions since their activities are widely seen as being political, since both regions have been the scene of (or are still seen as being at risk spawning) independence movements, some of them acting violently against the authorities. Many observers refer to Xinjiang as a police state: When the existence of re-education camps for hundreds of thousands of citizens could no longer be hidden, the authorities simply stated that these camps serve vocational and other training purposes and tried to win over international opinion by giving carefully guided tours. According to local sources, Christian converts have also been run through these programs. The small numbers of Christian converts within the minority religions struggle to survive as they are under pressure from both government and the surrounding culture, but even Han Chinese Christians are hindered from practicing their faith and keep their Christian meetings out of sight in these regions. Consequently, Xinjiang has been called a ["testing ground"](#) for the Communist Party's religious policies (Made in China Journal, 2 July 2021). There are other ethnic minority religions in existence, but they are not the focus of government repression.

The "Sinicization" (or "Chinafication", see above) of churches continues. Since 1 February 2020, [new rules](#) govern the organization of religion, its rites, selection of leaders and hiring of staff (International-LaCroix, 7 February 2020). Due to the new regulations on religion and its intensified implementation (both in depth and in breadth), numerous reports are emerging of raids and closures on churches - experienced by both TSPM and house-churches all over the country. This iron grip involves the confiscation of property and Christian materials (including Bibles), raids, fines and the arrest of church leaders. The February 2020 rules have since been updated and extended by regulations pertaining to religious ministers, which came into force on 1 May 2021.

All aspects of church life are now under the guidance of the Religious Affairs Office and the Communist Party. In a speech, delivered by a high-ranking member of the Communist Party in November 2019, the Ethnic Groups and Religion Committee of the Chinese National People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) was asked to [reinterpret and translate](#) (the original language said "re-annotate") holy scriptures (such as the Bible) guided by Socialist core values (China Scope, 1 January 2020). The goal seems to be to cultivate researchers of the Bible, who will work on an exegesis/annotation of the Bible based on Socialist core values.

Another example of this 'guidance' being imposed can be seen in Shandong Province (and increasingly elsewhere) where churches are being forced to display government-prepared posters with verses from the Bible illustrating the twelve core principles of Socialism, divided up below into National values (column 1), Social values (column 2) and Individual values (column 3):

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| • Prosperity | • Freedom | • Patriotism |
| • Democracy | • Equality | • Dedication |
| • Civility | • Justice | • Integrity |
| • Harmony | • Rule of law | • Friendship |

These 12 core principles (written in 24 Chinese characters) are being incorporated into training courses for church leaders and preachers.

A further example is an [ethics textbook](#) published for secondary vocational schools, which has changed the ending of the Biblical account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (to be found in the New Testament, Gospel of John, Chapter 8) (UCA News, 22 September 2020). In the Communist version of the story, Jesus does not protect and forgive the adulteress, instead he waits for the Pharisees to leave and then stones her himself, saying: 'I too am a sinner. But if the law could only be executed by men without blemish, the law would be dead'. Since schoolbooks have to go through a highly scrutinized process before being published (and as the publisher is the government-run University of Electronic Science and Technology Press), the Chinese authorities must have seen and approved this version. While all these examples may be individual cases, they deserve to be closely watched.

All kinds of cults are active in China, some of which may have Christian roots, but which seriously deviate from core Christian teaching. One of the best known is "Eastern Lightning" or "Church of Almighty God" (CAG), which believes that Jesus Christ has been born again in the form of a Chinese woman. The strong missionary zeal of the CAG has caused the authorities to act firmly against such groups which are referred to as "[xie jiao](#)", literally translated: "heterodox cults", a term already used in ancient, feudal China (Bitter Winter, 9 August 2018). According to a country expert, the authorities today do not distinguish between *xie jiao* and house churches anymore, they simply enforce the regulations by identifying any such gatherings as "illegal religious groups".

Due to rapid urbanization, the Chinese church is developing from being basically a rural-style to an urban-style church with large congregations and all the opportunities and problems that accompany such a development. Apart from the long working hours required in modern industry (which challenges the traditional forms of meeting), rising prices also pose difficulties. As the cost of living has risen considerably in recent years, churches have discovered the need to [financially care for pastors](#) and their families (China Source, 21 March 2017). According to the China Religion Survey 2015, the [average income](#) of a church leader has been the equivalent of 70 USD, with 41% lacking any pension system (Bitter Winter, 4 August 2020). Despite all challenges, there is a [growing movement](#) among China's churches focusing on overseas mission (The Diplomat, 4 July 2018). The circumstances may get more difficult, but Christians are determined to spread the Christian faith, even when they have to [split](#) into cell groups or find other ways of practicing worship and fellowship (China Source, 18 June 2021).

According to one expert's [observation](#) (Professor Timothy Cheek writing in CCP Watch on 17 June 2022), the Communist Party's need to dominate everything, does not come without challenges:

Probably the greatest ideological success of the CCP in the past 20 years has been to identify the nation with the Party and to get most people to believe that even with its faults, there's no alternative to the Party to take care of China's national interests.

This singlemindedness (also called monism), whereby the CCP declares that it alone must be responsible for organizing every aspect of Chinese society, collides with the people's need for some kind of spiritual foundation:

On what basis do you not just cheat everyone and assume everyone's trying to cheat you? That's a pretty nasty, brutish, and short way to live, and China's intellectuals don't like it. That's why you see the revival of Confucianism, because combined with a sort of nationalism that responds in understandable ways to the underlying racism of Western liberal theory, as they experience it and as the more radical colleagues in my university put it.

When asked about other sources of ideology in China today and if the Party-state has succeeded in stamping out other potential sources, such as religion or foreign political ideology, the answer is not surprising for anyone who has been watching China or has read Ian Johnson's seminal book "The souls of China":

Clearly not. There are a number of competing belief systems in China today. One of the great failures of the Communist Party, including in their own eyes, is their inability to eradicate religion. One of the weaknesses of the Chinese Communist state, perhaps its Achilles heel, is its inability to handle religion. The horrors of what they're doing in Xinjiang and their recurrent spats with Chinese Christians are so unnecessary from an agnostic political science point of view, but the Party feels challenged, because religion is another ideology.

Professor Cheek considers that a potential solution would be to simply add religion as a "Fourth Represent" to the so-called "Three Represents" (in Chinese: San ge daibiao) which the Central Committee formulated as the foundation of the CCP's social political theory in the 1990s. The Three Represents are:

1. The CCP represents the the advanced forces of production;
2. The CCP represents the advanced forces of culture;
3. The CCP represents all the people of China

However, to add "4. The CCP represents selected religions in China" would be impossible since the Communist goal is ultimately to eradicate religion and not co-opt it. Professor Cheek states:

Now, if they can do the Three Represents and say capitalists are fine in the Party, they could get a Fourth Represent. They could find a way to accommodate religion. I know a couple of Muslim Party cadres, and that's what they want. They would be happy to be Maoists and Muslims. The Party won't let them. It's an Achilles heel.

In a concluding remark, Professor Cheek shares a surprising observation, saying that the Chinese people expect the government to “talk like a church”:

Xi Jinping cannot tell people what to think and they will do it like a bunch of automatons. This is not the Borg. But people need to know why they're doing things. There's a broad expectation in China that the government ought to talk like a church. Chinese politics is about values and morality. Western politics at least used to be about interests. No wonder we misunderstand each other.

Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI profile:

- **Gross National Income (2017 USD PPP):** 16,057
- **Multidimensional poverty:** The rate of people in multidimensional poverty is 3.9%, the rate of people vulnerable to it is 17.4% The rate of people living below the national poverty line is 1.7%
- **Remittances:** 0.13% of the national GDP

According to the World Bank country profile:

- China is classified as an upper middle income country
- **GDP per capita (PPP constant 2017 international USD):** 17,603
- **GDP per capita growth rate:** 1.98% in 2020, but 8.1% in 2021. The country's [accumulated debt-to-GDP ratio](#) is 263% as of the 3rd quarter of 2021 (Bloomberg, 20 October 2021)
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** 3% (2019)

The days of very strong economic growth in China would seem to be over. For many years, China had recorded a double-digit economic growth, but in 2019, the growth rate hit a [29 year-low](#) at 6.1% (Fortune, 17 January 2020). Because of the already slowing growth and the strongly felt impact of the COVID-19 crisis, in 2020 the Communist Party did [not set a GDP growth target](#) for the first time in 30 years (The Economist, 30 May 2020). Likewise, in the long-expected 14th Five Year Plan, the Communist Party did not set a concrete growth rate to be achieved, but instead repeated a slogan (which echoes far beyond the economic sphere) about ["getting China's house in order"](#). This should be achieved by “proactively building a more favorable external environment” (MacroPolo, 10 November 2020).

The authorities targeted tech companies with restrictions and fines in 2020 and 2021 and although this policy seemed to have been eased, these actions may be signs of what “getting China's house in order” means. In a reminder that such policies tend to come in waves, in July 2022 ride-hailing app Didi Global was [fined a record](#) 1.2 billion USD for several law breaches, additionally, it had already been banned from the Chinese app market (CNN, 21 July 2022). Another reason to get the house in order is corruption, despite all efforts by Xi Jinping and his anti-corruption campaign, China is living through what one observer called the ["Gilded Age"](#) (Foreign Affairs, 24 June 2021). However, arguably the biggest challenge for the Communist Party is the fall-out from COVID 19 and its strict zero-COVID policy, producing lockdowns hard to predict and demanding mass testing, which is not only time-consuming for citizens, but also

very expensive. One of the most illustrative examples of what this means was the [extended lockdown](#) of Shanghai in March and April 2022. While there may also be a certain level of “schadenfreude” among fellow Chinese – as citizens of Shanghai are known for their tendency to look down on their compatriots – the economic and social consequences are hard to measure (Reuters, 19 April 2022). Therefore, the GDP growth rate for 2021 given above is misleading. The growth rate for the second quarter of 2022 was reported to be a [mere 0.4%](#) (CNBC, 15 July 2022) and it is not clear to what extent statistics can anyway be trusted, especially as more infectious variants of COVID 19 make their inroads within China.

While China's GDP, which is the second largest in the world, is set to overtake the USA's by around 2030, it should be noted that there are [two sorts of GDP statistics](#) (Project Syndicate, 30 April 2021) and it is most common for the total GDP to be discussed. But this is a poor indicator for the situation of ordinary Chinese people in everyday life. Most economists therefore care more about China's per capita GDP, or income per person, than the aggregate measure. China's per capita GDP in 2022 was \$12,556, placing the country between Seychelles (\$13,307) and Costa Rica (\$12,509). Its per capita GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms – with income adjusted to take account of the cost of living – was \$17,192. This is below the global average of \$18,381 (2019) and puts China 77th in the world, between Equatorial Guinea (\$17,788) and Botswana (\$16,893).

There are also [considerable economic variations](#) between the provinces (Asia News, 5 November 2019). Roughly speaking, the urban and coastal areas in the east are far better off than the rural west and hinterland. Guangdong Province, bordering Hongkong, is by far the wealthiest region. Seen as a total, China has what one observer called a [debt hang-over](#), which is mainly a local problem, meaning that local and provincial governments are far more in debt than the nation state as such (Macro Polo, 2 July 2021; this article provides data per province).

[Food self-sufficiency](#) still remains an important issue (Jamestown, 7 June 2021) and the CCP has called for efforts to [secure food supplies](#) and citizens had been advised to stock up on food and other supplies as the winter months of 2022 approached (Bloomberg, 23 November 2021). Apart from ideological alignment, food security may be one additional reason why China is siding with Russia in the Ukraine war. According to one [source](#), China produces approximately 93 percent of its own wheat, but the remaining 7 percent is still critical to its food security. China consumes all it has, has just had a bad winter wheat harvest, and is banning the sale of wheat for animal feed (The Diplomat, 30 March 2022). This also means that the symbol for (modest) prosperity in China - the ability to eat pork regularly - may come under pressure, as the price for pork is expected to soar. In the Diplomat article, the author adds:

China plans to increase its Russian imports, saying that the door is ‘wide open’ for Russian wheat. Therein lies China’s dilemma. Were even 5 percent of the Chinese population to be deprived of food made from wheat [e.g. China’s other staple food, noodles; ed.], due to China’s recently reinstated imports from Russia improbably being shut off by the Chinese government in a nod to sanctions, that translates into over 72 million people in China missing out on a staple food. That in turn would not only be a humanitarian disaster but also a political one for the CCP. If oil imports are not sufficient to meet demand, people may get ornery, but

they will not starve to death. If food imports dry up, and people begin to be hungry, that would incite social protest and worse. ... Almost 200 million people in China today are over 65. That means that the Great Famine [1959-1961] is held within the living memory of a significant portion of the Chinese population, approximately 13.5 percent, according to Chinese figures. Little haunts China more than the idea of impending hunger. As such, China will go to great lengths to protect the stability and security of its food supply. If that means flouting international sanctions against Russia, expect China to do so. No sanction on China could be worse from its perspective than a threat to its food supply and the consequences of not having enough.

