

FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

CHINA

LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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Introduction

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Introduction

World Watch List China	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	65	27
WWL 2018	57	43
WWL 2017	57	39
WWL 2016	57	33
WWL 2015	57	29

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.

Please note: The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

WWL 2019: Keys to understanding China

Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13017877>

Recent country history

President Xi Jinping assumed office in March 2013 and his first term of rule has seen a strong reduction in freedom in all sectors of society. His push for and successful change of abolishing the term-limit for being president in March 2018 gives him a position which observers call the strongest position since Mao Zedong. The Church in China is increasingly affected by the state's new approach of actively giving guidance instead of simple administration, regardless of whether state-approved or non-registered churches are meant. Restrictions come in indirect ways, such as through the renewed emphasis on Communist ideology and rhetoric, but much more by limiting the space in which churches can operate, as they come under pressure to adapt their ministry and are more closely watched. Since the Christian community is the largest, organized, social force not controlled by the Communist authorities, Christians are anyway seen with suspicion. The regulations on religion, implemented from 1 February 2018 onwards, provide authorities with the legal provisions for a stricter form of guidance.

The religious landscape

As a Communist country, China is – at least in theory and in increasing practice by authorities - against all religions, since Marxist teaching states that “religion is the opium of the people”. But as in all Communist countries, the government finds that people tend to be religious and so it tries to use traditional religions as a means of controlling and steering society. Therefore, Confucianism is praised as being truly Chinese, the message being: “If one needs to be religious, it should be Confucian.” This was a clever move, since it 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.

This cannot be said about the two minority religions in China, Tibetan Buddhism and Islam (especially in the province of Xinjiang). Very harsh restrictions are in place for both religious groups and their activities are widely seen as being political, which is at least partly true as both regions have been or are still home to independence movements, some of them acting violently against authorities and people. Even giving certain names to new-born babies can be prohibited. Xinjiang is called by observers a police state. When the existence of re-education camps for thousands of people could no longer be hidden, the authorities simply stated that these camps serve vocational and other training purposes, thus blatantly ignoring international concerns. The small numbers of Christian converts within these minorities struggle to survive as they are under double pressure from government and surrounding culture, but even Han Chinese Christians struggle to live their faith under these circumstances. There are other ethnic religions in existence, but they are not the focus for government persecution.

Due to the new regulations on religion, many more reports are emerging of crackdowns on churches - experienced by both TSPM and house-churches all over the country. Crackdowns include the confiscation of Christian material (including Bibles), raids, fines and arrests (especially of church leaders). The authorities do everything they can to block reporting. The Sinicization of all churches continues.

The political landscape

The Communist party has tightened its grip on society (including religion) and increasingly uses Communist and Maoist rhetoric in order to keep citizens in line. The need for structural reforms can be clearly seen as the economy slows down and the trade war with the United States is claiming victims on both sides. If these developments continue, the tacitly agreed social contract of trading a lack of freedom for growing prosperity could start crumbling. The overarching aim is to keep the Communist party in power by maintaining social peace and harmony. Any force perceived as posing a danger to this goal will be fought continually, including religion. Another indication of this overarching goal was the way President Xi's name and ideas under the title "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era" have been officially [incorporated](#) into the Communist Party's constitution at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, making him the first leader since Mao Zedong to have this happen in his lifetime. In an effort to make Xi Jinping's ideas more accessible, Chinese media produced a complex [mindmap](#), which is color-coded to facilitate orientation. With 30 different elements, each broken down into separate sub-sections, it looks so complicated that it is hardly surprising that several universities have opened special institutes to research and teach Xi Jinping's ideology. In reality, things are much simpler: Whoever does not toe the Party line closely, is in high danger of being replaced. And whichever group does not embrace Communist ideology (e.g. most churches), risks persecution on various levels.

China has become the fifth-largest provider of Foreign Direct Investments in the world and invests in such diverse regions and countries as Central Asia, Pakistan, Africa and Latin America. While some gargantuan investments such as plans for building a canal in Nicaragua competing with the Panama Canal seem to have been put on hold, others, for instance several projects for electric power plants, are in progress. In a more geostrategic move, China has built up what observers call its "string of pearls" or "One Belt, One Road" - a network of ports and commercial facilities along the coast all the way from China to Kenya and Sudan, making the (yet to be completed) Pakistani port of Gwadar the most recent addition. One of the latest efforts is also the [setting up](#) of an international development bank called the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which gained support from around the world despite opposition from the USA and Japan. By using "soft power", China increases its influence around the world and its self-confidence. At the same time, this presents opportunities for churches to become more active in ministry and mission.

The socio-economic landscape

The days of double-digit numbers in growth are over and China is now struggling not to fall short of the levels of growth needed for keeping the social balance and the Communist party in power. Moreover, millions of workers are still migrating from the more rural areas of western China to urban settlements on the eastern coast. Due to strongly increasing living costs, many others prefer to migrate to the so called "second tier cities", bordering these urban settlements. At the moment, figures show a steady economic growth of 6%-7% – something other states can only dream of – so far, this seems to be sufficient for China's needs and to the tacitly agreed social contract of not having participatory rights and freedoms in exchange for constantly growing personal wealth. What is another big challenge for the government, however, is the lack of quality control for people's daily needs. Especially when it is about children, citizens are reacting extremely sensitively. This could already clearly be seen in the milk powder scandal of 2008, but continues with a scandal around 250,000 doses of [faulty vaccines](#) in July 2018. In the long term, such scandals may prove much more challenging for the stable rule of the Communist Party than a slowing economy.

