



Freedom in the World - China (2002)

Polity: One party

Population:
1,273,300,000

GNI /Capita: \$3,617

Life Expectancy: 71

Religious Groups:
na

Ethnic Groups: Han Chinese (92 percent), other, including Tibetan, Mongol, Korean, Manchu, and Uighur (8 percent)

Capital: Beijing

Political Rights Score: 7 *

Civil Liberties Score: 6 *

Status: Not Free

Overview

China's leaders prepared in 2001 for a party congress in late 2002 that is likely to usher in a younger generation of rulers. There are few signs that the potential leaders from the younger generation favor loosening the Communist Party's tight grip on power, though they are likely to continue the country's painful transition to a market economy, which has already thrown millions out of work.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949 under Mao Zedong after defeating the Nationalist Koumintang in a civil war that began in the 1920s. Aiming to tighten the party's grip on power, Mao led several brutal, mass ideological campaigns that resulted in millions of deaths and politicized nearly every aspect of public life. Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping emerged as China's paramount leader. While maintaining the CCP's monopoly on power, Deng scaled back the party's role in everyday life and launched China's gradual transition from a central planning system to a market economy.

The party showed its intent to hold on to power at all costs with the June 1989 massacre of hundreds, if not thousands, of student protesters in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square. The Beijing demonstrations were part of a nationwide student movement protesting official corruption and demanding democratic reforms. Following the crackdown, the CCP named hardliner Jiang Zemin as party secretary-general, sacking the relatively moderate Zhao Ziyang. A former Shanghai mayor and party boss, Jiang became state president in 1993 and was widely recognized as China's new paramount leader following Deng's 1997 death.

Jiang, 75, has continued Deng's policies of selling off state enterprises, rolling back the cradle-to-grave welfare system, and encouraging private enterprise, while tightly restricting dissent. The CCP hopes that economic development will stave off broad calls for political reform. It fears, however, that liberalizing the economy too fast will create social unrest at the same time that Chinese citizens increasingly are exposed to foreign news and ideas about freedom and democracy.

While the student activism of the late 1980s has largely died down, factory workers and farmers have in recent years held thousands of street demonstrations over hardships associated with economic restructuring. These hardships are expected to increase as the government slashes tariffs and takes other measures to open up China's economy to trade and foreign investment as part of the condition for Beijing's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). The trade body formally admitted China in November 2001.

In line with its WTO commitments, the government has in recent years privatized thousands of small- and medium-sized state-owned enterprises, throwing more than 20 million people out of work. It hopes to sell off the remainder by the middle of the decade. But Beijing has not created a system of unemployment benefits, health insurance, and pensions for laid-off and retired state enterprise workers. Moreover, workers who still have jobs with state-run factories often receive their wages and benefits late, since most state enterprises are heavily in the red.

More layoffs could be in store if the government follows through on its pledges to clean up China's ailing state banks. They make 80 percent of their loans to state firms. Partly as a result, bad loans now make up some 30 percent to 40 percent of the state banks' outstanding loans, according to Western experts. They say that recovering loans from delinquent borrowers and cleaning up the balance sheets of state banks will involve even more painful job cuts at state firms. Failure to do so, however, raises the risk of a financial crisis.

In the countryside, where 900 million Chinese live, farmers have in recent years held thousands of riots, demonstrations, and other protests against high and often arbitrary local government fees and taxes. The government announced in December that a third of China's provinces would try out a new system in 2002 whereby farmers would pay taxes to provincial, rather than township, authorities. Called by some the biggest reform in the countryside since China disbanded communes in the early 1980s, the new system is aimed at forcing townships to cut costs rather than squeeze peasants in order to meet their ballooning debts.

Rural areas also have too many workers chasing too few farm and factory jobs. Rural unemployment and underemployment combined are estimated to be more than 30 percent, according to the U.S. State Department's February 2001 report on China's human rights record in 2000. This has contributed to a "floating population" of 100 million people, by official count, who have left homes in rural areas in search of work in the cities, where the migrants increasingly compete with locals for jobs. China's WTO accession could make matters worse for many peasants if cheaper agricultural imports chip away at their incomes.

Workers and farmers have also held many demonstrations against widespread official corruption. According to official figures, economic corruption consumes 13

percent to 17 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) annually. Authorities have in recent years responded by executing hundreds, if not thousands, of people for corruption. They include 14 people executed in 2000 for their roles in a \$6.6 billion smuggling racket in the port of Xiamin, the largest so far exposed in China. The government, however, has made few efforts to fight graft by creating more transparent and accountable institutions and improving law enforcement.