Due to the ongoing Chinese-US decoupling process, the Communist Party announced a "dual circulation" economic policy, which mainly means that China is turning more inwards, relying more on its [own strength](#) and abilities and, in economic terms, local demand (PRC Leadership tracker, 1 December 2021). This also includes a general strengthening of state-owned enterprises and the active involvement of Party committees in [private companies'](#) policies (Macro Polo, 16 December 2020). One observer summed up the trend as follows: "China Inc." is becoming "[CCP Inc.](#)" (PRC Leadership tracker, 1 December 2020). At the same time, all these efforts come with an ideological component, as could be seen in the introduction of "[common prosperity](#)", which is explicitly meant to shape the spirit of the people, too (Neican, 18 October 2021).

Internationally, China has become the fourth-largest provider of Foreign Direct Investments in the world according to [UNCTAD](#) and invests in such diverse regions and countries as Central Asia, Pakistan, Africa and Latin America (UNCTAD World Investment Report 2020). In a both economic and geo-strategic move, China has built up what observers call its "string of pearls" or "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) - a network of ports and commercial facilities along the coast all the way from China to Kenya, Sudan and Europe, of which ports like the (yet to be completed) Pakistani port of Gwadar are a very important part. Such investments come with a risk, as can be seen in the incident where [three Chinese teachers were killed](#) at the Confucius Institute of the University of Karachi in April 2022 (BBC News, 27 April 2022). Reportedly, China is considering deploying its own security forces to protect Chinese nationals, a request strongly opposed by the hosts. A [white paper](#) on foreign aid, released in January 2021, tries to keep the balance between yi (public good) and li (self-interest) (Panda Paw Dragon Claw, 18 January 2021). In general and also due to COVID-19, the speed of investment has slowed down and the Communist Party is also facing increasing levels of scrutiny when applying for projects abroad. There are voices calling for a better [restructuring](#) and reorganization of the different Chinese aid initiatives (Panda Paw Dragon Claw, 20 October 2021).

Additional reasons for the Communist Party to further develop the Belt-Road-Initiative (BRI) are to connect China's landlocked provinces to the sea and to keep the economy and surplus production running. However, criticism from abroad is being levelled at China for setting high interest rates for loans and requiring large numbers of Chinese workers to work in project countries. Apart from Pakistan, the BRI runs through other contested and insecure areas like Shan and Rakhine states in Myanmar. While China still did not officially recognize the military regime, the meeting of foreign ministers at the 7th Mekong-Lancang Cooperation conference

held in Bagan/Myanmar in July 2022 showed that while China is pushing for the security of its investments, it is willing to [continue developing](#) the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (Panda Paw Dragon Claw, 11 July 2022). Finally, in what can also be seen as an attempt at diversification, China joined the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ([RCEP](#) - a free trade agreement between ASEAN states and six of its partners) which it would also like to use to boost BRI progress (Panda Paw Dragon Claw, 30 November 2020). While in terms of volume, the foreign trade with [North Korea](#) is negligible, it should be noted that the borders slowly reopened and goods (as well as coal) have been crossing the border again in March 2022 (38North, 23 March 2022).

One of China's latest projects is the setting up of an international development bank called the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which has gained support from around the world despite opposition from the USA and Japan. Although its lending is still limited compared to other international development banks, China is likely to gain more diplomatic leverage. In general, by using 'soft power', China is increasing its influence around the world and its self-confidence. On the positive side, China's expanding influence presents opportunities for Chinese churches to become more active in ministry and mission. However, where countries feel threatened by China's growing power, there could be reactions causing the overseas mission work carried out by Chinese churches to be hindered.

According to the World Bank country overview:

- **Economic growth:** “China’s high growth based on resource-intensive manufacturing, exports, and low-paid labor has largely reached its limits and has led to economic, social, and environmental imbalances. Reducing these imbalances requires shifts in the structure of the economy from manufacturing to high value services, and from investment to consumption. Over the past few years, growth has moderated in the face of structural constraints, including declining labor force growth, diminishing returns to investment, and slowing productivity. The challenge going forward is to find new drivers of growth while addressing the social and environmental legacies of China’s previous development path. China’s rapid economic growth exceeded the pace of institutional development, and there are important institutional and reform gaps that China needs to address to ensure a high-quality and sustainable growth path. The role of the state needs to evolve and focus on providing stable market expectations and a clear and fair business environment, as well as strengthening the regulatory system and the rule of law to further support the market system.”
- **COVID-19:** “Following real GDP growth of 8.1 percent in 2021, growth is projected to slow to 5.0 percent in 2022. The forecast reflects rising headwinds: Domestic demand has slowed, and the global economic environment has worsened significantly with the war in Ukraine. In addition, COVID incursions have become more frequent and widespread. China is currently experiencing the largest COVID wave since the end of the national lockdown in March 2020. ... Over the medium term, China’s economy is facing structural headwinds given adverse demographics, tepid productivity growth, and the legacies of excessive borrowing and environmental pollution. In the face of these challenges, macroeconomic policies need to be careful not to exacerbate financial risks. Structural reforms are needed

to reinvigorate the shift to more balanced high-quality growth. An important element of such a shift is a reduction in the inequality of economic opportunities. The government has highlighted achieving common prosperity as a key economic objective but has not yet defined specific policies to reach this goal. More progressive taxation and a strengthened social protection system could protect the most vulnerable, reduce inequality and help boost private consumption as a driver of growth.”

A banking [scandal](#) emerged in April 2022, involving initially four rural banks in Henan province; it may however widen and point to problems in the rural banking system at a deeper level (Reuters, 12 July 2022). It could have serious implications not just for provincial authorities, but also for the central authorities. Around 400,000 customers who had invested in banking products from the four banks (and another one in Anhui province) were blocked from accessing and withdrawing their savings from April 2022 onwards. While the products had often been bought [online](#) and categorized as “savings”, they may have been better categorized as “wealth management” products (SupChina, 15 July 2022) which are not covered by a state-wide insurance fund. Angry customers took to the streets and demanded that their “China dream” should not be shattered. Although the protestors did not formulate their demands as criticism of the central authorities and even used official government catchwords like “[China dream](#)”, another protest in July 2022 was violently attacked by unidentified assailants dressed in white (BBC News, 12 July 2022). Finally, however, the authorities did announce that depositors would get back at least part of their savings.

Another reminder of the current economic difficulties and the need for the authorities to react effectively is the ongoing housing and mortgage crisis, which arguably has a far greater impact than the bank scandal mentioned above. Buyers of residential housing projects across China are beginning to [withhold mortgage payments](#) until the houses are finished: “By July 12 [2022], buyers of 35 residential projects across 22 cities in China said they had decided to stop mortgage repayments, according to a report by Citigroup Inc. on Wednesday, despite the fact that it could mar their personal credit rating” (RFA, 14 July 2022). Particularly interesting in this is the last remark, as a bad personal credit rating can have far-reaching implications for their ability to act in the economic sphere (e.g., for buying and selling) and even in the social sphere (where a bad credit rating may become public and lead to neighbors and friends distancing themselves). The mortgage boycotts have reportedly spread to include [hundreds of thousands of home-owners](#) across China (Foreign Affairs, 30 August 2022), and the Central government is struggling to curb the ripple effects.

Christians have also been participating in China's breath-taking economic development over the last decades. At the same time, it has been a challenge for churches to serve the millions of migrant workers (and assist them when facing social difficulties) and to adjust to the new environment in the cities, which is so different to life in impoverished rural areas. Another phenomenon has been that many well-educated middle-class intellectuals have been drawn to Christianity as well, among them many lawyers and university lecturers.

Gender issues

Overall, women remain economically more vulnerable than men in China. The gender gap in education has significantly improved over recent decades, such that girls are even beginning to narrowly outnumber boys in higher-education enrolment ([National Bureau of Statistics of China](#), December 2021). Despite this progress in China's education system, women face disadvantages in the workplace. As of June 2022, the labor force participation rate for men was 74%, compared to 62% for women (World Bank profile). Employers have [openly](#) favored men for promotions and high-responsibility jobs, in part eager to avoid the cost of paying for maternity leave (New York Times, 16 July 2019). According to Human Rights Watch, 11% of civil service job adverts specify '[men only](#)' (HRW, 29 April 2020).

These problems all play a role in a declining population level (see below: *Social and cultural landscape*).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI profile and the CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Han Chinese 91.1%, other ethnic minorities 8.9% (includes Zhang, Hui, Manchu, Uighur, Miao, Yi, Tujia, Tibetan, Mongol, Dong, Buyei, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh, Dai) 7.1% (2010 est.)
- **Main languages:** Standard Chinese or Mandarin (official; Putonghua, based on the Beijing dialect), Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghainese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, Hakka dialects, minority languages
- **Urbanization rate:** 63.6%
- **Literacy rate:** 96.8% (2018; of adults of 15 years and older)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 8.1 years.
- **Health and education indicators:** Per 10,000 people, China has 19.8 physicians and 43 hospital beds, the pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 16:1

According to the World Bank country overview:

- **Population/Age distribution:** The percentage of citizens under 14 years of age is 17.6%; the percentage above 65 years of age is 12.4%
- **Education:** The primary school completion rate is 98.3% (2009), the primary school enrollment rate is 103%
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 4.8%, the rate of vulnerable employment is 42.5% (modeled ILO estimate)
- **IDPs/Refugees:** The [IOM](#) (accessed 18 July 2022) estimates that in 2017, 10 million Chinese migrants were living and working overseas, while one million international migrants were registered in China. The country hosted approximately [290 million migrant workers](#) in 2022, 75% of which worked in their [home province](#); this number means that 20% of the whole population and almost 35% of the total workforce are migrant workers. The COVID-19 crisis had a particularly strong impact on them (Reuters, 27 May 2022/Statista, April 2022).

According to the UN Global Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **HDI score and ranking:** With a score of 0.761, China ranks 85th of 189 countries. Its growth in terms of HDI has been one of the strongest of all countries since 1990 and the strongest among the countries categorized as "highly developed"
- **Life expectancy:** 76.9 years
- **Median age:** 38.4
- **GINI coefficient:** 38.5
- **Gender inequality:** With a score of 0.168, China ranks 39th among 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index. Together with Azerbaijan, China has the most unequal sex ratio at birth with a score of 1.13 (male to female births)
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 4.3%; the rate of vulnerable employment is 45.4%; the percentage of youth between 15 and 24 years of age not in employment/school is 17.9%.

The Communist Party is facing a multitude of challenges in the social sphere, but three problems in particular are a focus for attention: 1) The population decline, 2) The youth challenge and 3) The eradication of poverty.

1) The Population decline

It is by now well known that the Chinese population is “getting old before it gets rich”. The now abandoned one-child-policy has had a serious downside: A growing number of middle-aged citizens are facing the challenge of balancing the needs of making a living, family life and of caring for ageing parents who now enjoy longer life-expectancy. According to Chinese government statistics, the number of people older than 60 will have doubled in 2030.

According to a [study](#) published by the Ministry of Public Security, the number of births in 2020 dropped by more than one million (or 15%) (Jamestown, 11 February 2021). However, this number varies regionally, with a city like Taizhou in relatively wealthy Zhejiang Province reporting a drop of 33%. A decline in population numbers is predicted to start as early as 2027, but some Chinese research institutes suggest it may even start during the 14th Five Year Plan period (2021-2025).

A psychological side-effect of the decline is that according to a UN projection, already by 2023 India will overtake China as the [most populous country](#) (Axios, 12 July 2022). According to China's latest census in 2020, the country saw an increase in population, but it was the [slowest growth](#) ever recorded within a decade and there was a significant decline in the number of births (Reuters, 11 May 2021). Looking at the census results, there are three particularly interesting points to take note of: One is that second children make up 50% of all births, showing that the easing of the one-child-policy has been effective, although its effects will come too late according to experts from inside and outside China and despite [headlines](#) such as “China is not having enough babies” (Channel News Asia, 27 November 2021). A second interesting fact is that only [two provinces](#) have more women than men, namely Liaoning and Jilin, both in China's northwest (Radii China, 11 May 2021). A third point of interest is that migration towards urban

areas has continued, despite previous indications suggesting the opposite. In the last decade, urbanization patterns changed as intra-urban migration grew stronger, but the [rural-urban migration](#) was still strong and the urban population increased by 14.21% in the last decade (Sixth Tone, 9 June 2021).