Additionally, the population is “getting old before it gets rich”, as one commentator put it, since the infamous one-child-policy had a downside as well. 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 a longer life-expectancy. According to Chinese government statistics, the number of people older than 60 will have doubled in 2030. Due to this and other considerations, the strict one-child policy was eased, but so far, the effect has been far from impressive. Taking into account the ongoing trend of urbanization, it is difficult for many to visit parents on a regular basis. Therefore, millions of old people are left on their own. The idea of nursing homes is still alien to the country and does not sit well with tradition. However, Christians have started to run some nursing homes and are thereby setting a good example and overcoming fears of breaking with tradition.

Concluding remarks

The 2017 Party Congress in October consolidated President Xi's power and basically made it impossible to challenge him. Elements within the Party that were not deemed loyal enough to him were purged or sidelined and the Party's reach is extending into all areas of society, including business, media and the NGO sector. In the religious sphere, this was most closely felt, when the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) was taken away from government and made a sub-entity of the Party's "United Front Work Department". In the plethora of challenges the government faces, China's leadership is struggling to keep everything under control. Its goal of maintaining power includes the need to control all forms of religion, especially the strongly growing Christian minority. The question for the future is whether the governing authorities can view Christians as a positive force in society. It seems that Christians will only be seen as a positive and contributing force for establishing a "harmonious society", if they Sinicize and submit to Communist and Socialist thinking. In this respect, even government-affiliated churches are coming under increasing pressure. If the first year of implementing the new regulations on religion are anything to go by, churches are deemed by the government to be a considerable threat.

External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding China

- The political landscape: incorporated
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chinas-leader-elevated-to-the-level-of-mao-in-communist-pantheon/2017/10/24/ddd911e0-b832-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.81bb254d61bc
- The political landscape: mindmap
https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2169151/simple-guide-xi-jinping-thought-heres-how-chinas-official-media?mc_cid=dc16011ce0&mc_eid=cb0c885248
- The political landscape: setting up
<http://www.asianewsnet.net/news-74205.html>
- The socio-economic landscape: faulty vaccines
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/china-outcry-over-sale-of-250000-faulty-vaccines-prompts-investigation>

WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
1,415,046,000	97,200,000	6.9%

Source: *Open Doors estimate for number of Christians 2018.*

Determining the number of Christians in China is very difficult. Estimates range from 40 million to 150 million, depending on the source.

How did Christians get there?

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. 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 doing. 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 instead became deeply rooted in Chinese society. Despite all efforts at government control, Christians and churches are still thriving and, even though persecution seems to be increasing again, it is not as intense and as violent as in the times of the Cultural Revolution; however, some observers argue that it is the strongest persecution since that time.

What church networks exist today?

Chinese Christianity is a patchwork of different church groups with multiple networks.

Basically, churches in China can be distinguished as being either state-registered or non-registered. The former are organized into the Three Self Patriotic Movement on the Protestant side – "three self" meaning being self-governance, self-support and self-propagation. There is also the China Christian Council, an umbrella organization for all registered Protestant groups, and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Church. Non-registered churches are independent and organized in multiple informal networks widely known as "underground churches". This can be misleading however, as they are not necessarily meeting secretly. They represent a wide variety of different denominations, some of them may be compared to Baptists, others are strongly influenced by Pentecostal teaching, although they may go by other names.

Hong Kong has a special status, especially as there are no state-controlled organizations such as the Three Self Patriotic Movement or the Catholic Patriotic Church there. In Hong Kong, around 11% of the population is Christian. However, the mainland influence in Hongkong is growing strongly and authorities are acting against democracy activists strictly.

There are a few thousand converts to Christianity among the Muslim minority in the Province Xinjiang as well as among the Buddhist communities in Tibet.

Religious context

Religious Context: China	Numbers	%
Christians	SEE OPEN DOORS ESTIMATE ABOVE	SEE OPEN DOORS ESTIMATE
Muslim	24,527,000	1.7
Hindu	19,100	0.0
Buddhist	230,987,000	16.3
Ethnoreligionist	59,863,000	4.2
Jewish	2,900	0.0
Bahai	6,700	0.0
Atheist	96,903,000	6.8
Agnostic	438,294,000	31.0
Other	426,185,370	30.1

OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Source: %ages shown are based on WCD estimate: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

All kinds of cults are active in China, which may have Christian roots, but which seriously deviate from Christian teachings. One of the best known is "Eastern Lightning" or "Church of the Almighty God" (CAG), which believes that the Lord Jesus has been born again in a Chinese woman. This cult is very aggressive and sparked nation-wide outrage when a missionary effort of sect members resulted in the public killing of a woman in a McDonalds restaurant in May 2014, although the CAG disputes that the incident had anything to do with them. This caused the authorities to act much more strongly against such groups which are referred to as "[xie jiao](#)", literally translated: "heterodox cults". However, the authorities are often neither willing nor able to distinguish between a cult and a genuine Christian group, so genuine Christian (house) churches sometimes come under the authorities' cult category as well.

The Communist government's growing emphasis on Chinese culture being derived from [Confucian values](#) means that Christians can be seen as following non-traditional values and are therefore to be watched with suspicion as they have the potential to create social unrest.

Due to rapid urbanization, the Chinese Church is developing from being basically a rural-style to an urban-style Church with large numbers and all the opportunities and problems that come with that. Apart from 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. Despite all challenges, there is a [growing movement](#) among China's churches for overseas mission.

