



Freedom in the World - China (2004)

Population:
1,288,700,000

GNI/Capita: \$890

Life Expectancy: 71

Religious Groups:
Daoist (Taoist),
Buddhist, Muslim (1-
2 percent), Christian
(3-4 percent)

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

As China completed its biggest leadership shuffle since the 1970s, new party chief Hu Jintao and other top officials pledged to improve conditions for rural Chinese, who formed the vanguard of the Communist revolution but who are now increasingly left behind in the Asian giant's wrenching transition to a market economy. Nevertheless, the new leaders are unlikely to offer bold initiatives to help China's ailing farmers--or its millions of unemployed urban factory workers--choosing instead to continue policies combining gradual reforms with large dollops of public spending. Carefully groomed and selected as they marched up the Communist Party ranks, Hu and his deputies are also unlikely to ease the party's iron grip on power.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949 under Mao Zedong after defeating the Koumintang, or Nationalists, in a civil war that began in the 1920s. Aiming to tighten party control, Mao led several brutal mass-mobilization campaigns that resulted in millions of deaths and politicized nearly every aspect of daily life. Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping emerged as China's paramount leader. Over the next two decades, Deng oversaw China's transformation from a hermetic, agrarian, and often tumultuous Communist society into an authoritarian state with a market-led economy, eager to sell its products abroad and expand its role in global affairs even as it trampled on internationally recognized human rights.

Deng and other leaders signaled their intent to maintain power at all costs with the 1989 massacre of hundreds of student protesters in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Following the crackdown, the party tapped Jiang Zemin, then Shanghai mayor and party boss, to replace the relatively moderate Zhao Ziyang as party secretary-general. Jiang became state president in 1993 and was widely recognized as China's new paramount leader following Deng's death in 1997.

Jiang continued Deng's policies of selling off state firms, encouraging private enterprise, and rolling back China's "iron rice bowl" welfare system. Having cast

aside Mao's utopian goals, China's leaders appeared to agree that continued market reforms would be needed in order to boost living standards and stave off broad calls for political reform. They feared, however, that freeing up the economy too fast could increase social hardship in the near term and create a groundswell against the party.

The CCP's sixteenth party congress in November 2002 was carefully stage-managed to project an image of an orderly transfer of power to a younger generation of leaders. Hu became party secretary-general and, along with other new leaders, took control of the powerful, nine-member Politburo Standing Committee. However, Jiang, now 77, apparently solidified his position as leader of China even as Hu and other younger cadres took charge of day-to-day affairs. Jiang remained head of the Central Military Commission--effectively supreme commander of China's 2.5 million-strong armed forces--and stacked the Politburo Standing Committee with several proteges.

At the annual session of China's parliament in March 2003, the final pieces of the leadership shuffle came together. Hu, 61, replaced Jiang as state president, and Wen Jiabao, the party's third-ranking official, took day-to-day charge of the economy by replacing Zhu Rongji as prime minister. Late in the year, the new government appeared set to revise the constitution at the March 2004 legislative session to give greater protection to private property and allow the party to recruit private entrepreneurs.

In addition to planning constitutional reforms, Hu and other leaders took pains to nurture caring images. They promised better schools, more public works for rural Chinese, and efforts to revive the northeast industrial heartland. However, their initial handling of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that broke out in early 2003 was more Communist than compassionate. They initially stonewalled before finally taking steps against the viral outbreak, which killed 349 people before it was contained in June. Chinese authorities, meanwhile, continue to stifle any organized calls for political reform. Since 1998, courts have sentenced more than 30 leaders of a would-be opposition party, the China Democracy Party, to jail terms of up to 13 years.

The privatization of thousands of small and medium-sized state-owned firms has thrown tens of millions of Chinese out of work in a society that lacks a viable system of pensions, health insurance, and unemployment benefits. These hardships are likely to increase as the government slashes tariffs and takes other steps to open up China's economy to trade and foreign investment to meet its commitments as a World Trade Organization (WTO) member. Analysts suggest that, at least in the short term, China's leaders will try to ease this transition by continuing to stoke the economy through massive, debt-accumulating public spending rather than by taking tough but painful measures to reform large,

money-losing state enterprises or cleaning up ailing and corrupt state banks.

Meanwhile, in the countryside, home to 70 percent of the population--or roughly 900 million Chinese--farmers recently have staged thousands of protests against high and often arbitrary local government fees and taxes. China's WTO membership could make matters worse for many peasants if cheaper agricultural imports chip away at their incomes. Already, China has wide income gaps between its rural areas and cities and between its hinterland and booming coastal areas.

Rural China's woes have contributed to a "floating population," officially tallied at 80 to 130 million people, who have left their rural homes in search of work in cities. Urbanization is transforming this historically agricultural society by providing many rural migrants with modest but unprecedented opportunities, though their shaky legal status often makes migrants vulnerable to abuse by police and employers.