According to observers, government reactions so far have mostly [made things worse](#), as these have put strong pressure on women (Foreign Policy, 3 May 2022). The options for the leadership to react to these challenges are clearly limited, especially since encouraging people to have more children, faces several obstacles: First, there may be social challenges (for instance, for migrant workers or for the increasing number of families who have to take care of their ageing parents while working long hours often a great distance away); secondly, according to studies, raising a child is comparably [more expensive](#) in China than it is in the USA or Japan (Reuters, 23 February 2022). However, the real “[demographic bomb](#)” is China’s population structure, which is rapidly ageing (South China Morning Post - SCMP, 12 April 2021). Given the CCP’s increasingly nationalist policies, migration will not be seen as an option to defuse this bomb, as it has been in some other countries facing similar challenges. The CCP’s immediate reaction was to ease the two-child policy, turning it now into a [three-child policy](#) (Reuters, 31 May 2021). This has led many to question why such a limitation is still seen to be necessary at all. The most likely answer is that the CCP would like only certain people to have more children. Ethnic minorities tend to have more children than the average Han family. As one observer said, this comes very close to making [eugenics](#) widely acceptable: “Beijing is trying to restrict fertility in some groups, it is also encouraging fertility in other groups, namely, among Han urban dwellers.” (Neican, 15 March 2021).

Another alternative for ageing societies is to encourage migration from cities into the countryside, a path the CCP will most definitely not want to follow. A far more likely and far less popular measure will be to raise the retirement threshold, something which had been proposed in the last 5 year plan, but never made it into law, as it was [highly unpopular](#) and even bore the risk of social unrest (Quartz, 22 April 2022). The [retirement age](#) in China for men is 60, while for women, it is 55 for white-collar workers and 50 for blue-collar employees (Xinhua, 12 March 2021).

The SCMP article mentioned above also gives some astonishing figures, illustrating the size of the problem: At the end of 2019, there were 176 million people over 65 years of age; in 2025 it will be 300 million. The labor force continues to decline and will lose a further 66 million by 2030. There are predictions that China’s population will peak around 2030 at the 1.44 - 1.46 billion mark and then see a sharp decline, some expecting it to fall to 800 million by the year 2100. And another report has highlighted the fast ageing society in China by saying that 149 cities across the country have entered the state of ‘[deep ageing](#)’, meaning that 14% of the population are over 65 (RFA, 9 September 2021). This poses challenges, but also unique opportunities for Christians, who are known around the world for running nursing homes for the elderly, in obedience to Christ’s command to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

Taking into account the ongoing trend of urbanization, it is difficult for many to visit their parents on a regular basis. Therefore, millions of old people are left on their own. These demographic challenges translate into political challenges. The three main factors are: 1) The birth rate is shrinking; 2) The workforce is shrinking; and 3) The proportion of elderly people is growing exponentially. The traditional values of caring for ageing parents will therefore become virtually impossible for families to fulfil in the near future. This could become a serious problem for the Communist Party since other countries facing similar challenges have always partnered with social charities and churches. Such a solution is obviously not an option in Communist China where all social activities run by churches have been closed down or made to vanish from public view.

2) The youth challenge

The economic slowdown has another consequence which the Communist Party is having a hard time to deal with. In 2022, a record number of [10.6 million college graduates](#) are starting their career and are faced with an increasing lack of opportunities (Sup China, 4 May 2022). Reportedly, graduates are applying in record numbers for state jobs, a career that had come to be seen as second-choice, since private employers and especially the tech sector were creating more lucrative jobs in high numbers. But now, in more challenging times, as tech companies are struggling with tighter regulations and record fines, young people seem to appreciate more what has sometimes been referred to as the “[iron rice bowl](#)” (Taketonews, 5 May 2022).

Young people aged between 16 and 24 have a tough start in their working lives with 19.9% of them currently [unemployed](#) according to official statistics (Sixth Tone, 16 August 2022). While many try to find security in state employment, others – in record breaking numbers – are deciding to continue their studies and apply for postgraduate courses. At the same time, college graduates are applying for jobs for which they are over-qualified. Experts do not see any quick solutions for this dilemma, especially in an adverse economic climate. While this does not necessarily translate into social unrest, it poses a challenge for the tacit social contract the Communist Party has placed on society (see above: Political and legal landscape).

There are further unwanted consequences which the authorities are facing but find hard to react to. One is an increasing response among the youth called “tang ping” (“[lie flat](#)”), meaning that the younger generation is turning its back on the fierce competition in society and is looking to live a more simple, low-key life. To what extent this is a conscious choice or a consequence of circumstances depends on the individual case, but this response has turned into a movement which the CCP has begun to take note of (Jamestown Foundation, 1 July 2022). A related reaction to this is “bai lan” (“let it rot”), meaning that modern youth are simply giving up. And while it is neither a widespread movement nor possible for many young adults, “[run xue](#)”, meaning the “art of running away” and leaving the country, is at least something the younger generation is toying with online (Neican, 5 July 2022). While none of these responses pose an immediate danger to CCP dominance in society, it shows that more and more people, especially young adults, seem to be disillusioned with what has been called the ‘China Dream’.

3) The Eradication of poverty

The CCP's success at [eradicating poverty](#) has been widely reported and would seem to be a commendable achievement (China Digital Times, 26 January 2021), but not everyone is convinced that the claim is true. These reports should be seen in perspective as the CCP's definition of poverty may need to be revisited given China's overall economic situation. If international standards are used, up to 75% of the Chinese population in urban and 90% in rural areas can still be considered to be living in a [state of poverty](#) (Brookings, 25 January 2021). Whichever standards one follows, there is clearly a huge imbalance in the distribution of wealth in China, which should be kept in mind, whenever the CCP celebrates the eradication of poverty. Meanwhile, [responsibility](#) for the issue of poverty has been moved to a new government department: In February 2021, the "State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development", a high-level agency in charge of poverty alleviation, was officially replaced by the new "National Rural Revitalization Bureau" (The China Story, 22 April 2021).

As a reminder that statistics are often just numbers and not a perfect reflection of reality, China Daily (a newspaper owned by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party) published an article on 25 April 2021 about [two villages](#) in Luonan county in Shaanxi Province. While the county has been officially included in those being lifted out of poverty, it has also been reported that some of the poorer villagers and contract workers have simply been resettled in quickly erected, makeshift buildings with no water supply.

This highlights the problems caused by [centrally-ordered policies](#) (Merics, 29 April 2021). For one thing, the local authorities are confronted with political goals which they have to report as being successfully achieved at a certain point, despite lacking the financial means and staff capacity to actually implement the policies. The Luonan county example is a good illustration of this: On paper, the goal has been achieved; but in reality, the people are still living under dire circumstances. Secondly, the central government is well aware that it cannot trust all data coming in at face value, but it lacks the capacity to control everything. If statistics in general should often be taken with a grain of salt, for China the amount of salt needs to be quite considerable. This was illustrated in the aftermath of the long expected and much debated publication of the census results; one demographic expert has looked into the data available so far and points to inconsistencies, calling them [manipulation](#) (Project Syndicate, 5 August 2021).

At the same time, while the Gini coefficient measuring inequality is quite low, the top 20% across China earn 10.2 times as much as the poorest 20%. While the economic slowdown is posing a challenge, the real problem is the [growing inequality](#) within China, according to data from the World Inequality Lab, in terms of overall wealth, the richest 10% in China own 70% of the household wealth (Grid News, 26 July 2022). As was already reported in WWL 2021's Full Country Dossier, Prime Minister Li Keqiang told his colleagues at the end of the '2020 Two Sessions' meeting that up to 600 million people in China were earning less than 100 yuan (around 145 USD a month) and were struggling to make ends meet. These and other ["inconvenient truths"](#) belong to the real story about poverty and its claimed eradication in China (Foreign Affairs, 28 May 2021).

According to a [survey](#) by the Income Distribution Research Institute of Beijing Normal University, 964 million Chinese people earn a monthly income below 2,000 yuan (US\$ 292.50); 364 million earn a monthly income between 2,000 (US\$ 292.50) and 5,000 yuan (US\$ 731.10) and only 72 million people, or 5.13% of the total population, have a monthly income of more than 5,000 yuan (US\$ 731.10) (Caixin, 6 June 2020). There is a state-welfare program in place, but according to research the Communist Party is making use of it [for surveillance purposes](#), especially for monitoring religious groups (Bitter Winter, 13 June 2020). The welfare program had been initiated more than a decade ago under Hu Jintao to eradicate poverty particularly in rural areas, however, it is now also used as one way of monitoring and controlling the people.

Another challenge is the ripple effect that the COVID-19 crisis has had - and not just on the economy. Millions of migrant workers have lost their jobs, unofficial estimates claiming this could have affected as many as 70 million workers. The continuing US-Chinese decoupling process (also involving other states) has added to this.

Further issues (including Gender)

Political parties other than the Communist Party are allowed to exist, but - not surprisingly - these are carefully selected by the Communist Party. They are consulted on a regular basis, but are careful not to go against the grain. Some civil society organizations are also allowed, but not Christian organizations, unless they are run under the auspices of registered churches, which excludes the larger part of Chinese Christianity from getting involved in social action in an organized way. In the past there had always been a certain leeway for local authorities to decide for themselves whom to tolerate, but with the new legislation the goal, as one observer said, is to [“cultivate aridity and deprive them of air”](#) (Made in China Journal, 29 April 2021). This does not mean that such organizations are banned completely, but they are [vetted much more carefully](#) than before (Made in China Journal, 15 July 2021).

In a move to potentially kill several birds with one stone, the Chinese authorities announced new regulations for the [private education sector](#), which is a 120 billion USD business in China (Al-Jazeera, 26 July 2021). The main reasons were probably a) to ease the monetary and psychological costs for parents in providing a good education for their children (and help them get good grades in the infamous university entrance exam "*gaokao*"), but also b) to limit any influence from foreign teachers and educational programs, also those in the Internet. It also jeopardized an estimated three million jobs within the industry, many of those open for fresh college graduates.

In rural Tibetan communities, Buddhist Lamas have a great influence on daily life (e.g. government subsidies), because many of them are also local government officials. These Buddhist leaders even allocate resources, including relief resources from government, to families in the communities. If someone is known to be a convert to Christianity, they are excluded.

Despite Communist ideals of gender equality, discriminatory stereotypes in relation to the roles and responsibilities of men and women persist. Men are expected to assume the position of financial provider, whereas women are perceived to [belong in the home](#) (Qing, S, The Journal of Chinese Sociology, July 8, 2020). This increases dependency of women and girls on men, a

dynamic that can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution, although the official policy is one of gender equality and empowering women. The CCP recently started to emphasize traditional “Confucian values” as an alternative to religions and improve birth rates which reflect the classical household gender roles. The 2021 [WEF Gender gap report](#) published on 20 March 2021 lists China at position 107 out of 144 countries, down from rank 69 in 2013, the first full year of Xi Jinping’s presidency. This imbalance is reflected in the political leadership as well, leading one observer to use one of Mao’s well-known sayings: “[Women hold up half the sky, but men rule the Party](#)” (Merics, 3 June 2021). The story of a woman who was [found chained up](#) in the province of Jiangsu and who had apparently been trafficked several times, was not only widely shared on social media in China for several months, it also highlighted a deeply entrenched problem, especially in rural areas (RFA, 24 February 2022). Another incident highlighting the situation of women in China was the Tangshan incident in June 2022, in which a young woman was [attacked](#) after rejecting unwanted sexual advances (Neican, 5 August 2022). The public anger was amplified when state media presented the case in a way apparently siding with the attacker.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 68.3% penetration - survey date: December 2021 (over 989 million users)
- **Facebook usage:** 0.3% penetration – survey date: January 2022

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 119 per 100 people. Multiple studies report a small gender gap in relation to [mobile phone ownership](#) and [internet usage](#), with rural women being [least likely](#) to have a phone or access to the internet ([GSMA, The Mobile Gender Gap Report, 2019](#); [CNNIC, February 2022](#); [GSMA, Bridging the gender gap, 2015](#)).

According to Freedom House’s Freedom on the Net 2021 report:

- China is categorized as “Not free” and was even listed as “the world’s worst abuser of Internet freedom” for the eighth consecutive year. The report gives China the lowest score and states: “Conditions for internet users in China remained profoundly oppressive and confirmed the country’s status as the world’s worst abuser of internet freedom for the eighth consecutive year.”
- The “Great Firewall” is well-known as a catch-all term for Internet censorship and China arguably hosts the most sophisticated system of censorship worldwide (e.g. by blocking VPN for private use).
- “The Chinese government maintains control over China’s gateways to the global internet, giving authorities the ability to restrict connectivity or access to content hosted on servers outside the country. This arrangement is the foundation for the “Great Firewall,” the informal name for the government’s comprehensive internet censorship system. All service providers must subscribe via the gateway operators, which are overseen by the MIIT. The government has shut down internet access in response to specific events. The most

dramatic example occurred in 2009, when authorities imposed a 10-month internet blackout in Xinjiang—home to 22 million people—after ethnic violence in the regional capital, Urumqi. Since then, the practice has continued sporadically on a smaller scale."