Notes on the current situation

Since the 1980s China has witnessed an enormous growth in the Christian community and still faces growth, although nobody is able to give exact numbers. What is clear, however, is that it was the pressure of persecution which actually helped the Church to grow. This growth now poses many challenges, especially to house churches, but to Three Self Churches as well:

- Growing materialism and consumerism are a serious threat. It is also not easy to find and train leaders able to care for the growing congregations.
- The churches need help in developing both a missionary attitude and missionary structures. Church representatives have pledged to send out 20,000 missionaries by 2030. Where missionaries are

sent into cross-cultural situations such things as member care, home-church contact, children, insurance (illness, family, retirement) etc. are all factors about which Chinese churches have little experience.

- Christians who converted abroad on student exchanges etc. often return and find they do not feel at home in the existing Chinese church structures. This in turn can cause them to be watched with caution, although many blend in after some time.
- Arguably, the persecution of Christians did intensify in the reporting period of WWL 2019 due to the Communist Party's new campaign to actively influence churches instead of just managing them from a distance. If history is anything to go by, the additional pressure may well lead Chinese churches to grow in resilience and in the end, in numbers as well, e.g. by being forced to split into smaller groups, re-discovering home or family churches again. However, as the older generation (who experienced severe persecution in the 1960s and 1970s) dies out, there are worries whether a young generation of leaders will be able to face the combined challenge of persecution and materialism.

External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- Religious context: "xie jiao"
<https://bitterwinter.org/what-is-a-xie-jiao/>
- Religious context: Confucian values
[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/opinion/sunday/chinas-communists-embrace-religion.html?_r=1&ct=t\(10/30/14\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/opinion/sunday/chinas-communists-embrace-religion.html?_r=1&ct=t(10/30/14))
- Religious context: financially care
http://www.chinasource.org/blog/posts/church-staff-salary-how-much-is-enough?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedpress.me&utm_campaign=Feed:+chinesechurchvoices
- Religious context: growing movement
<https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/chinas-belt-and-road-exporting-evangelism/>

WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

China scored 65 points in WWL 2019, rising to rank 27. In WWL 2018, China ranked 43 with 57 points.

What type of persecution dominates?

Communist and post-Communist oppression: The Communist Party tries to maintain power by limiting outside influences and controlling all forms of religion, including the growing Christian minority.

Islamic oppression: Christian converts among the Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang suffer increased general pressure from the government and face persecution from family and local communities.

Religious nationalism: Tibetan Christians from a Buddhist background face strong opposition from family, friends, neighbors and communities.

Dictatorial paranoia: President Xi Jinping is strengthening his personal position of power and Christians are viewed as a potential threat.

Who is driving persecution?

The small numbers of Christians from a Muslim or a Tibetan Buddhist background are facing strong persecution, which comes from non-Christian religious leaders, communities and families, since conversion is seen as betrayal. The Communist authorities are responsible for limiting all freedoms in all China in their effort to control society and to stay in power. Since the Communist Party took over the implementation of the regulations on religion, the treatment of religious groups and especially Christians became much harsher, across the country. Christians are a particular focus because they are the largest social force in China not controlled by the state.

What it results in

If a convert from Islam or from Tibetan Buddhism is discovered by community and family, they are usually threatened, physically harmed and reported to the local authorities – all in an effort to win them back. Spouses may be forced to divorce and children can be taken away from Christian parents. All churches are perceived as being a threat if they become too large, too political or by inviting foreign guests. A policy of "Sinicizing" the church is becoming increasingly influential as the Communist Party is relying strongly on Chinese cultural identity to stay in power. The new restrictions on internet, social media and NGOs and the new regulations on religion are all seriously limiting freedom. However, it is not only the introduction of new laws but also the stricter implementation of already existing laws, which can be observed. One example for this is the ban on the [online sale of Bibles](#), which made headlines in March 2018.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures.

China	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	0	58	1131	171	15
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	0	12	134	10	11

Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.

Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- Lamas in rural areas have a great influence on the daily lives of Tibetan communities (e.g. in health care), 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 as a convert, he is excluded from this.
- Not surprisingly, the Communist Party does not allow other political parties to exist; some continue but only in name, e.g. the Kuomintang Party (KMT). However, civil society organizations are allowed. Among these, Christian organizations are not allowed 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.
- There were no killings reported in the WWL 2019 period. However, many attacks against churches went hand in hand with Christian leaders being detained and with Christians being attacked and beaten. Such incidents took place in several provinces with an emphasis on Henan, a populous province with a sizeable Christian minority, but went far beyond its borders. Attacks were perpetrated most often by members of security forces or the United Front Workers Department, but sometimes locally hired mobs were the perpetrators as well.
- There were many incidents (similar to the anti-cross campaign in Zhejiang from 2014 to 2016) of crosses on the outside of church buildings being destroyed, both those of TSPM and house churches alike. There were also many cases of landlords being put under pressure by the authorities to cancel renting contracts with churches. Two widely published cases were the harassment and closure of [Zion](#) house church network in Beijing and the [Golden Lampstand](#) house church in Shanxi. The breadth and depth of the campaign can also be seen by the highly unusual reaction of unregistered house-churches in Beijing issuing a [joint-statement](#) calling on the authorities to respect freedom of religion enshrined in China's Constitution in July 2018, meanwhile signed by more than 600 house-church pastors all over China.

External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- What it results in: online sale of Bibles
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/05/world/asia/china-bans-bible-sales.html>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: Zion
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-religion/china-outlaws-large-underground-protestant-church-in-beijing-idUSKCN1LQ07W?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: Golden Lampstand
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/world/asia/china-church-dynamite.html>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: joint-statement
<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/churches-letter-07242018152113.html>

WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

China scored 65 points in WWL 2019, rising to rank 27. In WWL 2018, China ranked 43 with 57 points. The rise in violence score only contributed to a very small extent to the overall rise in score. The scores for pressure in the *Spheres of life* increased in *Private* and *Family spheres*, reflecting a much stronger emphasis on Communist ideology, but especially in the *National* and *Church spheres*, reflecting the very strict implementation of the regulation on religion, beginning 1 February 2018 and the fact that it is not the government anymore which implements, but the much more ideology-bound Communist Party. Christians are witnessing many more problems with the authorities and this pressure is especially felt in the *Church sphere*. What is said here each year has to be kept in mind again: It must be remembered that China is vast and the situation for Christians can be very different in the various parts of the country. However, it is correct to say that the situation for Christians deteriorated all over the country, as reports from many different provinces show.