Chinese authorities, meanwhile, continue to forcefully put down any organized dissent. Since December 1998, courts have sentenced more than 30 members of a fledgling dissident group, the China Democracy Party, to prison terms of up to 13 years on subversion or other charges. The government has also jailed thousands of followers of the Falun Gong spiritual movement, which in April 1999 organized the biggest demonstration in the capital since 1989 to demand official recognition.

The government has also tried to crush independence movements among the seven million ethnic Uighurs and other, smaller Turkic-speaking groups in China's northwestern Xinjiang province. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese authorities have executed several hundred Uighurs accused of involvement in separatist activities, and detained, imprisoned, or tortured thousands of others, Amnesty International said in October. Most Uighur independence activities appear to be peaceful, although armed groups have carried out several bombings and assassinations. Uighur leaders accuse Beijing of exploiting the region's rich mineral resources, controlling religious affairs, and altering Xinjiang's demographic balance by encouraging an influx of Han Chinese through job opportunities and other incentives.

The CCP faces these pressing economic and social issues at a time when it is choosing a new generation of leaders. The CCP's sixteenth congress in late 2002 will reshuffle the powerful standing committee of the party politburo. It is widely expected to name Hu Jintao, the youngest member of the current Politburo, to replace Jiang as party secretary-general. Hu, 58, strongly supports maintaining the CCP's tight control over politics, the media, and cultural affairs, the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review noted in February. Under the constitution, Jiang must give up the presidency in 2003. Some of his aging colleagues resent his plans to hold on to the chairmanship of the powerful Central Military Commission past the congress, The Economist of London reported in August. CCP leaders are also sharply divided over Jiang's controversial July proposal that the party open its ranks to private businesspeople. Jiang said that the party should bring in capitalists in order to boost its "influence and cohesiveness." But conservatives fear that giving private entrepreneurs influence within the party will strengthen the CCP's economic reform camp.

China's economy posted solid growth in 2001, even taking into account the fact that official figures are widely believed to be somewhat inflated. Zeng Peiyan,

chairman of the State Development Planning Commission, predicted in December that GDP would grow by 7.4 percent in 2001, down from 8.0 percent in 2000.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) runs China as a single-party state, prohibiting opposition parties, controlling the judiciary, and restricting sharply most basic rights. The CCP Politburo's seven-member standing committee makes all key political decisions and sets government policy. China's legislature, the National People's Congress, is constitutionally the most powerful state body. In practice, it rubber-stamps the Politburo's decisions. At the same time, many of the Congress's handpicked delegates have in recent years registered protest votes over the government's handling of crime and other issues.

In a limited democratic experiment, rural Chinese elect their local village committees. These bodies, however, cannot levy taxes and hold few administrative powers. While government-supported candidates have lost races in some villages, the overall election process is hardly free and fair. Local party officials carefully vet candidates, and balloting is often marred by irregularities and unfair procedures. By some estimates, up to 90 percent of China's 900,000 or more villages have held elections since the 1980s, although there are no exact figures.

The CCP controls the judiciary and directs verdicts in sensitive cases, but has also introduced reforms in recent years aimed at making ordinary criminal and civil trials fairer. Police and judges, however, frequently ignore the new rules and flout due process rights, and local authorities often intervene even in ordinary cases. Overall, 99 percent of trials result in guilty verdicts.

The government revised the Criminal Procedure Law in 1997 to grant defense lawyers greater roles and to increase their access to defendants, create a more adversarial trial process, and to end the presumption of guilt (although without establishing a presumption of innocence). Other reforms sought to curb the widespread practice of bribing judges for favorable verdicts, open most trials to the public, and increased training for judges and lawyers. But criminal defense lawyers "are often harassed and intimidated, and sometimes detained or even convicted of crimes, merely for actively defending the interests of their clients," according to a 2001 report by the New York-based Human Rights in China. Reflecting in part the reluctance of many lawyers to defend criminals, 70 percent of defendants in criminal cases lack counsel at trial, according to National Bar Association figures.