- "A minority of Chinese internet users (albeit tens of millions of users) access blocked websites with circumvention tools, such as VPNs. However, the government has intensified its restrictions on these tools since 2017, when MIIT issued a ban on the use of unlicensed VPNs. Service providers are barred from setting up VPNs without government approval, and illegal VPN operations have been increasingly targeted for closure or blocking. Blocks on VPNs typically escalate ahead of high-profile events, such as the annual plenary sessions of China's legislature. VPN providers have noted that a growing technical sophistication of Chinese authorities has been reflected in VPN blocking incidents."
- "Self-censorship among ordinary users and journalists is common and takes place amid an increasing risk of account closures, real-world reprisals, and legal penalties for online commentary. Self-censorship is also exacerbated by nationalistic netizens' intimidation and online harassment of those who they perceive as harming the reputation of China. There is evidence that WeChat users are increasingly self-censoring to preempt the closure of their accounts or other penalties, since WeChat is relied on for messaging, banking, ride-hailing, ordering food, booking travel, and more. The app's critical role in daily life, alongside platform moderators' growing propensity to close accounts rather than delete objectionable posts, has increased pressure on users to self-censor. Self-censorship is pervasive among members of persecuted groups, especially Uyghurs, whose WeChat activities are closely monitored. Many block their own family members living abroad to avoid being detained for having foreign contacts."

New [Internet regulations](#), effective from 1 March 2020, further restricted user freedom in the Internet and aim at curbing any opposition to the prevailing Communist worldview (International-LaCroix, 11 March 2020). Christian content is still available on some online platforms, but the risk of access is increasing and it is resembling a game of cat and mouse with increasingly limited space for the latter. One example of this is the Christian platform "[Jingjie](#)", founded in 2013 and active on WeChat. While it continues to be active under different "handles", it had been closed down by the authorities for a second time in summer 2021 without any reasons given (China Source, 15 September 2021). As of November 2021, it was still posting on WeChat. Amazon's audiobook service Audible for reading religious books as well as other Bible apps in the Apple store have been [banned](#), as have Koran apps (AP News, 15 October 2021). Numerous Christian Internet accounts have been [closed](#) in China, among them the much used "Jonah's Home", which had been operating for over 20 years (Christianity Today, 13 May 2022). This is a result of the full implementation of recent regulations, some dating back to 2018, but with others only in force since March 2022.

New rules for bloggers, fitting into the ever more restrictive Chinese Internet environment, require [real name registration](#) before anyone is allowed to start posting (AP News, 18 February 2021). In what has apparently been a tit-for-tat decision, Chinese regulators have also decided to [ban](#) the broadcasting of the BBC World Service in mainland China (BBC News, 12 February 2021). Although this ban is mainly symbolic since it was mostly only available in a few high-end hotels in cities anyway, it fits into the broader picture of the government making moves to

control opinion.

New rules on the use of the [Internet for religious groups and organizations](#) came into force on 1 March 2022. Accordingly, organizations need to obtain a license for using the Internet for religious purposes (China Source, 8 February 2022). The implementation of the 'Administrative Measures for Internet Religious Information Services' reportedly led pastors to only share 60-second voice mails on social media such as WeChat, for example, to avoid having to submit sermon details to the authorities. This shows that in-person meetings remain irreplaceable, wherever possible. The first (TSPM) churches in Jiangsu province were issued the [license](#) for "Internet Religious Information Services" in March 2022 (CCD, 11 March 2022).

The swift implementation of the Internet regulations does not come as a surprise since the Communist Party sees the online world as a place where speech needs to be restricted and controlled and dissent needs to be nipped in the bud. As one observer [commented](#): "Xi Jinping's government wants more than one billion Chinese people to use only one head; his government wants the Chinese people's mouths to have only one function: eat, not speak" (China Aid, 18 May 2022). Consequently, Christians are having to find creative ways to circumvent censorship.

In a vivid reminder that censorship and related operations can reach beyond China, on the anniversary of the 1989 events at Tiananmen Square, Bing and YouTube produced [error messages](#) when searches were made for photos or videos of the iconic "tank man" (the nameless man who faced a row of tanks with just a shopping bag in his hand) (Quartz, 7 June 2021). Although Bing and their parent company Microsoft apologized and spoke of a "human error", this has not been the first such incident.

An eye-opening interview with a former Weibo censor revealed - at least in part - how [censorship](#) in China works in practice (The Protocol, 4 June 2021): One of the largest Internet and social media companies in China, ByteDance, employs 10,000 content moderators in Tianjin alone, which shows the immense challenge of attempting to censor the whole Internet (or of making it into a de facto intranet). Although some of the operations are automatized and artificial intelligence tools are applied, censorship is still strongly dominated by the human factor. The CAC (Cyberspace Administration of China) only provides guidance (and punishment after failures), but companies have to come up with their own censorship lists, which are consequently seen as valuable assets. The reason behind this policy is simple. In the words of the former censor: "The censors' strategy is to make you feel that the red line no longer exists, scaring you into complete self-censorship. It's always a cat-and-mouse game. Once censors realize users have tested a red line, they move it. The red line has become a moving target." It is interesting to note that China's powerful [Cyberspace Administration](#) is a hybrid entity with 'two nameplates displayed' at the entrance to its headquarters: The government's and the CCP's (Stanford's DigiChina, 8 August 2022). Its demands seem to increase: according to another report, the Instagram-like platform Xiaohongshu identified 564 nicknames (or misspellings) of President Xi as well as sensitive terms within a two-month period in 2020 and [actively monitored](#) the news for potentially sensitive content shared on their site (Vice News, 19 July 2022).

In the WWL 2023 reporting period, the authorities stepped up their efforts to control [social media](#) (PRC Leadership Watch, 1 June 2022) and especially the comments functions which have been used as platforms for veiled and sometimes more direct criticism. There are plans to hold the tech companies responsible for all [comments](#) and to ensure that it is done under real-name conditions (MIT Technology Review, 18 June 2022). At the same time, censorship will not be able to completely rule out criticism, as efforts to censor the hardships brought by the lockdown in Shanghai showed (Sup China, 22 April 2022). A further step would be to ban all “[negative comments](#)”, leaving it up to the CCP and censors to decide what should be classed as “negative” (Bitter Winter, 7 July 2022).

The above explains why the 989 million Internet users in China represent an impressive number, but their access to the Internet is limited. The rural-urban gap is still felt (particularly in the Western part of the country) not just in online accessibility, but also in Internet speed. However, the gap is closing. Internet cafés are becoming less important as access points since mobile phone coverage is improving. China is one of the world's largest technology developers and providers with an emphasis on electric mobility. Another well-known specialization is in providing electronics for mobile phone infrastructure. Indeed, Huawei, the largest and one of the few providers of the 5G mobile standard, is one of the focal points of the trade war with the USA; security aspects and the company's links with the People's Liberation Army and the Communist Party are not clear.

Pilot projects for the much-publicized “[Social Credit System](#)” have been carried out in some areas but two years ago there was evidently still a long way to go until the system could be introduced nationwide (Trivium China, 27 August 2019). As one country observer indicated in 2019: The “messy truth” about the [Social Credit System](#) (SCS) is that there is currently no centralized database and efforts at scoring are patchy and localized at best (China File, 22 April 2019). The [Social Credit Score](#) system can easily be adapted and used to monitor the political trustworthiness of all Chinese citizens (China Leadership Monitor, 1 March 2020). This kind of monitoring is becoming a top priority in today's China and it seems that the timing of the COVID-19 outbreak has been very convenient for the state authorities to [extend control](#) both by technical and more personal means (The Guardian, 9 March 2020).

The implementation of [Artificial Intelligence](#) into the systems may provide a boost for all surveillance and social monitoring, by bringing files from different authorities across the government together in one location (Reuters, 8 April 2022). The report that buyers of residential housing projects across China [withhold paying](#) their mortgage until the projects are finished (RFA, 14 July 2022), is particularly interesting when it comes to the Social Credit Score. As mentioned above (see: Economic landscape), such action could mar their personal credit rating, thus affecting their ability to interact economically and even socially. At the same time, recent research showed that the social effects of the Social Credit System are [present, but limited](#), as citizens know to distinguish and read a bad score (Alexander Trauth-Goik/Chuncheng Liu (2022): “Black or Fifty Shades of Grey? The Power and Limits of the Social Credit Blacklist System in China”, Journal of Contemporary China, 30 September 2022).

Physical surveillance has become so [synonymous](#) with Communist Party policy that some observers think the Party has switched its promise of economic improvement for citizens to simply providing security and well-being in a more general way (China Digital Times, 23 September 2022). It is not just the physical surveillance, which is increasing and causing worry, but also the growing levels of control in the virtual sphere. The CCP is becoming increasingly successful at indoctrinating a [young generation](#) of Internet and social media users by simply shutting out unfiltered news and feeding in ideological content, often with a strong nationalistic tone (Politico, 1 September 2020). As one observer writes, China's youth is increasingly [turning its back](#) on the West (Chatham House, 1 August 2021). This comes at a certain risk, as nationalism is easily fanned, but hard to contain.

The challenge is, above all, to influence a generation who up until now was exposed to a very different narrative for the whole of their lives. And from the media side of things, journalists who wish to obtain a [press card](#) have to pass a test which includes their knowledge about Xi Jinping thought, showing that it is not just a question of access restrictions, but also of shaping reports (RFA, 11 November 2020). Independent reporting from China has been made ever harder, since non-state media outlets have been put on a [market access blacklist](#) (The Diplomat, 13 October 2021). This means that even sources from within China would be banned from private investment if they allowed even modestly critical reports to be published, e.g. by revealing corruption cases. This is something which privately owned Caixin Media had done. As a result, Caixin was removed from the October 2021 [list of sources](#) approved for syndicated news content (RFA, 21 October 2021).

The system of control already in place is far-reaching and is well on the road to becoming Orwellian, once the technical capabilities are all in place; the political will for this seems to be a given. Christians are able to access the Internet, but always need to be careful about what they are doing and whom they are meeting. For Christians, the Internet space has become arguably tighter than for the average citizen, as they are perceived as being allied with Western influences. Even for Christians not living in China, control is a topic needing their attention. As WeChat warned its users abroad, their [interactions](#) on social media (histories, comments, likes etc.) are being sent to data centers in China (RFA, 8 September 2022).

Security situation

Global security

On the international stage, China presented a new policy in April 2022 called the “[Global Security Initiative](#)” - GSI (Jamestown, 13 May 2022). While its principle of “indivisible security” was first set out in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, it has become a common point of reference in many national strategic documents. While it is not impossible that the initiative will be backed by other countries (Russia already did so), it is clear that it comes with “Chinese characteristics” and is meant as a counterweight to what is seen as Western and especially American dominance. So far, the GSI is still [lacking detail](#), but it may become a focal point in an increasingly divided world (The Diplomat, 8 June 2022).

Dealing with minorities in Xinjiang, Tibet, Nei Mongol and elsewhere

While all the policies and actions referred to in the WWL 2021 and 2022 Full Country Dossiers are still in place, it is important not to lose the broader view of what is going on. The ultimate goal of the Communist Party is to [assimilate](#) and ‘Sinicize’ ethnic minorities (Neican, 11 October 2020). This drive to assimilation is most widely seen in the CCP’s efforts at mainstreaming the Xinjiang, Tibet and Nei Mongol regions, but it extends to dozens of recognized and hundreds of unrecognized minorities. As China Neican noted in its October 2020 article referred to above: "A national consciousness fashioned by the CCP is seen as critical to maintaining the Party’s rule. This idea influences Beijing’s policies with respect to ethnic minorities, religion, education, media and internal security across the length and breadth of China." The pressure to conform to this ‘national consciousness’ is thus beginning to be felt strongly by Christians and other religious minorities.

The question whether what is happening with China’s [Uighur minority](#) should be called genocide or not, while important, should not be seen as the main question (The Diplomat, 1 May 2021). Beyond the defining aspects of international law, the situation in Xinjiang has to be seen in a broader context, as the policy towards all ethnic minorities has changed. The goal, as The Diplomat explains, is now “to actively alter the thoughts and behaviors of what Chinese authorities perceive to be a ‘backward’, ‘deviant’ and innately ‘dangerous’ sub-section of its population by raising their ‘bio-quality’ (suzhi, 素质) and overseeing their rebirth as loyal, patriotic, and civilized Chinese citizens”. This is to be achieved by “planting the seed of patriotism” through the education system.

It has to be kept in mind that China is home to 55 so-called “Minzu” or ethnic minorities. As of 2005, more than 71% of China’s minority population lived within one of the over 1,300 autonomous districts. These cover 64% of Chinese territory but are home to less than 10% of the total population. The long-term policy of granting autonomy has increasingly been replaced by the desire for a process of ‘transformation’ (or rather, assimilation): This entails a more interventionist role for the CCP and involves actively remolding a minority’s ideological, cultural and spiritual fabric into what President Xi calls the ‘collective consciousness of the Chinese (Zhonghua 中华) nation’. As a result, these shifts in policy go well beyond Xinjiang and are part of a fundamental rethinking of how the CCP is seeking to manage ethnocultural diversity. As far as Xinjiang is concerned, the emphasis seems to be on regional economic development, without neglecting strict control (see: Political and legal landscape). This may be seen as being a reaction to the high levels of international attention being given to the situation in this province.