The increase of seven points is one of the biggest rises China has ever made in the WWL; it reflects, however, the spike in incidents and the strongly growing pressure felt by all churches, no matter whether they are government-affiliated or not. Some may wonder why the score did not increase even higher. Partly, this has to do with the vastness of the country and the sheer size of the church in China. There are still many churches unaffected by the Communist Party's campaigns. However, probably the more important part of the answer lies in the surprising resilience of the Chinese church. Many churches did not just dissolve after experiencing crackdowns; they re-organized and deliberately split up into smaller groups.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: China	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Weak
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Very weak
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Weak
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Very strong
Secular intolerance	SI	Strong
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
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 (long version).

Communist and post-Communist oppression (Very strong):

The over-arching goal of the Communist Party of China is to maintain its power through national unity and by limiting outside influences, a challenging task. 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 rules. That President Xi's name and ideas (under the title "Xi Jinping Thought

on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era”) have been officially [incorporated](#) into the Communist Party’s constitution at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 shows that ideology remains key. Confucianism is praised as being Chinese; thus, if one needs to be religious, it should be Confucian. President Xi Jinping is arguably the strongest Party leader since Mao Zedong. Party organs like the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection are becoming increasingly powerful and investigated high ranking party members tipped to be promoted to national leadership in the 19th Party Congress. The Congress itself underlined how strongly the Party is refocusing on Communist ideology and how adamant it is in demanding this focus from all other officials and society actors. In a continued effort to bring all Communist party members back in line with basic Communist and Marxist theory, President Xi Jinping ordered the setting up of study sessions on [the Communist Manifesto](#) in April 2018. According to [updated Communist party rules](#), any members clinging to religious beliefs after a dose of “strengthened thought education” will be “encouraged to leave the party”. Interestingly, the Party Congress refrained from nominating an “heir apparent” into the new leadership (more under “Context” below).

The leadership’s goal of maintaining power and social harmony includes the control of all religions as those command a strong social force, 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 even 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. In many regions of China, Christian activities have increasingly been controlled rather than watched and although house-churches were still targeted most, especially when concerning children and youth camps, government-controlled churches were controlled and limited as well. Concerning the ethnic Han churches, some observers spoke of three kinds of churches: the “black” ones which are illegal and which the state is fighting against (for example Vatican loyal Catholics), the “red” ones which are state-approved and controlled, and the “gray” ones which are not registered, but tolerated, and which form the majority of the Christian communities. However, this distinction is becoming increasingly blurred as the pressure on all churches rises and persecution trends and priorities seem to have shifted, as detailed below under “Church Sphere”.

Islamic oppression (Weak):

Disclaimer That the level of strength of the engines *Islamic oppression* and *Religious nationalism* is described here as ‘weak’ (instead as of ‘medium’ as in recent years) does not have anything to do with changes for the better on the ground. It is purely owing to the fact that the WWL aims to evaluate countries as a whole and therefore the fact that Xinjiang and Tibet are so sparsely populated (together making up only 2% of China’s total population) led to the consequence of a changed description. Again, the situation on the ground did not change, on the contrary, it got worse for everyone, including Christians.

The north-western state of Xinjiang, where the Muslim Uighur minority lives, has come under even heavier control, making observers speak of a [police state](#) , especially since re-education camps for thousands of people have been set up. Foreign Islamic militants are seeping into the province, and Islamic fighters from Xinjiang were reportedly found fighting in the siege of Marawi in the Philippines in May 2017. All this has led China to intensify its crackdown on militants as well as its control on religious communities in Xinjiang.

The situation 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 persecution from their own family, friends and

neighbors. Any deviation from the Muslim creed and traditions will be seen as a disgrace and even treason since every Uighur is expected to be a Muslim. Although it is difficult to obtain reports on the situation of the converts, all information received points to a deteriorating situation, sometimes even involving violent persecution such as physical abuse by families.

Religious nationalism (Weak):

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. 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.

Secular Intolerance (Strong):

Efforts to remove faith from public life have increased, as seen in restrictions on religious publishing and religious activities on campuses. The [ban](#) on online Bible sales in March 2018, which has been widely reported in international media, is one example for this, although this ban technically existed for many years already, without being implemented. Some locations report an increase in atheistic education. By definition, Communism is atheist and against all religions.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium):

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 Party is to maintain power. In some ways, ideology is a tool which serves this rather than being an end in itself. For example, Christianity is seen as a possible threat because it involves people organizing and rallying around something outside Party control, rather than specifically for its theology.

Organized Corruption and Crime (Weak):

Local officials can be very corrupt. Land disputes involving Christians account for a fair number of reported cases of persecution in the last year. However, the Communist Party started a big anti-corruption campaign, so this persecution engine might be less apparent in the future. Local governments often [hire thugs](#) to implement unpopular policies or enforce illegal measures, this affects religious groups, particularly the house-churches.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: China	IO	RN	EA	DPR	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	WEAK	WEAK	VERY WEAK	WEAK	VERY STRONG	STRONG	MEDIUM	WEAK
Government officials	Medium	Medium	Weak	-	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak
Ethnic group leaders	Very weak	Very weak	Medium	-	Weak	Weak	Weak	Very weak
Non-Christian religious leaders	Strong	Strong	Medium	Weak	Medium	-	Weak	-
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	Medium	Weak	Weak	Weak	-
Violent religious groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ideological pressure groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Weak	Weak	Very weak	-	Weak	Weak	Very weak	Very weak
One's own (extended) family	Strong	Strong	Medium	-	Weak	Weak	Very weak	-
Political parties	-	-	-	-	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong	Weak
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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 (long version).