Corruption, meanwhile, has flourished in a country that has a rapidly expanding economy but has neither independent courts, regulators, and investigative agencies, nor a free press to probe and punish wrongdoing. Chinese authorities have responded instead with brute force, in recent years executing hundreds, possibly thousands, of people for corruption.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Chinese citizens do not have the power to change their government democratically. Ordinary Chinese enjoy few basic rights, opposition parties are illegal, Chinese jails hold thousands of political prisoners, torture is widespread in prisons and detention centers, and the judiciary is used as a tool of political control. The CCP Politburo Standing Committee makes nearly all key political decisions and sets governmental policy. Party cadres hold almost all top national and local governmental, police, and military posts.

China's only real experiment with democracy has been at the local level, mainly with elections for village committees that cannot levy taxes and hold few executive powers. While party-backed candidates have lost some elections, "in general the CCP dominates the local electoral process," and roughly 60 percent of those elected to the village committees are party members, according to the U.S. State Department's 2002 human rights report, released in March 2003. Elections in some areas have also been held for township governors, township and county-level people's congresses, local party secretaries, and the leadership of urban neighborhood committees, which help officials maintain order and provide services.

Press freedom is severely limited, and Chinese editors and reporters work under tight constraints. The government bars the media from advocating political reform,

criticizing Beijing's domestic and foreign policies, reporting financial data that the government has not released, or covering internal party politics or the inner workings of the government. At the same time, officials often allow journalists to report on corruption and other ills that the party itself seeks to alleviate. All articles in private publications must be vetted by the government before publication.

As of May, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Chinese jails held 38 journalists, 15 of them for publishing or distributing information on-line. Other journalists have been harassed, detained, threatened, or dismissed from their jobs over their reporting. Officials also recently suspended or shut down some liberal magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses.

The government promotes use of the Internet, which it believes to be critical to China's economic development, but regulates access, monitors use, and restricts and regulates content. Amnesty International said in October that it knew of more than 40 Chinese who were detained or jailed for Internet-related offenses. They included students, political dissidents, and Falun Gong practitioners. Some 59 million Chinese use the Internet, a government-funded group reported in 2002, and the number is growing rapidly.

Chinese face severe restrictions on religious practice. The government forces religious groups to submit to the tight control of state-sponsored bodies and cracks down on religious leaders and ordinary worshippers who reject this authority. The five recognized religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Buddhism claims the most adherents. For each of the five religions recognized by the government, the respective "patriotic association" appoints clergy and controls clerical education; monitors religious funding, membership, and activities; and controls publication and distribution of religious books and other materials. Beijing bars the Roman Catholic "patriotic association" and its member churches from recognizing the Vatican's authority in matters including the ordination of bishops.

The extent to which congregations must actually submit to these regulations varies by region. In many areas, unregistered Protestant and Catholic congregations--particularly those that are small and unobtrusive--worship freely. Elsewhere, however, zealous local officials sometimes break up underground services. They also at times fine, harass, detain, interrogate, beat, and torture underground church leaders and ordinary worshippers and raid, close, or demolish underground churches, mosques, temples, and seminaries, according to the U.S. State Department report and other sources.

In Xinjiang, officials limit the building of new mosques, keep tabs on mosques and their leaders, and restrict Islamic publishing and education. Officials recently have also shut down some Xinjiang mosques, burned some Uighur books and journals,

and restricted the use of the Uighur language.

Many thousands of Falun Gong practitioners remain behind bars in China, with most apparently held without trial in "re-education through labor" camps. Several hundred Falun Gong adherents reportedly have died in detention because of torture, abuse, and neglect since Beijing's crackdown on the group began in 1999. "Anticult" laws developed to crush the Falun Gong, which combines qigong (a traditional martial art) with meditation, have also been used to sentence members of at least 16 other religious groups to long jail terms, the New York-based Human Rights Watch reported in 2002. Authorities at times also crack down on folk religions and unorthodox religious sects. Academic freedom is restricted by ideological controls on what can be taught and discussed at universities.

Workers, farmers, and others have held thousands of public protests in recent years over labor issues and wrongdoing by local officials. Chinese factory workers routinely take to the streets to protest hardships associated with economic restructuring. In spring 2002, tens of thousands of workers demonstrated in Liaoyang and other northeastern rustbelt cities over mass layoffs and low or unpaid wages, pensions, and severance pay. While the government often tolerates these types of protests as an outlet for pent-up grievances, security forces have also forcibly broken up many demonstrations, particularly those with overt political and social messages or where protestors became unruly.

China has hundreds of thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). All work in areas that, at least on the surface, do not challenge the government's authority, such as the environment and social welfare. Once registered, NGOs must report regularly to specific government departments.

Workers lack vigorous, independent unions, and enforcement of labor laws is poor. All unions must belong to the state-controlled All China Federation of Trade Unions, and several independent labor activists have been jailed for their advocacy efforts. Private factories often arbitrarily dismiss employees, pay workers below minimum wages, and force them to work overtime, sometimes without extra pay. Moreover, factory and coal mining accidents kill thousands of Chinese workers each year. Though workers lack the legal right to strike, officials frequently allow workers to strike or demonstrate over layoffs; dangerous working conditions; or unpaid wages, benefits, or unemployment stipends.