Taiwan

The policy towards Taiwan is unchanged and China continues to send its navy and airforce across the Taiwan Strait. It, in turn, continued to be crossed by naval vessels belonging to various nations which China sees as a provocation. China and Taiwan are both watching closely for lessons they can learn from the Ukraine war. The increase of alliances in Asia, an increase in weapon supply and more visits by high-ranking Western politicians are likewise seen as provocations by China. Many long-term observers think that if China were to be involved in a serious conflict, Taiwan would be the most likely trigger for it. Some also see it as the ultimate

prize the Chinese president is eyeing, and it featured prominently in the report for the 20th Party Congress in October 2022.

South China Sea

China's increasingly pronounced claims on the South China Sea are causing backlashes as extra-regional forces are getting involved and claimant states see themselves forced to take a stand. The five-year anniversary of a ruling by a Court of Arbitration deciding in favor of the Philippines and rejecting almost all of China's claims highlights the prolonged stalled situation. A legal statement published by the US government in January 2022 did not help in easing the tensions (see above: Political and legal landscape). With navy vessels from various countries exercising freedom of navigation in this region, a greater level of international attention is being brought to the dispute. The South China Sea and Southeast Asia are seen as the People's Liberation Army's "[primary laboratory](#)" for developing both joint forces and doctrine. The aim is "to awe regional states into acquiescing to Chinese interests", resulting in what one observer called "learned helplessness" (NBR, 25 August 2022).

North Korea

China has made it repeatedly clear to the world - especially to the USA and South Korea - that no solution for the Korean Peninsula will work without China being directly involved. China is not very happy about North Korea having nuclear weapons, but it sees the country as a risk it can control and contain. By closing its border to North Korea to combat the spread of COVID-19, it also made the country even more dependent on Beijing. Nevertheless, China soon restarted its policy of [repatriating North Korean](#) refugees to the country they were fleeing from (Human Rights Watch, 22 July 2021). Chinese officials have been [searching the homes](#) of female North Koreans, looking for signs of possible contact with South or North Korea (Daily NK, 3 November 2021). If the security officials find evidence of such contacts (either by inspecting their cell phones or by investigating any visits made to the Chinese provinces of Heilongjiang and Jilin), they threaten to send the women back to North Korea. Recent history shows that this is not an empty threat.

Overall relations have [warmed again](#), not least illustrated by the fact that the two countries pledged to extend the 1961 mutual friendship treaty by a further twenty years (Jamestown Foundation, 17 August 2021). The border trade with China [slowly re-opened](#) early in 2022 (38North, 23 March 2022) and it should be kept in mind just how dependent North Korea is on China as an export destination. According to one report, China imported coal from North Korea at 1/4 of the world market prize, capitalizing on its [de facto monopoly](#) (NK Econwatch, 25 April 2022).

India/Bhutan

The military standoff with its neighbor India in May and June 2020, continues to simmer. China has been building village infrastructure on [Bhutanese territory](#), thus tacitly claiming ownership of land for the Tibet Autonomous Region (Foreign Policy, 7 May 2021). Whereas neither the claim to ownership nor the factual occupation by building infrastructure are new tactics, the building of a whole village complex (named Gyalaphug in Tibetan or Jielluobu in Chinese) is a

significant new step. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, the villages have been expanded and are reported as being [fully inhabited](#) now (The Diplomat, 30 July 2022). Located in mountainous terrain, the area is still internationally understood to belong to part of Lhuntse district in northern Bhutan. The Bhutanese government does not have the means to monitor this territory and even less to do anything about such Chinese construction-work. As Foreign Policy reports, the territory is of great religious importance to Bhutan and the real goal of the Communist rulers might be to pressurize Bhutan into ceding disputed terrain in a region referred to as the 'Chicken neck'. This lies much closer to India and is a strategically important area on the Doklam Plateau where China and India had a standoff in 2017.

The Bhutanese government [concluded](#) a three-step memorandum of understanding with the Chinese government to talk about the boundaries (The Hindu, 14 October 2021). Since China does not have an embassy in Bhutan, these talks may take place in the Bhutanese embassy in India - a delicate situation for China, given the tensions with India. Still, both countries agreed that talks should re-start, but any results have not yet become public knowledge (see above: *Political and legal landscape*).

Myanmar

In an unexpected development, China is [building a wall](#) (or fortified fence) along its border with Myanmar (Asia Times, 19 December 2020). As this border stretches more than 2000 kilometers, this is not a small undertaking and speculation has been rife about the possible motive behind it. Suggestions for the construction range from protecting against the spread of COVID-19 (or future pandemics) to hindering drug smugglers - or perhaps even to preventing dissidents from fleeing the country. But long-term Myanmar watcher Bertil Lintner has another interesting hypothesis; although [the whole article](#) is highly recommended reading, a small extract illustrates his thoughts on this matter (Asia-Pacific Research, 19 December 2020):

On November 27, the popular, privately-run but still strongly nationalistic Chinese website Toutiao published a long, unsigned [article](#) headlined 'Speaking English and believing in Christ, is Kachin State in northern Myanmar pro-American?' The article, which has all the hallmarks of state-approved propaganda, points out that the Kachins, called Jingpo in China, are the same people and, erroneously, that the Kachin Hills were once Chinese but 'before 1941', included in the then British colony Burma.

This is not to say that the CCP's reason behind building the wall is mainly to keep Christians/missionaries out, but it is at least noteworthy that the Party allows propaganda to be published which stirs up nationalist feelings mixed with ethno-religious undertones. At the same time, it shows that the relationship with Myanmar is more complicated than the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) rhetoric would like people to believe. The military regime in Myanmar aims to roll out a [surveillance system](#) with facial recognition features across all 14 regions and states of the country and Chinese companies are winning the contracts (The Diplomat, 12 July 2022). Within the framework of the "[Digital Silkroad](#)", technical equipment is exported to other countries, too (Rogier Creemers, ed., "The Digital Silkroad - Perspectives from affected countries", Leiden Asia Centre, July 2021).

Afghanistan

While the Communist Party has studied the historical development of Afghanistan carefully and is not interested in becoming yet another nation to join “the graveyard of empires”, it cannot avoid being drawn into the current situation. For one thing, it is a major player and superpower in the region; secondly, it shares a common border with Afghanistan (if only 76km long); and thirdly, Afghanistan could become an important part of the BRI and help in keeping rivals like India in check. After a Taliban representative called China 'a friend', Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted a [delegation of the Taliban](#) (Washington Post, 28 July 2021), even before the Taliban officially took power. Thus, although China is cautious and wary of being dragged into a conflict, it seems to have little choice. However, the security situation in Afghanistan is so volatile that, in all probability, any investments would immediately be [threatened](#) by groups such as the Islamic State group ISKP (Jamestown Foundation, 16 June 2022). After the killing of nine of its citizens in an attack in Pakistan in July 2021 and the attack against teachers of the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi in April 2022 (see above: Economic landscape), China has pushed for increasing the coordination of [counter-terrorism measures](#) with both Pakistan and the new Taliban leadership of Afghanistan (Jamestown Foundation, 7 September 2021).

Other countries

China agreed with Cambodia to [upgrade and expand](#) a naval base in Ream at the Gulf of Thailand and may have received stationing rights there, expanding the reach of the Chinese People's Liberation Army south- and westwards (Washington Post, 6 June 2022).

In all the above areas of conflict and dispute, the Communist Party stirs up nationalist sentiment and receives support from most of the Chinese citizenship. In doing so, however, the CCP [leaves out](#) a significant segment of China's population who are not Han Chinese, thus fueling further unrest (The Diplomat, 18 August 2020). Christians are sometimes caught up in the middle of such conflicts. In Xinjiang and Tibet, even Han Chinese Christians suffer from all the restrictions and surveillance, although the small groups of converts (from Islam and Buddhism to Christianity) are more greatly affected.

Gender issues

In countries neighboring China, Christian women and girls are exploited in extensive human trafficking networks ([Brookings, March 2022](#)). China's earlier one-child policy - which fueled 'son preference' and gender-biased sex selection - resulted in a shortage of women and a [corresponding rise in bride-trafficking](#) (Human Rights Watch, 3 November 2019). According to the US State Department's 2022 [Trafficking in Persons Report](#) (p. 433), traffickers have increasingly targeted impoverished Christian communities. For instance, [629 Pakistani girls](#), many of whom were Christian, were reportedly trafficked to China between 2018 and 2019 (AP News, 7 December 2019). In Myanmar, women from the Christian-majority Kachin State have been trafficked, married and [raped until they become pregnant](#) (The Guardian, 21 March 2019). Reports suggest that whilst pandemic-related lockdowns and strict border closures may have significantly disrupted trans-border trafficking, confined victims faced increased risks of physical and sexual exploitation and abandonment by their traffickers due to reduced demand, while survivors faced reduced access to essential health and psychosocial services ([UNODC, 2021](#)).

Trends analysis

1) The fight against internal threats

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

a) Ideology: Reports show that the CCP is increasing its [funding of academic research](#) in social science topics which support Marxist theory, along with a range of other projects (Macro Polo, 30 November 2020). The number of research grants increased by more than 44% from 2015 to 2019, the number of projects sky-rocketed ten-fold and the areas which saw the greatest increase were “Marxism and Scientific Socialism”, “Ethnic Studies” and “Party History and Party Building”. Many of these projects are directly linked to President Xi and his “Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a new Era”. Plans that one lecturer on Marxism should be employed for every 350 university students (together with a general increase in ideological education in schools, government departments and companies) have led to a surge in the demand for [graduates of studies in Marxism](#) (Financial Times, 7 July 2022). This confirms the overall impression that while everything else is changing – economy, society, technology – [politics is not](#) (The New Yorker, 16 May 2022). And it possibly cannot, as the Communist Party always has to be right.

This is particularly visible in the effort being made to keep the zero-COVID policy. Shifts in this policy may gradually come, but only after the Party Congress in November 2022, if at all. For it is not a question about health, economy or the well-being of the people, but about [ideology](#) (Neican, 26 April 2022). End of November 2022, [protests](#) started across the country and some were not only targeted against the zero-COVID policy, but against the CCP rule itself (Reuters, 28 November 2022). While the immediate answer has been 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 change the course of CCP policy and potentially ideology and 2) even a gradual opening will see a surge in COVID infections with the risk of many deaths, especially among the older population, and emergency wards of hospitals overwhelmed. Both consequences do not sit well with a party which cannot do wrong.

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. 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).

c) Social control and surveillance: China's much-discussed Social Credit System (SoCS) is still more fragmented and patchy than a consistent tool for social monitoring. This has been [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 labour. These include Golden Shield, Skynet, Safe Cities and Police Clouds, Project Sharp Eyes, and the Integrated Joint-Operations Platform (IJOP) in Xinjiang.

At the same time, the authorities are well aware of such 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.

In a wide-ranging investigation, the New York Times analyzed more than 100,000 Chinese government tenders and found that tools developed and used for [surveillance](#) are increasing at unprecedented levels (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.

If one asks for the reasons behind all the measures listed above, it helps to look at the younger generation. “[Lying flat](#)” (or low) has been one of the trending topics among young people on social media, countering society’s focus on career and long working hours (Channel News Asia, 16 July 2021). Another [trend](#) which can also be clearly observed among the younger generation is the search for meaning and for improving future possibilities in life (China Source, 16 and 23 March 2021). 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. Many young people are looking for security and are suffering from anxiety and depression. 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.

2) The fight against external threats

China’s relationship with the USA is highly contentious and did not improve in the WWL 2023 reporting period. The Ukraine war deepened this rivalry and although China does not want to be seen as invariably tied to Russia, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the [relationship](#) with Russia is showing “strong resilience” and “strategic resolve” (Reuters, 8 July 2022).

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 perfectly possible that the CCP understands democracy well enough to realize that it is counterproductive to impose sanctions on members of the very organ (the European Parliament) which has the task of ratifying the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI). The [CAI](#) is an agreement which aims to regulate foreign investment and help European companies compete better in the Chinese market (South China Morning Post, 25 May 2021). The CCP simply regards delivering a clear message to be a higher priority than coming to an agreement with the EU. Such priorities are bad news for Christians: Advocacy and all efforts to make the CCP understand that the Christian minority not only does not pose a threat, but is even a blessing to society, will have limited effect in an environment where ideology trumps all.

This point was also emphasized when State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi gave an address to the US Council of Foreign Affairs in April 2021, saying that “[democracy is not Coca-Cola](#)” (Xinhua, 24 April 2021), meaning it may have different flavors around the world. However, what this statement seems not to be noting (or rather to be willfully ignoring) is that just like the soft drink, it is American soft power which is still influencing people all over the world, a form of power China is still lacking. Whether the “Coke soft power” has been historically promoted with the state’s help and thus “[American democracy is a lot like Coke](#)”, is another question (SCMP, 26 April 2021). This is, however, not to say that China does not have [soft power](#) of its own (Maria Repnikowa, “Chinese Soft Power”, Cambridge Elements Global China, 18 February 2022).