Drivers of Communist and post-Communist oppression:

In their efforts to control and guide religions, the Communist Party and the government authorities are the main drivers of persecution for Christians. In strongly Communist families, the family can become another driver as no-one, who wants to become a member of the party or make a career in the public service or the vast sector close to the state is allowed to be religious. 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 (yet) under official state-control.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia:

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 as Christians, especially as they are still seen as foreign and connected with foreign, mainly western powers.

Drivers of Secular intolerance:

According to Communist ideology, which is much more emphasized since President Xi Jinping came to power, religion is the opium of the people. Consequently, the Communist Party and the government authorities are against all religions, although indigenous religions and moral-philosophical systems like Confucianism are more accepted than "alien" belief systems like Christianity.

Drivers of Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism:

The small convert community from a Muslim and Buddhist (Tibetan) background is facing a lot persecution, which comes from non-Christian religious leaders – who are still very influential in Xinjiang and Tibet – as well as 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 community. The Communist authorities are also drivers of persecution since they are responsible for limiting all freedoms in Xinjiang and Tibet.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:

Local party and government officials sometimes prefer to hire mobs and gangs to close a church, put pressure on a landlord or evict a Christian community from a plot of land. In cases of land-grabbing, the demand can come from property development companies as well.

Context

China remains one of the most complicated countries on the WWL with the persecution of Christians occurring in multi-faceted and diverse ways. While the campaign of tearing down crosses in the Zhejiang Province stopped at the beginning of 2016, a new, more aggressive wave of such measures began again in 2018. Thousands of crosses have been removed by authorities and hundreds of churches closed - mostly in Zhejiang and Henan Provinces. Large, influential churches in Beijing, Shanxi and Chengdu were forced to close in 2018. Many more reports have emerged of church meetings being disrupted and stopped in several provinces, of Christians being fined, detained and arrested and of churches being strongly discouraged and hindered from running youth camps. The old four-fold warning still holds true - i.e. that churches will be targeted for monitoring and disruption if i) foreigners attend the gatherings, ii) foreign media seems to be involved, iii) the gathering is perceived as being too big, or iv) missionaries are being sent abroad - but there is no longer any guarantee that if a church abides by these rules, it will be left unhindered.

In the Communist Party's pursuit of its goal of maintaining power through national unity and by limiting outside influences, the campaign against corruption continues, but there are other issues demanding the leadership's attention even more: The economy continues to be a challenge (since society has grown to expect an increasing level of wealth) as is the provision of general security (currently won by keeping militant elements confined to Xinjiang and Tibet). Another big challenge is how to deal with the lack of quality control in goods for the home market, seen again in the scandal of around 250,000 doses of [faulty vaccines](#) in July 2018. In the long-term, such scandals may prove much more challenging to the stability of Communist Party rule than a slowing economy. The answers the rulers have given so far are cautious and ideologically strict. The easing of the one-child-policy has not led to the results the government hoped for and is anyway a two-edged sword: It may well alleviate some of the problems caused by an ageing society, but at the same time it adds to the need of increased economic growth.

The leadership's goal of maintaining power includes the control of all forms of religion. The question of how to regulate Christianity and its growth is gaining weight. The [implementation of new regulations on religion](#) began on 1 February 2018. The regulations are stricter than former draft versions and the first months of implementation show a much stronger control over Christians and churches by the authorities. As stated above, the government is abolishing the long-serving religious bureau (SARA) and the [Party's United Front Workers Department](#) is now to deal directly with all religious organizations. This administrative shuffle means that it is no longer the government's task to deal with religious groups, but the Party's. Therefore, less pragmatism and more ideology is to be expected. The UFWD's role is to enforce Communist ideology and [defend](#) the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) supreme position. As one report put it: "The CCP's UFWD has been behind the scenes to ensure that no authority is higher than the CCP in the eyes of religious Chinese." This implies that the Christian claim of God being greater than Caesar is being called into question and directly challenged.

President Xi's name and ideas (under the title "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era") have been officially [incorporated](#) into the Communist Party's constitution at the 19th Party Congress. Although time is needed to see how everything plays out in practice, there are still three important results to note from this Party Congress: 1) President Xi Jinping is the first leader since Mao Zedong to have his ideas added to the Party constitution during his lifetime. This illustrates how powerful his position really is. 2) Unlike previous congresses, the leadership did not indicate an 'heir apparent' to take over from President Xi in 2022, when the next Party Congress takes place. Whether this means that he will be seeking a third term in office or will just wield influence behind the scenes, remains to be seen. 3) In his speech lasting more than three hours, President Xi mentioned religious issues quite prominently and emphasized the [state's need to control](#) religion and to Sinicize it.