The government controls the judiciary. The CCP directs verdicts and sentences, particularly in politically sensitive cases, according to the U.S. State Department. Despite some recent criminal procedure reforms, trials are often closed and reportedly only one in seven criminal defendants has counsel. Officials often subject suspects to "severe psychological pressure" to confess, and coerced confessions are frequently admitted as evidence. Police frequently conduct

searches without warrants and at times monitor telephone conversations and other personal communications to use as evidence against suspected dissidents.

Many political and ordinary criminal detainees lack trials altogether, detained instead by bureaucratic fiat in "re-education through labor" camps. These camps held as many as 310,000 detainees as of early 2001, and the number has likely grown since then, Amnesty International said in October. In a positive development, Chinese officials said in 2003 that they were abolishing another form of administrative detention called "custody and repatriation." This had been used to detain some one million Chinese each year, many of them migrant workers. By law, at least, migrant workers now can no longer be detained and deported from cities for failing to carry proper papers.

In another gain for the rule of law, ordinary Chinese increasingly are able to bring suits against local governments and are occasionally winning damage awards. At the same time, property rights remain rudimentary. Many Chinese are forcibly relocated from their homes each year to make way for commercial development, often for meager compensation.

China executes thousands of people each year, more than all other countries combined, according to Amnesty International. Many are executed immediately after summary trials, raising serious questions about the fairness of their convictions and sentencing. As part of Beijing's national "Strike Hard" campaign against crime that began in 2001, many Chinese have been executed for nonviolent offenses such as corruption, pimping, "hooliganism," or the theft of rice or farm animals.

Moreover, "torture and ill-treatment continue to be widespread and [are] reported in many state institutions as well as in workplaces and homes," Amnesty International said in June. Courts recently have sentenced some officials convicted of torture to heavy jail terms, although most perpetrators go unpunished. Deaths of criminal suspects in custody because of torture continue to be reported.

By most accounts, Chinese prisons, re-education camps, and detention centers hold thousands of political prisoners, although the exact number is unknown. Conditions in Chinese prisons and labor camps for both political prisoners and common criminals generally are "harsh and frequently degrading," according to the U.S. State Department report. The U.S.-based rights activist Harry Wu and others have reported that forced labor is used widely in Chinese jails and labor camps.

Muslims and other minorities in China face discrimination in mainstream society in access to jobs and other areas, and the majority Han Chinese have reaped an outsized share of benefits from government programs and economic growth despite government initiatives to improve minority living standards. China's 55

ethnic minorities make up slightly less than 9 percent of the population, according to official 1995 figures. The government has tried to crush pro-independence movements among the seven million ethnic Uighurs and other, smaller, Turkic-speaking Muslim groups in China's northwestern Xinjiang province. Since the early 1990s, officials have detained "tens of thousands" of Uighurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang, executing several for alleged separatist activities, the human rights group Amnesty International said in 2002. The government has used the U.S.-led campaign against terrorism to link even peaceful Uighur advocacy of independence to terrorism and to justify its repression of Uighur culture and religion. Authorities also have forcibly repatriated thousands of North Koreans in recent years, putting them at risk of execution or other severe punishment.

The economic reforms launched in the late 1970s have freed millions of Chinese from party control of their day-to-day lives. Increasingly, ordinary Chinese are becoming homeowners as housing once owned by government departments or state-owned enterprises is partially or wholly privatized. The national household registration and identification card system is eroding, meaning that Chinese are increasingly free to move around the country to live and work. Many now work for private firms, which account for about 30 percent of China's economic output. For those who still work for the state, the government took steps in 2003 to scale back the powers of the *danwei*--company-based, government-linked work units for state employees. Though the *danwei* still control certain aspects of daily life for state workers, the changes allow Chinese to marry, divorce, and sell their state-assigned housing without their employers' permission. The economic reforms have also lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of absolute poverty, although some 100 to 150 million still live in poverty, according to the World Bank.

Chinese women reportedly face serious discrimination in education and employment and are far likelier than men to be laid off when state firms are slimmed down or privatized. Despite government crackdowns, trafficking in women and children for marriage, to provide sons, and for prostitution remains a serious problem.

Chinese couples cannot freely choose how many children to have. In the name of stabilizing the country's population, a one-child policy is applied fairly strictly in the cities, though less so in the countryside. While urban couples generally are denied permission to have a second child, rural couples usually may have a second child if their first is a girl. Couples who have an unapproved child can be assessed stiff fines, fired from jobs, demoted or barred from promotion, denied access to social services, forced to pay higher tuition costs when the child goes to school, and occasionally have property destroyed. The use of forced abortions or sterilizations by local officials trying to keep within county birth quotas is believed to occur in occasional, isolated cases, though less frequently than in the past.

** 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.*