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 when China leads the world. 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.”

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 (National Bureau of Asia Research, “China’s Digital Ambition: A global strategy to supplant the liberal order”, 1 March 2022).

Another field where China is trying to gain more influence is international diplomacy and especially 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, among the most important questions, who is allowed to participate in debates and how will human rights be shaped in the future (The Diplomat, 1 October 2021). In one of the strongest signs of how far China has come, 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 ([UN News, 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.

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. This tradition dominated reactions during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. 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."

3) Preliminary conclusions from the 20th Party Congress (held outside the WWL 2023 reporting period, in October 2022)

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). 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.

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" - shows 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 pandemic has speeded them up.

With the implementation of the Social Credit System (referred to above), even though it may be delayed, the authorities will very likely find ways and soon have the technical means to follow their plans up. In any case, for the foreseeable future, Christians and churches in China will see tough times ahead.

Parallel to the [training sessions](#) for personnel issuing the licenses for the use of the Internet for religious purposes (see above: *Technological landscape*), pressure from the United Front Work Department has been increasing on state-registered churches to study the directives on Sinification and so gain a deeper understanding of the Marxist, scientific approach to religion (China Christian Daily, 11 March 2022). It is thus very clear that it is up to the churches in China to prove that they are not – in the words of an article from the Communist Study Times of 21 March 2022 – "irreformable". Whether or not they succeed is solely for the Communist Party to decide.

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- Trends analysis: equation - <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/10/china-after-party-congress-welcome-xis-peoples-republic-control>
- Trends analysis: reading the tea leaves - <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/blog-entries/reading-tea-leaves-from-the-2021-national-religious-work-conference/>
- Trends analysis: situation - http://www.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2022-06-06/-group-based--family-based--digitalization---three-trends-of-chinese-churches-intensified-in-post-covid-19-era_11544

- Trends analysis: training sessions - http://www.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2022-03-11/china-s-provinces-successively-issues-notice-on-licensing-internet-religious-information-services_11256

WWL 2023: Church information / China

Christian origins

The first record of Christians in China is written on an 8th century stone stele stating that (Nestorian) Christians reached the city of Xian in 635 AD. In what is called a [second \(or third\) wave](#), in the 13th century, Catholicism spread among the Mongols and Franciscan and Dominican missionaries worked in China ("A brief history of Christianity in China", 26 July 2017). Later on, Christianity was banned in the Ming dynasty, but Roman Catholics made new inroads to the country in the 16th century. Protestants arrived in Macau with the missionary Robert Morrison in 1807.

When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the Communist Party took over and all religion was viciously fought against, especially religions seen as foreign (like Christianity). Foreign Christian missionaries had to leave the country and for decades, very little was known about how Christians were surviving. When the so-called Cultural Revolution took place (1966 – 1976) the whole of society was turned upside down. As a surprise to many, the Christian faith not only survived all efforts to eradicate it but had instead become deeply rooted in Chinese society. Despite all efforts at government control, Christians and churches are still thriving and, even though pressure seems to be increasing again, it is currently not as intense and as violent as in the times of the Cultural Revolution; however, many observers argue that it is the strongest wave of repression since that time.

Church spectrum today

China: Church networks	%
Orthodox	0.0
Catholic	9.5
Protestant	32.6
Independent	57.9
Unaffiliated	0.0
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0.0
Total	100.0
Evangelical movement	32.4
Renewalist movement	34.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

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 (UFWD), 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. 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. 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. With COVID-19, most had to cease their physical meetings and some have not been allowed to worship together again, despite health-related restrictions being lifted for other forms of meetings.

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 UFWD 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.

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 can be mostly found). Many Tibetans are living in the west of Sichuan, and 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.

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. However, Chinese authorities throughout the country are cracking down on [foreign Christian](#) missionaries, especially South Koreans (SCMP, 10 June 2018), but also Americans and Taiwanese. 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. The number of foreigners in China continued to decline sharply, not only because of the restrictions, but also because of the government's COVID-19 measures (see above: Trend 2). This has naturally meant that the number of foreign Christians dropped as well.

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 white papers from the leadership level 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. "

Since September 2018, the Holy See (the smallest sovereign state in the world and the central administration of the Roman Catholic Church) has been party to a "[Provisional Agreement](#)" with China on the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops (Asia News, 22 September 2018), which was renewed for two years in 2020 and 2022 (see above: *Church spectrum today*). However, no details have been made public. This has not led to any tangible relief of pressure on Catholic Christians; it is even claimed that it has led to additional pressure. Before prolonging the agreement in October 2020, it was reported that computers belonging to the Vatican had been [hacked](#), most likely by the Chinese authorities (UCA News, 30 July 2020). That the pope mentioned publicly for the first time the [suffering of the Uighurs](#) in Xinjiang in a book published on 1 December 2020 led to a sharp rebuke from China's foreign ministry (AP News, 25 November 2020).

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 above: Trend 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 of members and in some provinces met openly in commercial buildings, most house churches (one country expert gives an estimation of up to 80%) have now returned to home gatherings. This category is seriously affected by the intensification of control and 'Sinification'. Along with the pandemic, many house churches have stopped in-person meetings and moved their services online. There have even been instances where online meetings via Zoom etc. have been stopped (for more details, see below: *Church sphere* and *Violence*). While other parts of society were allowed to cautiously open up in accordance with the government's pandemic requirements, gatherings of house churches in many parts of the country were not allowed to resume.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: second (or third) wave - <http://www.teachicoc.org/teachers-blog/2017/7/26/a-brief-history-of-christianity-in-china>
- Church spectrum today - additional information: extended its agreement - <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-china-asia-religion-78a3433674c968aa65faaa581b999328>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: foreign Christian - <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2150057/south-korean-missionaries-fearful-crackdown>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: new rules - <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/25/asia/china-foreign-religion-christianity-islam-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: TSPM - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/protestant-five-year-plan-for-chinese-christianity/82107>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: CPA - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/sinicization-of-china-church-the-plan-in-full/82931>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: Sinicization - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/chinese-churches-get-ready-for-sinicization/82876>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: Provisional Agreement - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Press-Office-announces-a-%E2%80%98Provisional-Agreement%E2%80%99-between-China-and-the-Holy-See,-the-beginning-of-a-process,-says-Greg-Burke-45010.html>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: hacked - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/vatican-hong-kong-diocese-hacked-by-china-ahead-of-talks/88962>
- Christian communities and how they are affected: suffering of the Uighurs - <https://apnews.com/article/beijing-china-pope-francis-xi-jinping-f679c9f2c2cc2afeb21c3e961a67051a>

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / China

Reporting period

01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

China: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	77	16
WWL 2022	76	17
WWL 2021	74	17
WWL 2020	70	23
WWL 2019	65	27

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The increase of 1.1 points in WWL 2023, after an increase of 1.7 points in WWL 2022, more than four points in WWL 2021, an increase of five points in WWL 2020 and of 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 more and more difficult to avoid having to fall in line with official Communist ideology, especially with the continued flurry of published guidelines and policies affecting churches. The violence score remained on the same level as in WWL 2022. Many churches were forced to continue gathering in smaller groups or even move 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 across all sphere scores can be found in the new restrictions on groups using virtual platforms for religious purposes and other increased limitations. All regulations on religion are now being implemented in a strict and uniform manner, be it the new rules from 2018, 2020, 2021 or 2022 (an overview on the clergy rules is provided in a USCIRF [Factsheet](#) published in October 2021).

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 Communist Party of China (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. 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 well possible and even likely that he will be in charge for much longer than the official term running until 2027 (for a preliminary assessment of the outcomes of the Party Congress, see above: Trend 3).

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 growing 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 pandemic measures have made it possible to "drown out" churches, with the authorities simply not allowing them to re-open.

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 threats 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 (see below: *Future outlook*), 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.

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 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, has come under even heavier control than before, making observers speak of a [police state](#), especially after re-education camps were set up (BBC News, 1 February 2018 - more recent examples and reports can be found above in: *Security situation and Trends 2*, and below in: *Persecution of other religious minorities*). 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 as described above, 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. On the other hand, the difficulty of getting reports is also connected to the strong pressure the authorities are exercising on the Islamic community, so that families and communities are often torn apart and cannot target converts.

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	Very weak	Very weak				Very weak			
Non-Christian religious leaders	Weak	Weak				Weak			
Religious leaders of other churches						Weak			
Ideological pressure groups						Weak		Weak	
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak	Weak				Weak			
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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". 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. 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 recent pattern of promotions and demotions as observed at the 20th Party Congress shows that toeing the ideological line is rewarded and

this even more so in times where the external environment gets more challenging.

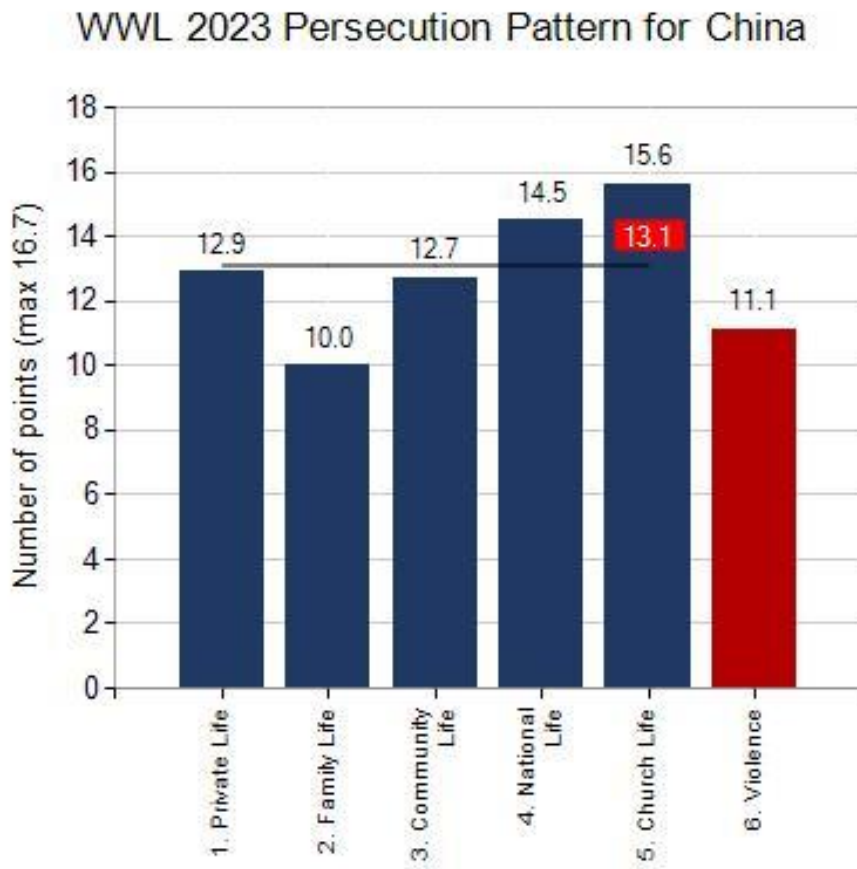
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **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.
- **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 or make 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 dealing with religious groups is one of the Party's top priorities.

Drivers of Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism - Buddhist

- **Non-Christian religious and ethnic leaders (Very weak):** The small convert community from a Muslim and Buddhist background is facing a lot of problems 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, village and sometimes even religious leaders. 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 2023 Persecution pattern for China shows:

- The average score for pressure on Christians in China rose from 12.9 points in WWL 2022 to 13.1 in WWL 2023. The score for pressure increased most in the *Community sphere*, showing that the new online restrictions are already having consequences. Pressure for implementing the new regulations on religion from 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022 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 UFWD, not the government.
- Pressure is strongest and at an extreme level in the *Church* and *National spheres of life* (with scores of 15.6 and 14.5 respectively). While pressure in these spheres is typical for countries where *Communist and post-Communist oppression* is active, the pressure in the *Private sphere* (12.9) 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. This is also true for the *Family sphere*, which still has the lowest score of all spheres with 10 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*

nist and post-Communist oppression is felt more strongly in these spheres as well, for example in questions dealing with education or with employment, e.g. where Christians are teachers or medical staff and/or members of the Communist Party. The continued rise in pressure in the *National sphere* (14.5) is due to increased interference by the Communist Party into the way that Christians are running their businesses, especially when these businesses include some form of communication of Christian faith.

- The score for violence against Christians remained at 11.1 points. Although there were fewer reports of church buildings being destroyed or closed than in WWL 2022, the pandemic offered the Communist authorities a unique opportunity: While at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis meetings in general were banned, in the re-opening phase Christian meetings were simply kept shutdown in some places, affecting both registered and unregistered churches. China has thus in the WWL 2023 reporting period once 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 2023 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://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

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 to more self-censorship in general, too.

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

This is 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 110 million people) as well as civil servants 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 (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."