In relation to the regulations on religion mentioned above, a hot topic of debate is church growth. While official figures point to comparatively low numbers of Christians, other estimations say that the number of Christians – comprised of the registered Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Protestant house-church networks, Catholic Patriotic Association and Vatican-related Roman Catholic churches – outnumbers the members of the Communist Party, which is estimated at around the 88 million mark. Other estimations for the number of Christians are in the 130 million range or even above. The very discussion and the wide range of estimations show that China is not easy to understand, and that persecution and the strong growth of Christianity are not contradictory, but might well be interdependent. More importantly, this also explains why the Communist Party is nervous about the growth of Christianity and is acting [to curb it](#). As Ian Johnson explains in his ground-breaking book "[The souls of China](#)", there is another reason for the Party to keep worrying: Even though China has

managed to lift millions of citizens out of poverty, people are still unhappy and are looking for a sense and meaning to life. Religion is thus a very important factor in Chinese society to reckon with. In fact, Christianity is the largest organized body outside the Communist Party.

Officially, the authorities prefer giving much lower figures for the number of Christians in China. On 3 April 2018, the Chinese State Council Information Office published a 10 page white paper entitled "[China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief](#)". The paper declares that China has 200 million religious followers, among them 36 million Christians. Whereas this is [double](#) the numbers given in the previous paper in 1997 and is therefore an official recognition of a major increase in the number of Christians, it fails to take into account the millions of Christians adhering to non-registered churches, both Catholic and Protestant. Presenter of the paper and outgoing top SARA official, Chen Zongrong, was adamant in insisting that religion can only be practiced in state-registered and approved entities.

Freedom for Christians in China is shrinking and persecution is increasing, also among the Han Chinese majority. Adding to this are efforts by the Party to [knit a tight security net](#) covering the whole country with the aim of monitoring ordinary citizens. The planned Social Credit System (see "Future outlook" below) may also affect [foreign businesses](#) and a government program for 2019 plans to [track all cars](#) via RFID chips. In another effort to further control and supervise all citizens, police stations in almost every Chinese province have devices for [monitoring smartphones](#) and extracting data, according to a report from August 2018. This has become increasingly important to the state since China's online community is on its way to passing one billion users, having crossed the [threshold of 800 million](#) in 2018.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

Compared to the other categories below, expatriate Christians 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. As of December 2018, a significant number of foreign missionaries have been forced to leave because of proven or suspected missionary activities. Others have simply been refused when renewing their annual visa, with no explanation given. It appears much work has been done by the authorities to identify missionaries who belong to the same sending organization, tracking and expelling them even if they reside in different provinces around the country.

Historical Christian communities and government controlled churches:

This category highlights a unique factor in Chinese Christianity: There are registered and government recognized churches – the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) – and non-registered, independent churches. On the Roman Catholic side, these are the followers loyal to the Vatican. TSPM and CPA-related churches are government-controlled and even if there is no direct censorship, they will carefully weigh their words. Election of leadership is state-influenced. [TSPM](#) and [CPA](#) have each published five-year-plans on how to Sinicize. Churches are continuing to publish white papers on this topic, e.g. on [Sinicization](#) in a Catholic context. In an unprecedented development in September 2018, the Holy See (the smallest sovereign state in the world and the central administration of the Roman Catholic Church) has entered into a "[Provisional Agreement](#)" with China on the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops. Its consequences and implementation remain to be seen as the content has not been made public.

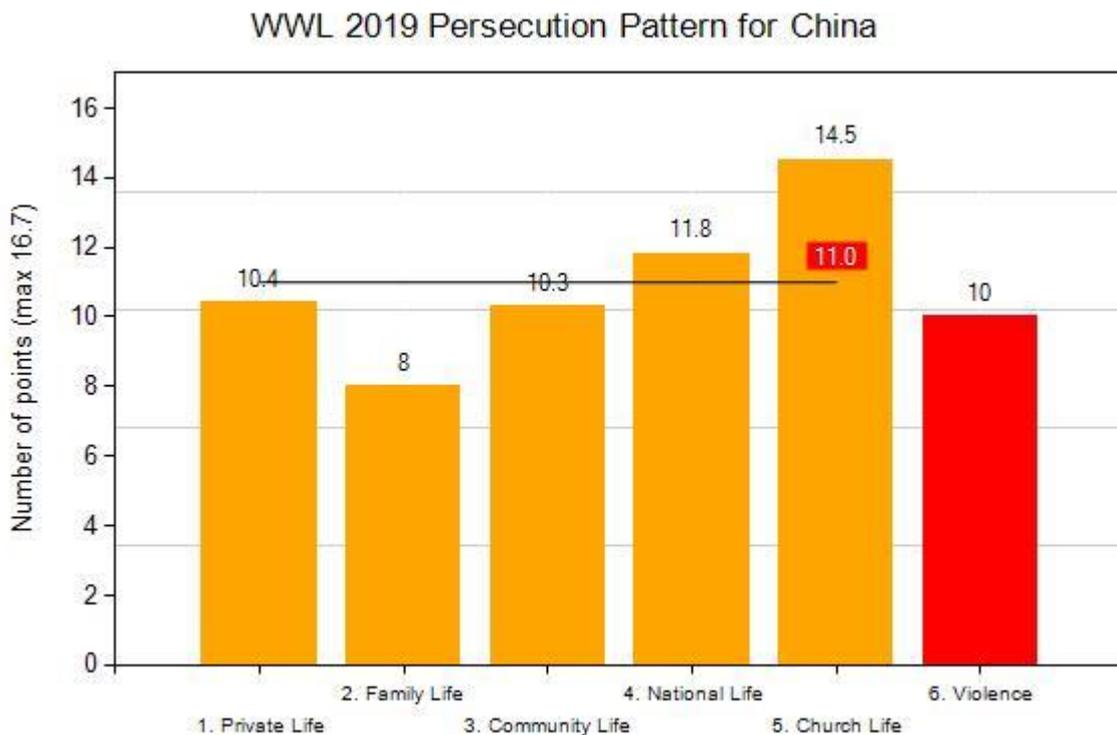
Converts to Christianity:

Converts are either from a Muslim background or from a Buddhist (Tibetan) background. While Christians in China generally have more freedom, although this is shrinking, this is not true for the small communities of Christian converts from other religions. 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. While the government restricts any meeting or action it deems political or dangerous, 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.

