

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, China perpetuated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Chinese authorities sought to exert complete control over religion through an extensive web of laws, regulations, and policies that do not conform to international human rights standards. In September, the government published regulations that ban clergy from engaging in online religious activities outside of government-approved websites. Authorities continued to pursue the state’s coercive “sinicization of religion” policy, which seeks to integrate the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) political ideology into every aspect of religious life and forcibly assimilate ethnic minorities, including through co-opting or prohibiting their unique religious traditions and destroying or modifying their houses of worship. Chinese President Xi Jinping touted the sinicization of Tibet and Xinjiang during his visits to the regions in 2025.

As part of the government’s ongoing genocide, at least half a million predominately Muslim Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic minorities remained imprisoned or held in other internment facilities in Xinjiang. Authorities continued to expand forced labor programs and residential boarding schools used to forcibly assimilate the population. In January 2025, independent media reported that authorities had sentenced Uyghur Muslim [Seylihan Rozi](#) to 17 years in prison for teaching her children and a neighbor Qur’anic verses used for daily prayers. In March, officials ordered Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang to provide video proof they were not fasting during Ramadan.

Authorities cracked down on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and disappeared and imprisoned monks who publicly or privately honored the Dalai Lama. In or around May, authorities in Sichuan Province demolished three hundred Tibetan Buddhist stupas and statues. Officials provided no details on the whereabouts or well-being of 11th Panchen Lama [Gedhun Choekyi Nyima](#), 30 years after his enforced disappearance. Authorities reaffirmed their intent to interfere in the Dalai Lama’s succession.

Law enforcement also ramped up its targeting of independent Protestant religious leaders and house church congregations. In June, authorities sentenced around a dozen members of the Golden Lampstand Church for alleged fraud, including 15 years’ imprisonment for its pastor [Yang Rongli](#). In October, law enforcement detained more than 20 members of Zion Church, including its pastor [Ezra Jin](#), for “unlawfully using online information.” Despite increased engagement between the Vatican and China, underground Catholic clergy faced government pressure to align with state-controlled Catholic organizations. Chinese authorities unilaterally appointed two Catholic bishops, one in Shanghai and another in Xinxiang, following the death of Pope Francis in April, in violation of Catholic Church protocols. Prison authorities have continued to deny activist [Jimmy Lai](#) access to the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist. In December, a court in Hong Kong convicted Lai on national security charges, further emblematic of China’s repression of religious freedom and related human rights.

The government imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners, Church of Almighty God members, and followers of other unrecognized religious groups that authorities deemed illegal. In August, authorities reportedly forced an 87-year-old Falun Gong practitioner to begin serving a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence. Several elderly Falun Gong practitioners reportedly died while imprisoned in 2025.

China continued to harass, surveil, threaten family members of, and pursue the deportation of religious minorities and dissidents living outside the country as part of its transnational repression efforts. In February, Thailand [deported](#) 40 Uyghurs back to China despite concerns of severe punishment and torture upon their return. Chinese authorities engaged in online disinformation campaigns, especially about Xinjiang and Tibet, to whitewash the country’s religious freedom record.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Redesignate China as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Sanction, in coordination with international partners, Chinese government agencies, entities, and officials—including the CCP’s United Front Work Department and the public security and state security apparatus—responsible for severe violations of religious freedom;
- Appoint the special coordinator on Tibetan issues at the U.S. Department of

State as part of efforts to address Tibetan religious freedom issues and combat China’s attempts to interfere in the Dalai Lama’s succession;

- Allocate funds to programs that document and/or report on religious freedom violations in China, such as Radio Free Asia (RFA) and the National Endowment for Democracy; and
- Instruct the U.S. Department of Justice to prioritize investigating and prosecuting Chinese government transnational repression against religious minorities and activists.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Pass legislation to assist those fleeing religious persecution in China, support civil society working on religious freedom issues in China, and combat Chinese propaganda, disinformation, and transnational repression against religious communities;
- Tighten export controls on technologies China uses to facilitate religious freedom abuses, including through amendments to the Export Control Act of 2018; and
- Ban foreign lobbying by agents representing the Chinese government and its state-affiliated commercial entities that undermine religious freedom.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Factsheet:** [China’s Persecution of Religious Leaders](#)
- **Hearing:** [State-Controlled Religion in China](#)
- **Spotlight Podcast:** [China’s Religious Freedom Violations on the Basis of Article 300](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief** [Victims List](#) and [Appendix 2](#)

Background

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

Religious communities must register with the government to practice their religion legally. Major restrictions remain in place for registered religious communities, including a prohibition on minors engaging in religious activities or receiving religious education. Authorities surveil houses of worship and use other authoritarian means to ensure compliance with government regulations. Authorities have destroyed, shut down, and forcibly modified churches, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship under China's "sinicization of religion" policy. Religious leaders and community members who refuse to submit to the CCP's intrusive system of control face harassment, fines, detention, political reeducation, forced labor, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and other abuse.