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 the new online rules was only starting to be rolled out in the WWL 2023 reporting period, at least 15 different social media channels run by Christians on WeChat have 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. According to a leaked internal document, authorities in the province of Guangxi restricted the celebration of [Christmas](#) as a Western festival, citing both COVID-19 restrictions and the policy of Sinicization (UCA News, 24 December 2021). This illustrates a situation in the country, which is leading 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)

While access to Christian content on the Internet is possible in general and communication on social media can also take place, (leading some observers to speak of a "vibrant online Christian community"), all this is strictly monitored by the government. TSPM churches are allowed to have websites 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 (China Source, 28 June 2021). The government increasingly blocks website content and limits the space of available content, e.g. by blocking Bible apps. While it is common for Chinese Christians to use VPN to obtain resources on the Internet, the risk for doing this is increasing and frequent users of VPN would catch the attention of the authorities. 'Audible' and Bible apps in the Apple store have been [banned](#) as have Koran apps (AP News, 15 October 2021). Jona Home, a well-known Christian website for sharing resources has [shut down](#) after 21 years of service (CCD, 1 June 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 rules, 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). For converts to Christianity in Xinjiang and Tibet it has been especially risky to access Christian content, but they only number a few thousand.

Block 1 - Additional information

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 Party members or in the army, 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.

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. In a telling example reported in UCA News, 22 September 2020, a Chinese ethics textbook deliberately changed the ending of the Biblical account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (see details above in: *Religious landscape*). Although this one example should not be over-interpreted, it serves as an illustration of the sort of Communist goals the education system is working towards. 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 Block 2.8 above) 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. Although international and private schools exist, they are heavily restricted and financially inaccessible for most families (South China Morning Post, 5 December 2021). For converts from Muslim or Buddhist background, members of their wider family will try to influence the education of their 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) 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 new [survey form](#) investigates the religious affiliation of college students and graduates in China and prohibits them from expressing any religious convictions at all (China Aid, 27 May 2022). Young people in some areas have been threatened with not being allowed to graduate or 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 as has been shown when authorities hindered a baptism in the Guangdong Province in September 2021 (CBN News, 22 September 2021). 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, 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.

Block 2 - Additional information

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 wed-

dings 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 in Chengdu, Sichuan, shows (China Aid, 27 May 2022). 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 above: 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. 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 (PRC Leader, 1 March 2021).

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.

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 the norm than in private employment. It has to be kept in mind here, 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. An illustration, although not directly related to this kind of discrimination, is the push for increasing the Party's presence via UFWD supervision of [private enterprises](#) (Jamestown, 28 September 2020).

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. One country expert stated: "Police keep tabs on all known religious leaders (registered or unregistered)." A well-publicized case has been that of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, which was raided by police at Easter 2020 and whose members continued to be [interrogated](#) long after the initial raid (China Aid, 8 November 2021). There have been numerous reports of cases concerning less well-known churches, too (e.g., from the provinces of Beijing, Fujian, Gansu, Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, Jilin, Shanxi and Sichuan), and it is more than likely that most cases go unreported.

Block 3 - Additional information

In an effort to fulfil the new Party regulations dealing with religions, local authorities do not shy away from switching their mode of operation from monitoring to 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 UFWD 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.

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 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. There have been several 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 with 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 schools and medical staff.

Block 4 - Additional information

Publicly displaying religious symbols is risky for all Christians in the provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet. As one country expert said: "Officials routinely discriminate against Christians." In the media, Christianity is depicted as being a tool of Western aggression and 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 2023 reporting period, in the rules on using online platforms for religious purposes, further explained below (see: Church sphere).

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" 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.

As one country expert summarized for the previous reporting period: "Prior to COVID-19 the government had begun shutting down large, unregistered congregations. During lockdown, no public meetings were allowed so believers continued meeting online. It is highly unlikely that unregistered groups will attempt to resume large in-person meetings. The future of small group meetings, which many are currently utilizing, is uncertain." Many house churches switched to (limited) online meetings. The country expert quoted above added for WWL 2023: "Legislation on religious online activities that took effect in 2022 may result in restrictions on online gatherings." Churches are trying to [navigate](#) these new rules in an effort to stay online (China Source, 12 April 2022). Churches that have been officially closed down for good - particularly in rural areas - have lost everything, including church property and assets.

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. As stated above under 5.1, the authorities seem to prefer simply not allowing churches to open again after lifting COVID-19 restrictions. The WWL 2023 reporting period saw an increased pressure on TSPM churches in rural areas to merge. In some areas, house churches have not simply been closed down but have been placed under pressure instead to join TSPM churches.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points)

Christian activities are not allowed outside areas specifically designated for religious purposes. Even religious processions which have a long tradition among Catholic Christians are closely monitored and limited in terms of space, time and the number of participants allowed. A Catholic festival in Shanghai was [cancelled](#), for instance (China Aid, 25 May 2022). Due to COVID-19 measures and the continued strict Zero-COVID policy, the number of group outdoor activities has been very limited in general. But even after the gradual re-opening, Christian venues have had to remain closed. And where they were allowed to open, they were monitored closely and some were prevented from meeting due to the sensitive event of the 20th Party Congress, which took place in October 2022.

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

Everything is monitored. 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. At the same time, the Communist Party has introduced new "Administrative measures for [religious staff](#)" for creating a national database of recognized and authorized church leaders (as well as other religious leaders) (Bitter Winter, 11 February 2021).

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 has happened before. 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 drop in reports. 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.

Block 5 - Additional information

While Christian material is still available online, the scope is decreasing and accessing it is becoming increasingly difficult. Church leaders, especially those connected to churches under scrutiny like ERCC, can be interrogated for [participating](#) in online seminars (China Aid, 7 November 2020), gatherings on Zoom have been [interrupted](#) (Guangdong Province, China Aid, 19 July 2021), messages posted by high profile Christians on public message boards for the People's Congress have been [deleted](#) (China Aid, 23 February 2022), and the social media

account of the Presbyterian Church of Shanghai has been [deleted](#) (China Aid, 13 May 2022). TSPM churches are applying for the new religious online licenses and reportedly the first (TSPM) churches in Jiangsu Province have been issued 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).

It should be noted that the local authorities are mainly responsible for implementing the new regulations. 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. The COVID-19 crisis has been used as a pretext for delaying (often indefinitely) the re-opening of a church building, providing the perfect way for not having to officially raid a church building (with its risk of photo and video footage of the police in action being leaked to a wider public). It seems that the goal is changing: The aim is to ‘suffocate’ unregistered churches out of existence, while co-opting and strictly monitoring the TSPM churches.

While owning printing presses, printing and openly distributing bibles and other Christian material is restricted in China, a Franciscan-run educational organization in Hong Kong, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, reported [not being able to print](#) Chinese-language bibles (UCA News, 2 August 2022). According to the SBF, they formerly worked with printing houses from mainland China, but those declined the printing for two factors: that the business profit was not enough as the numbers are so small and that the printers wanted to avoid “trouble from the authorities”.

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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. 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.

5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

China: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	3000
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	100 *	1000 *
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)?	11	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	1000 *

China: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
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 *	100 *
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?	10 *	100 *

In the WWL 2023 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. Reports have been considerably fewer than in earlier reporting periods, so the estimated number given here may be a serious understatement. One illustration of these incidents are [attacks](#) against and abuses of Christians being members of the Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) in Chengdu (China Aid, 29 October 2021).
- 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.
- Churches attacked:** 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. But the more important reason during the WWL 2023 reporting period was that a large number of church buildings had already been closed previously as part of COVID-19 lockdown measures. While all locations used for religious meetings had to be closed down in reaction to the pandemic, the Communist authorities seem to have used this opportunity to shut some of them down for good or erect insurmountable hurdles for re-opening. Such cases are difficult to track, as this does not need a discernable government

action. Many churches and meeting places have simply vanished. (However, when church gatherings have vanished, it often means that the Christians have decided to simply split up and now meet in smaller groups at other 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. The reports collected throughout the previous WWL reporting period (for WWL 2021) resulted in a conservative estimate totaling 3088 churches closed. This would seem to be the minimum level for a WWL 2022 estimate too. Keeping in mind that the real number is most likely much higher than the number reported (possibly even higher than 20,000), the number has been set at 3,000 for WWL 2022. Given that so many church buildings and meeting points had already been closed before, the minimum number for WWL 2023, which by necessity has to be an estimation, is set at 1,000.

- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** Homes of Christians have been raided in which electricity has been cut off and furniture damaged. Christians have been evicted and [removed](#) by force from their homes (China Aid, 25 January 2022).
- **Other:** South Korean missionaries were expelled from the country, who had been living in the border region close to North Korea, especially in the province of Jilin. Their numbers have dwindled as this campaign has been running for a number of years already. Churches with foreign ties have come under particular scrutiny or have been closed down. The "Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church" with 60 members [fled to Jeju Island](#) in South Korea and asked for asylum (China Aid, 11 June 2021), but their application was declined.

5 Year trends

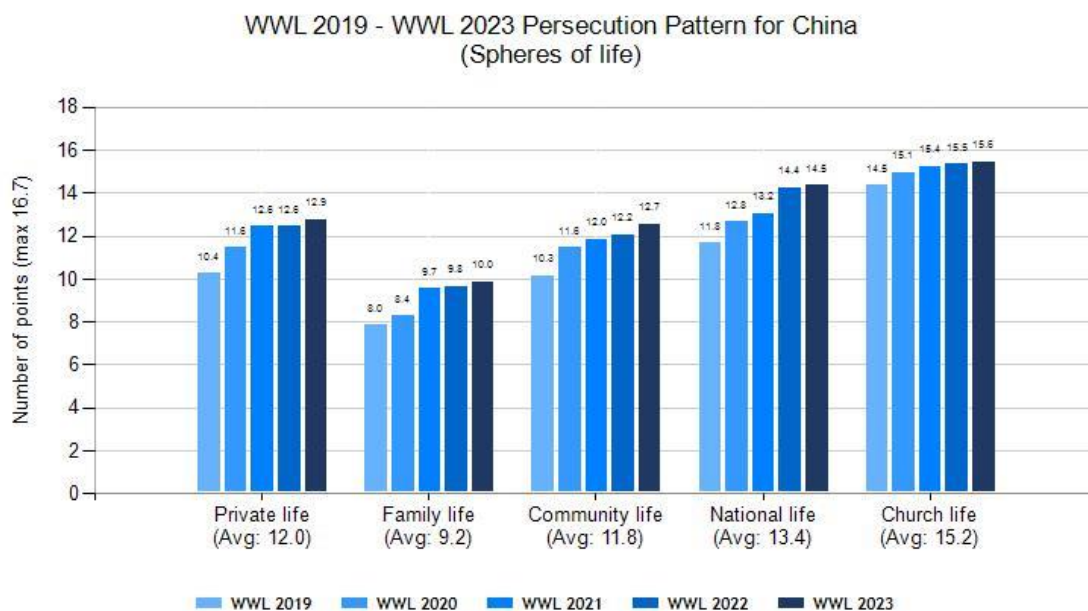
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

China: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023	
Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	13.1
2022	12.9
2021	12.6
2020	11.9
2019	11.0

The score for average pressure further increased to a very high level of 13.1 points in WWL 2023, showing a period of pronounced increase after starting the five year period at 11 points in WWL 2019. 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. 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

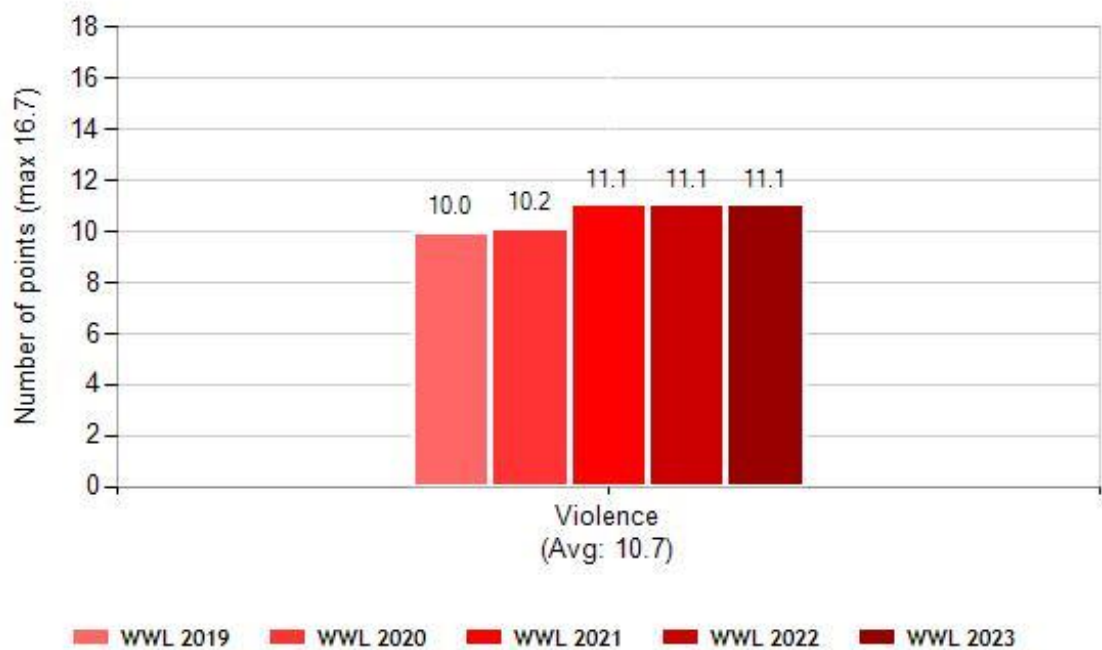


It can be seen in the chart above that all five *spheres of life* show marked increases in score in the last five reporting periods and now - in WWL 2023 - have never been at a higher level in the past five years. The fact that the level of pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres* is not higher 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' since WWL 2019, reflecting how life for all churches has become much more complicated, 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

In the chart below, it can be seen that the scores for violence against Christians - consistently in the category "very high" - have steadily increased and have now levelled off at 11.1 points. However, there have not been any reports of Christians being killed for their faith.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for China (Violence)



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

As marriage and birth rates fall in China, women are seeing an erosion of equal opportunities and are now encouraged toward “family virtues,” meaning they should focus on child-rearing and caregiving roles ([Wall Street Journal](#), 9 November 2022). It is too soon to tell how this will impact persecution, but it represents the possibility of increasing vulnerability for Christian women.