Non-traditional Christian communities:

This category is made up of a multitude of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations under a whole variety of names. On the Protestant side, these non-traditional churches are also called house-churches or underground churches. These terms, however, are misleading as some congregations consist of thousands of members and they are often meeting openly in commercial buildings and not in secret. As explained in detail above (see: Persecution engines), the government’s main goal is to keep control over society and therefore all Christians are affected by the measures it applies to reach this goal.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 Persecution pattern for China shows:

- The average score for pressure on Christians in China rose from 9.7 in WWL 2018 to 11.0 in WWL 2019. The scores for pressure increased in all *spheres of life*, showing that the implementation of the new regulations on religion began strictly and harshly, also reflecting that the main implementer is not the government anymore, but the Communist Party. Consequently, the legal

and administrative environment became more difficult, not just for the so-called house churches, but also for churches belonging to the Three Self Patriotic movement as well.

- Pressure is strongest in the *Church* and *National spheres of life* (with scores of 14.5 and 11.8 respectively, both increasing more than one point in score in the reporting period). While pressure in these *spheres* is typical for countries where *Communist and post-Communist oppression* is active, the pressure in the *Private sphere* (10.4) points to the problems Christian converts with a Muslim or Buddhist (Tibetan) background are facing. Pressure from *Islamic oppression* and *Religious nationalism* is present not just in the *Private sphere*, but also in the *Family* and *Community spheres*. But even pressure resulting from *Communist and post-Communist oppression* can be felt in these *spheres*, for example in questions dealing with education or with employment, e.g. as teachers or medical staff. The increase in the *National sphere* (11.8) is due to an already high level of pressure and reports that elderly Christians have been threatened to be cut off from social and pension benefits contributed to it.
- The score for violence against Christians increased from 9.1 in WWL 2018 to 10.0 in WWL 2019, reflecting the fact that even more churches have been closed down across the country. There were no killings reported, but an increasing number of Christians continue to be imprisoned or detained, sometimes for “educating” them. The authorities - and the Communist Party in particular - seem not to care much about bad international headlines, as can be plainly seen in the situation in Xinjiang.

Private sphere:

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 as 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. Sharing the new-won faith is virtually impossible and 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. Known converts are closely monitored and will face threats and in some cases even physical or mental abuse. In strict Communist households and families, Christians may suffer from restrictions as well.

Family sphere:

In Tibet and Xinjiang the situation is very volatile and the more pressure the government places on society in these provinces, the more every change of religion is seen as a disgrace to the family and as a betrayal of the close-knit community life. Therefore converts are very cautious and 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 baptisms, Christian weddings or funerals. Converts are expected to hold a traditional wedding ceremony and can therefore celebrate a Christian wedding only in hiding, if at all. If they are discovered organizing a baptism in Xinjiang or Tibet, converts are detained by the authorities for up to a few months. Children of all Christians throughout the country are forced to study anti-biblical teachings as the atheist education system strongly discourages religious belief (this is a campaign which has been re-started in the WWL 2019 reporting period) and the wider families of converts will put pressure on them to teach traditional values and religion. Children of Christians have been forced by the authorities in several parts of the country to sign statements confirming that they are 'not religious' - and they have been put under pressure to reveal their parents' religion.

Community sphere:

Converts are put under pressure by family, friends and neighbors to renounce the Christian faith, and their children face discrimination and bias by Muslim or Buddhist teachers and pupils at school. Monitoring (e.g. by school authorities and neighborhood committees) is prevalent in the whole country and affects Christians as well as other citizens. However, high-profile Christians often come under special scrutiny. It is challenging for Christians to participate in communal forums as most community organizations include a political element. In rural areas of Tibet, Lamas have great influence on the peoples' daily lives (e.g. by controlling health care), because many of them are local government officials. They allocate resources, even government relief resources, to families in the community and frequently discriminate against or even exclude known converts. All religious believers are excluded from government positions which require Party membership. The occasional invitation to church leaders "to meet for a cup of tea" with the authorities, seems now to be increasingly replaced with open monitoring and full crackdowns. In an effort to fulfil the new Party policy dealing with religions, local authorities do not shy away from switching their mode of operation from monitoring to actively intimidating. This may be a reflection of the fact that it is the Communist Party (and not the government any more) which is taking control of all religious affairs.

National sphere:

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 government continues to propagate a Communist and atheist ideology: In August 2017 Cambridge University Press (CUP) decided - at the request of the Chinese authorities - to [censor hundreds](#) of academic papers being prepared for publication in China, since many were regarded as being too politically sensitive. Although CUP quickly changed its mind after an international outcry, this episode shows that control of what is reported and said, be it in the academic world or elsewhere, plays a key role in national life. As the media is state-controlled and access to non-state-controlled news is made more and more impossible (see Context above), there is an inherent anti-religious bias which also affects the reporting about Christians.

The ban on religion in the public sphere in China has been [extended](#) to schools and medical workers. In some parts of the eastern province of Zhejiang the authorities have demanded that teachers in high-schools sign a letter confirming that they do not hold religious beliefs. Reports have also emerged that school-children, students and medical staff in hospitals elsewhere in China have been asked to sign comparable letters.

Publically displaying religious symbols is a problem for all Christians in the provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet. The March 2018 White Paper makes this clear. Its definition of "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 CPC 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."