Transnational Repression

China engaged in transnational repression, including through high-tech and emerging technologies, to silence religious and ethnic minorities living abroad. In February, the Swiss government alleged that China surveilled Uyghurs and Tibetans in Switzerland and pressured them to spy on their own diaspora communities. In May, Turkish authorities dismantled an alleged Chinese spy network conducting surveillance on Uyghurs in the country. In August, Australian authorities arrested a Chinese national for allegedly spying on a Buddhist group on behalf of Chinese state security.

International Bodies and Mechanisms

United Nations (UN) human rights bodies raised concerns about China's religious freedom record. UN mandate holders in [February](#) and [July](#) sought information about Chinese authorities' treatment of several human rights defenders whose cases are tied to religious freedom, including forcibly disappeared lawyer [Gao Zhisheng](#), Uyghur academic [Ilham Tohti](#), and Tibetan protester Namkyi. In July, UN special rapporteurs and independent experts [raised](#) Tibetan Buddhist religious freedom issues with the Chinese government, including the Dalai Lama's succession, government regulation of the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation process, and the enforced disappearance of the Panchen Lama. That same month, UN mandate holders [highlighted](#) allegations of China's transnational repression against ethnic and religious minorities, among other activists. In August, UN experts [inquired](#) to China about the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of Tibetan Buddhist religious leader Tulku Hungkar Dorje in Vietnamese custody. He had reportedly fled China to Vietnam in 2024 after Chinese law enforcement briefly detained him for unclear reasons.

Key U.S. Policy

The administration of President Donald J. Trump brought attention to religious freedom issues in China, including freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) prisoners. Following Thailand's moves to forcibly return Uyghurs to China, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio [announced](#) in March a new visa restriction policy for foreign government officials involved in the refolement of Uyghur Muslims and other religious minorities to China. In May, [Secretary Rubio](#) alongside members of [Congress](#) called for the immediate release of the Panchen Lama and an end to China's repression of Tibetan Buddhism. In August, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [identified](#) new high-priority sectors of enforcement under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. In October, Secretary Rubio [condemned](#) the arrest of Ezra Jin and others from Zion Church. Later that month, President Trump raised the case of Jimmy Lai when he met with President Xi in South Korea. In November, the United States alongside several other countries [released](#) a joint statement expressing concerns about China's human rights record, including its treatment of religious minorities.

The U.S. government's cuts to broader human rights programming and U.S.-funded international media affected organizations that documented and reported on religious freedom violations in China. RFA's Uyghur and Tibetan language services—which ceased operations in May—were among the only independent sources of information reporting out of the regions.

The U.S. Congress introduced several bills to address China's religious freedom and related human rights violations and support impacted religious communities, including the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Policy Act ([S. 288](#)), the Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act ([H.R. 2349](#)), the Transnational Repression Policy Act ([S. 2525/H.R. 4829](#)), the Preventing the Forced Return of Uyghurs Act of 2025 ([S. 2502](#)), the Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act of 2025 ([S. 2560/H.R. 4830](#)), the FREEDOM for Gao Zhisheng and All Political Prisoners Act ([H.R. 5303](#)), and the Combatting the Persecution of Religious Groups in China Act ([S. 3056/H.R. 5838](#)). In September, the U.S. House of Representatives [passed](#) the bipartisan Uyghur Policy Act of 2025 ([H.R. 2635](#)), which would require the State Department to prioritize Uyghur human rights issues. The bill is with the U.S. Senate for consideration. In November, the Senate [agreed](#) to a bipartisan resolution ([S. Res. 463](#)) [introduced](#) by Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Chris Coons (D-DE) condemning the CCP's persecution of Zion Church and religious minorities. Representative Andy Barr (R-KY) subsequently [introduced](#) a companion resolution ([H. Res. 861](#)) in the House. Members of Congress appealed directly to the Trump administration on U.S. policy related to religious freedom in China, including about [Uyghur forced labor](#), the [special coordinator on Tibetan issues](#), and [FoRB prisoners](#). In November, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China held a [hearing](#) on religious freedom in China and its importance in U.S. foreign policy.

The U.S. Department of State last [redesignated](#) China as a CPC under IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Any presidential action taken as a result of this designation terminates by the end of 2025 unless expressly reauthorized by law.