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).

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

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. They may further encounter bullying and harassment in school or their place of work.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Although they face similar pressure to women, men and boys are at greater risk of being physically abused, such as being beaten by police officers. Male Christian leaders are particularly targeted for government surveillance. Catholic priests and high-profile house church leaders have been abducted. In these instances, men may be physically abused, including being beaten by police officers. While in detention, many men are traumatized. For those under prolonged detention, they are unable to provide financially for their families. Due to such pressure, some church leaders choose to emigrate.

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department's IRFR 2021:

- "During the year, officials across the country shut down religious venues, including some that were affiliated with the authorized patriotic religious associations, in some but not all cases citing COVID-19 restrictions. The government intensified its campaign against religious groups it characterized as 'cults', including the CAG, maintained a ban on other groups, such as Falun Gong, and conducted propaganda campaigns against *xie jiao* (literally "heterodox teachings") aimed at school-age children. Authorities limited online worship. Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible, the Quran, and other religious literature, and penalized businesses that copied and published religious materials. The government removed religious apps from app stores and censored religious content from the popular messaging service WeChat. Authorities censored online posts referencing Jesus or the Bible and there were continued reports that authorities destroyed public displays of religious symbols throughout the country. The government continued to remove architectural features that identified some churches and mosques as religious sites and removed crosses from private property." (Page 2)

- “At a national conference on religious affairs in December, President and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping called on religious personnel and government officials to ‘uphold and develop a religious theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics’.” And “Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. International media reported growing anti-Muslim sentiment in society as a result of the government’s Sinicization campaign.” (Page 3)
- “Unequal treatment in society of Uyghur Muslims and Han Chinese continued in parallel with authorities’ suppression of Uyghur language, culture, and religious practices while promoting the Han majority in political, economic, and cultural life. Muslims reported severe societal discrimination in employment and business opportunities, and in travel. A journalist who traveled to the region reported manifestations of Uyghur culture, such as song, dance, and clothing, were packaged as tourist items for visiting Han Chinese in what one Western scholar referred to as the “museumification” of Uyghur culture.” (Pages 85 and 86)

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). While no official investigation had been made possible, a privately organized investigation, supported by NGOs, called the [Uyghur Tribunal](#), started in September 2020 in London.

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), a more detailed explanation can be found above under *Religious landscape*. 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* (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.

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Communist oppression

The law on religion and its February 2020 supplement continue to being implemented by the Communist Party via its United Front Work Department and the related offices on religion. Its strict implementation is strongly felt by all religions, but Christians have been a particular target and even TSPM churches have come under scrutiny. The CCP is much more relentless in following its goals and preserving its national ideology and will do whatever it deems necessary, as has been shown during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis when many church buildings were simply kept closed, while most other meetings and venues could start up again (some church venues were allowed to re-open as well). The "Administrative measures for [religious staff](#)" entered into force on 1 May 2021 (gov.cn, 9 February 2021). If they are implemented equally strictly (first and foremost for TSPM and CPM leaders), the room for churches in particular will shrink considerably, but house churches may be affected, too.

A report entitled "'[Comprehensive National Security](#)' unleashed: How Xi's approach shapes China's policies at home and abroad" sums up one of the major future challenges (Merics, 15 September 2022). While countries around the world (even democracies) are re-defining and tightening national security, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has raised this whole concept to new heights with its "securitization of everything". The CCP's traditional concept of national security, as followed by Mao Zedong, consisted of just three elements – political, territorial and military security. In contrast, Secretary General Xi's comprehensive national security concept consists of not less than 16 different types of security. The frame of analysis is being increasingly narrowed down to perceived or real internal and external threats. However, if threats are detected everywhere, this leads to ever higher levels of paranoia. As the number of perceived threats has been multiplying, so has the reaction against and adaptation to them. Threat recognition and adaptation has become a style of governance for the whole CCP system from the center down to the grassroots – even if it is only done to impress superiors and score points for promotion.

One of the areas in society where this change of priorities is becoming increasingly evident is religion. As the report explains: "Beijing sees individual identification with the party and country as fundamental to long-term security. Recent campaigns have focused on promoting a unified national identity (国家认同) and 'correct' mainstream values. Xi has called for a comprehensive national security outlook in religious affairs to ensure that religious organs promote CCP core values and policies. Minority languages have been marginalized in public education and partly restricted from use online. All Chinese are meant to be "one heart and soul" under the banner

of a Chinese nation (中华民族) and the leadership of the CCP. Those who resist may be subject to re-education ...".

There is evidence that many of the younger generation are beginning to doubt the social contract (of participating in the ever improving economic situation in exchange for agreeing with strict limitations on personal freedom) and look for alternative meaning to life (see Trend 1 above in: Trends analysis); this can be seen as a rich mission-field for Christians, but may also feed into the CCP's paranoia and its need for tighter control.

Dictatorial paranoia

Dictatorial paranoia plays out in an emphasis on national ideology and indoctrination, but can find its culmination in efforts to control and supervise society. China is the country where online and mobile paying systems are by far the most advanced and used, especially in cities, and such systems can be used for monitoring, too, leading to questions about data protection within China itself. While the Social Credit System and GM are still being developed (see above: Trends 1 c), citizen ratings will have very serious implications. Questions arise not just about fraud or buying a better rating: What happens if citizens show socially unwanted behavior, by being – for example – religious or Christian? What will be the consequence of that?

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that it is relatively easy to introduce strict surveillance and isolation measures for health-related reasons, although there were some fears related to data protection being raised by Chinese citizens, too. However, the stronger the personality cult around President Xi Jinping grows, the more weight this Persecution engine, *Dictatorial paranoia*, will carry. An outline of what to expect from Chinese politics in the [next five years](#) up to 2025 by observers of the CCP includes a stronger focus on internal politics. The key points mentioned are: 'Xi consolidates political power in 2022', 'Government will become a better means to Xi's ends' and 'Xi's Party-state will deliver more for most Chinese citizens' (MacroPolo, 26 October 2020). This holds for the WWL 2023 reporting period as well, with the addition of: 'Manage to go it alone and overcome effects from the decoupling trends', increasing the economic autonomy and independence of China. Given how much these trends are centered around the person of President Xi, aged 69 at the time of writing, it will become increasingly important to think about [succession scenarios](#) with each passing year (CSIS, After Xi, 21 April 2021). This will add to CCP paranoia. For Christians in China, this consolidation of political power may well translate into increasing pressure to conform and the decoupling may lead to stronger isolation from other churches worldwide.

Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism – Buddhist

These Persecution engines are mainly driven by family, society and religious leaders and aimed against the few thousand converts among the Muslim and Buddhist (Tibetan) people groups. Pressure on converts is likely to remain high and potentially even increase as the urgency for conformity among these minority communities grows due to the increasing pressure being placed on them by government policing measures.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Position on the World Watch List.: Factsheet - <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/2021%20China%20Factsheet.pdf>
- Persecution engines description: police state - <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-china-42911468/china-xinjiang-police-state-fear-and-resentment>
- Persecution engines description: Ethnic Unity Law - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/law-05012020182336.html>
- 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): Christmas - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/china-bans-christmas-as-forbidden-western-celebration/95523>
- Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points): banned - <https://apnews.com/article/technology-business-religion-china-apple-inc-dafe0fad25bdac0313d458453e0dcf53>
- Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points): shut down - http://www.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2022-06-01/well-known-christian-website-closes-permanently-after-21-year-service_11519
- Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (3.50 points): more cautious - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/march-web-only/internet-regulations-china-evangelism.html>
- Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.75 points): home-schooling - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/april/china-education-school-homeschooling-restrictions.html>
- Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.75 points): survey form - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/05/investigation-of-students-religious.html>
- Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere: ongoing challenges - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/05/early-rain-couple-overcame-harassment.html>
- 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): grid management system - <https://www.prcleader.org/pei-grid-management>
- Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points): private enterprises - <https://jamestown.org/program/the-ccps-new-directives-for-united-front-work-in-private-enterprises/>
- Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points): interrogated - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/11/early-rain-believers-share-gospel-with.html>
- 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): Journal of Law and Religion - <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-law-and-religion/article/freedom-in-handcuffs-religious-freedom-in-the-constitution-of-china/55969679D7541B29CAA7477AE1503627>
- Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points): navigate - <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/chinese-church-voices/churches-seeking-to-stay-online/>
- Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (4.00 points): new regulations - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/05/ccp-issues-administrative-measures-for.html>
- Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (4.00 points): cancelled - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/05/shanghai-lockdown-canceled-15-year-old.html>
- Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points): Training courses - http://www.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2022-08-15/training--preaching-of-sinicization-of-christianity-rolled-out-in-three-provinces_11770
- Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 points): religious staff - <https://bitterwinter.org/enter-the-administrative-measures-for-religious-clergy/>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: participating - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2020/11/police-interrogate-yunfei-ran-renowned.html>

- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: interrupted - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/07/ccp-authorities-forcibly-interrupt.html>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: deleted - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/02/early-rain-members-online-message.html>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: deleted - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/05/after-being-banned-officials-closed.html>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: license - http://www.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2022-03-11/china-s-provinces-successively-issues-notice-on-licensing-internet-religious-information-services_11256
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: provincial regulations - https://www.china-zentrum.de/fileadmin/PDF-Dateien/E-Journal_RCTC/2022/RCTC_2022-1.3-13_News_Update.pdf
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: not being able to print - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/printing-troubles-spark-catholic-bible-shortage-in-hong-kong/98253>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: attacks - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/10/police-raid-home-of-early-rain-church.html>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Home as prison - <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/home-becomes-prison-china-s-expanding-use-house-arrests-under-xi-jinping>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: removed - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2022/01/early-rain-member-constantly.html>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: fled to Jeju Island - <https://www.chinaaid.org/2021/06/shenzhen-holy-reformed-church-members.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Wall Street Journal - <https://www.wsj.com/articles/under-xi-jinping-women-in-china-have-given-up-gains-11667995201>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: HRW, 7 June 2022 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/07/chained-woman-has-become-face-bride-trafficking-china>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: The Battle for China's Spirit - https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_ChinasSpirit2016_FULL_FINAL_140pages_compressed.pdf
- Persecution of other religious minorities: China Leaks - https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html?mc_cid=51ab797dd4&mc_eid=cb0c885248
- Persecution of other religious minorities: reports - <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2019/11/new-leaks-uncover-xinjiang-detentions-and-surveillance/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: overview - <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/meghara/china-new-internment-camps-xinjiang-uighurs-muslims>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: United Nations - <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/investigate-china-for-uighur-persecution-39-nations-tell-un-77918>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Uyghur Tribunal - <https://uyghurtribunal.com/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Ethnic Unity Law - <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/law-05012020182336.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Church of the Almighty God - <https://bitterwinter.org/1634-church-of-almighty-god-members-arrested-in-first-half-of-2020/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: folk religions - <https://bitterwinter.org/guangxi-religious-repression-zhuang-minority/>
- Future outlook: religious staff - http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-02/09/content_5586371.htm
- Future outlook: Comprehensive National Security - <https://merics.org/en/report/comprehensive-national-security-unleashed-how-xis-approach-shapes-chinas-policies-home-and>
- Future outlook: next five years - <https://macropolo.org/analysis/china-forecast-politics-2025-stronger-as-xi-jinping-goes/>
- Future outlook: succession scenarios - <https://www.csis.org/analysis/after-xi-future-scenarios-leadership-succession-post-xi-jinping-era>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=China>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/#chinablog>