In a positive development, many ordinary Chinese have won out-of-court settlements or even outright victories in recent years in civil suits against township governments, employers, state firms, and local police. This would have been impossible only a decade ago. Judges, however, are often wary of ruling against

local governments, which provide their salaries and appointments. Even when they do win, plaintiffs often find it impossible to enforce judgments against local authorities. In any case, courts generally accept only lawsuits that dovetail with Beijing's policies and priorities, such as curbing abuses by local officials.

Any reforms to the way Chinese courts operate are undermined by the fact that authorities still imprison without trial hundreds of thousands of people each year, using administrative procedures. Officials can sentence suspects without trial to up to three years in "re-education through labor" camps. These camps held some 230,000 people in 1997, the latest year for which figures are available, according to the U.S. State Department report. Authorities can also detain without trial homeless people and other "undesirable" city dwellers under a practice called "custody and repatriation." The State Department report said authorities detain upwards of 1.7 million people each year under "custody and repatriation."

By most accounts, Chinese prisons, labor camps, and detention centers hold thousands of political prisoners for peacefully expressing their political, religious, or social views, although the exact number is not known. Many political prisoners are jailed under broadly drawn laws against subversion, "endangering state security," or "leaking state secrets." In addition, the Criminal Procedure Law criminalizes the advocating of independence or greater autonomy for Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. Even after they are released, many former political prisoners face unrelenting police harassment that prevents them from holding jobs or otherwise leading normal lives.

China executes thousands of people each year, more than all other countries combined, according to Amnesty International. As part of Beijing's ongoing "Strike Hard" campaign against crime, many Chinese have been put to death for nonviolent offenses including hooliganism, pimping, theft of farm animals or rice, tax fraud, embezzlement, or bribery. Capital trials are often summary, increasing the odds of innocent people being executed. All told, Chinese law punishes 65 separate crimes by death.

Throughout China, torture of criminal suspects, political dissidents, and others is "widespread and systemic, committed in the full range of state institutions, from police stations to 're-education through labor' camps, as well as in people's homes, workplaces and in public," Amnesty International said in a February report. Courts have in recent years sentenced some officials convicted of torture to heavy prison sentences, although most perpetrators go unpunished.

The CCP sharply restricts press freedom. It prohibits the media from promoting political reform, covering internal party politics or central government affairs, criticizing Beijing's domestic and international policies, or reporting financial information the government has not released. At the same time, the CCP often

allows the media to report on certain problems that the party itself seeks to alleviate. These include corruption, arbitrary decisions, and other abuses by local officials. At least a dozen journalists are serving prison terms for breaching these limits. Authorities have in recent years also dismissed several journalists and editors, and suspended or banned some liberal magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses. While China's press is both public and private, the government owns and operates all radio and television stations.

The government promotes Internet use, but restricts content and regulates providers. Regulations introduced in 2000 require content providers to gain official approval of websites and obtain permission to post news from foreign sources. They also criminalized the unauthorized release on the Internet of broadly defined "state secrets" and banned content that could be subversive, harm China's reputation, or undermine social stability. Authorities have in recent years arrested several dissidents for information disseminated through the Internet. Growth in the number of Chinese Internet users slowed in 2001, rising by 17.8 percent, to 26.5 million users, in the first half of the year after more than quadrupling in the same period a year earlier, the government said in July.

China has hundreds of thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work in ostensibly nonpolitical areas. These include the environment and the provision of social services for women and migrant workers. Beijing, however, does not allow NGOs to work on human rights or other overtly political issues. Authorities use a complex vetting process to deny licenses to politically oriented groups, in part on the basis of State Council Order 43 of 1989. It bans "identical or similar social organizations . . . within the same administrative area." This allows officials to deny registration to independent labor organizations or other activist NGOs on the grounds that they would serve functions allegedly covered by some existing state-controlled groups. Once registered, NGOs are supervised by specific government departments. Government figures show that at the end of 1998 China had more than 1,500 quasi-NGOs, 165,000 social organizations, and 700,000 nonprofit organizations registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Workers, farmers, and other aggrieved Chinese have held thousands of public protests in recent years over labor and economic concerns and corruption by local officials. Security forces, however, broke up many demonstrations, particularly those with overt political and social messages or where protesters became unruly. By official count, Chinese staged more than 100,000 demonstrations nationwide in 1999.

Beijing sharply restricts religious freedom by placing religious groups under the tight control of state-sponsored associations and cracking down on religious leaders and ordinary worshippers who reject these bodies. For each of the five religions recognized by the government, the respective "patriotic association"

appoints clergy; monitors religious membership, funding, and activities; and controls publication and distribution of religious books and other materials. In addition, Beijing does not allow the Roman Catholic patriotic association and its member churches to maintain loyalty to the Vatican. The five recognized religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism.

Some local governments tolerate mainstream groups that reject their respective patriotic associations. In many areas, unregistered Protestant and Catholic congregations worship freely. At the same time, local authorities throughout China have in recent years raided, closed, or demolished scores of "underground" churches, mosques, temples, and seminaries, according to the U.S. State Department report and other sources. They have also harassed and at times fined, detained, beaten, or tortured hundreds of bishops, priests, and ordinary Protestant and Catholic worshippers for months and, in some cases, years. In Xinjiang, authorities sharply restrict construction of mosques, limit Islamic publishing and education, ban religious practice by those under 18, and control the leadership of mosques and religious schools.

Since July 1999, when Beijing banned the Falun Gong spiritual movement, more than 250 practitioners have reportedly died in custody, with about half of the deaths coming in the first seven months of 2001, Amnesty International said in September. As of late 2000, courts had sentenced without trials up to 5,000 Falun Gong followers to up to three years in "re-education through labor camps," the State Department report said. Unidentified Falun Gong and official sources said in 2001 that Beijing now officially sanctions violence by police against Falun Gong practitioners, The Washington Post and Amnesty International reported separately.

In addition to those arrested and jailed, many Falun Gong practitioners have been expelled from schools or fired from their jobs for refusing to renounce their beliefs. Beijing broadened the crackdown in October 1999 to include other groups that, like the Falun Gong, also combine qigong (a traditional martial art) and meditation. In recent years, officials have also harassed religious groups with unorthodox practices or beliefs or that have charismatic leaders.

China's one-child family planning policy is applied fairly strictly in the cities and less so in the countryside, where 70 percent of the population lives. While urban couples seldom receive permission to have second children, rural couples generally may have second children if the first are girls. The one-child policy nominally applies less strictly to ethnic minorities, although officials in Xinjiang province reportedly pressure Uighur parents to have only one child. Throughout China, couples adhering to the policy receive stipends and preferential education and medical benefits. Those failing to comply face fines, loss of benefits or access to social services, or even forced abortion and sterilization.

Chinese women face considerable discrimination in employment and other areas of mainstream society and are far likelier than men to be laid off when state firms are slimmed down or privatized, according to the State Department report. A 2000 survey by the All-China Women's Foundation indicated that one in four married women are victims of domestic violence. Trafficking of women within China for forced marriage and prostitution and abroad for forced labor is fairly widespread, although the number of victims is not known, the State Department report said.

In the absence of vigorous unions or strong enforcement of labor laws, private factories often pay workers below-minimum wages, force them to work overtime, sometimes without extra pay, and arbitrarily dismiss employees. Although the law does not guarantee the right to strike, authorities frequently allow workers to strike or demonstrate to protest dangerous conditions, layoffs, and unpaid wages, benefits, or unemployment stipends. Most prisoners are forced to work with little or no compensation.

The government prohibits independent trade unions, requires all unions to belong to the CCP-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), and has in recent years detained or jailed several labor activists. Some were trying to form independent unions as provided for in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which China signed in 1997 but has not ratified. Most ACFTU-affiliated unions mainly organize social activities rather than defend workers' interests. A revised labor law approved in October extended to private and foreign firms of 25 or more workers the obligation to set up ACFTU branches. Previously, only state and collective firms needed to set up ACFTU branches.

The economic reforms that began in the late 1970s have freed millions of Chinese from party control of their day-to-day lives. Many state workers still must belong to company-based work units, which control everything from the right to change residences to permission to have children. And all government departments, state-run schools, and state firms still have party committees that handle budgets, political education, and personnel decisions.

But tens of millions of Chinese now work for private companies in the cities or in semiprivate, small-scale "township and village enterprises" in the countryside. They are often free of job-related party supervision and have greater choice over where to live and work. To further boost labor mobility, the government is planning to phase out remaining migration restrictions within five years, although analysts say the largest cities are likely to take at least some steps to keep out rural job seekers, *The Economist* reported in September. The reforms have also lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty, although some 200 million still live on less than \$1 per day, according to the World Bank.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*