Another example of how Christians are being harassed is how the authorities in several provinces have threatened elderly people with a cut in their pension benefits, if they do not renounce their Christian faith. The same threat was often extended to their children and grandchildren. As there is almost no social security system in China, many elderly or handicapped people depend on government

subsidies. According to a widely publicized report, in November 2017 the authorities in the province of Jiangxi entered a predominantly Christian village and tore down pictures of Jesus Christ as well as posters and verses from houses, saying that the Communist Party provides the funds to improve their situation, and that they should [believe in Xi Jinping](#), not in Jesus Christ. This has reportedly happened in other parts of the country as well.

Church sphere:

As mentioned above, the government's interest is in maintaining a "harmonious society". In terms of religion this means not just "managing" registered and non-registered churches any more (be they "black", "red" or "gray"), but actively guiding them. The unpublished, but tacitly well-understood guidelines every Christian church should adhere to are: (1) report to the authorities about recent activities; (2) allow no participation of foreign Christians or income from foreign funds; (3) stage no high-profile activities; (4) only conduct "regular" Christian activities during sensitive periods. These are no guarantee, however, that if churches follow them they will be left alone. The WWL 2019 reporting period saw two trends which led to increases in score for the *National* and the *Church sphere*: First, the Communist Party tries to push all house-churches (which are "gray") into the government-controlled Three Self churches, either by promising incentives or by violent means. Many house-churches have been closed all over China, with an emphasis on Henan. This is one of the largest provinces with (in absolute numbers) the biggest number of Christians. The other trend is the apparent Party goal to consolidate the distribution of Three Self churches, which explains why a surprising number of them are being targeted as well. There are efforts to hold the number of TSPM churches in a given area at a manageable level, maybe at 2, 3 or 5 churches. But in certain cities or districts, there are a hundred or more TSPM churches and meeting points, which is far too many in the Party's view.

The regulations on religion are implemented in a very strict way which means tighter control, monitoring and measures against churches. Not surprisingly, this has the strongest consequences in the *Church sphere*. Suggestions that the authorities might offer a certain kind of registration to the thousands of house-churches in China have not materialized so far. In any case, there is no certainty about what such an offer might look like and what strings may be attached. And this would not be a quick registration process, either. Unregistered churches continue to be pushed by local authorities to join state-registered churches. Additionally, an increasing number of house-churches are facing difficulties in renewing their rent contracts, due to the pressure landlords have been receiving from local authorities, in particular following the publication of revised religious regulations. Unregistered churches (but also some Three-Self churches too) in the provinces of Anhui, Beijing, Fujian, Gansu, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hebei, Henan, Hunan, Heilongjiang, Jiangxi, Jilin, Liaoning, Nei Mongol, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanghai, Shanxi, Sichuan, Xinjiang, Yunnan, Zhejiang (alphabetical order) have been harassed and/or shut down. Henan has been one province the authorities have put strong emphasis on, being a province with a relatively high number of Christians and being the cradle of three large house-church networks. It is strictly forbidden for children under 18 to attend churches and this ban has been implemented in places like Henan, but also in other provinces like Gansu as well. Reportedly, checklists are circulating to assess the quality of work of the Communist Party and government entities dealing with religion. In one example from [Hebei](#), the checklist scores 65 possible actions which can be taken to combat religious activities. Highest scores are given to actions taken against churches which do not want to be managed by the state (i.e. seeking to retain autonomy) as well as churches with foreign ties.

The Chinese authorities have drafted new guidelines to [curb "chaotic" online information](#) on religion in September 2018. Online resources have always been a major source of encouragement and training for Christians all over China – especially in rural and remote areas. The online sharing of resources will

now only be allowed when the provincial religious affairs department has issued a license for it. Some resources - such as the live broadcasting of sermons – will not be allowed any more at all.

It should be noted that the bulk of implementation work for the new regulations lies with local authorities which might lead to more local bias and increased control. However, since the Communist Party is now in control of religious matters, a more unified and strict approach can be expected. Christians in China still experience differing levels of freedom today, but most observers agree that freedom is shrinking fast. This does not mean that churches are fearful of what is going to happen. A Chinese pastor said: "Our experience is that more persecution leads to a revival and a growth of the church. We stood through tough persecution before, we will stand through whatever comes now as well." Other pastors even expect churches to benefit as they will need to become smaller again, returning to a more "family style" church. Churches are being monitored and will be closed down if deemed necessary - and this goes not only for "high-profile" churches (which are often perceived as acting politically). The sword of Damocles is hanging over all non-registered churches in China and the thread holding that sword is getting decidedly thinner. If Beijing demands it, all house-churches will be asked to register under the umbrella of TSPM churches and act according to the guidelines referred to above, or face the consequences.

There are, however, huge opportunities for churches as well. In February 2018, the National Bureau on Statistics released alarming statistics on the country's [ageing population](#). Christians in several provinces are helping by [opening care homes](#) for the elderly and by participating in the social care offered by the few existing state-run care homes.

Violence:

Many attacks against churches went hand in hand with the arrest of Christian leaders detained and beating of Christians. This happened in several provinces with an emphasis on Henan, a populous province with a sizeable Christian minority, but went far beyond its borders. The perpetrators were often members of security forces or the United Front Workers Department, but sometimes locally hired mobs were responsible as well.

In many cases (and in a reprise of what was witnessed in Zhejiang from 2014 to 2016) crosses of churches have been destroyed, both of TSPM and house-churches, hundreds of churches have been closed. Some reports speak of 7000 crosses which have been broken down. In many cases, landlords were pressured by authorities to cancel renting contracts with churches. Two widely published cases were the harassment and closure of [Zion](#) house church network in Beijing and the [Golden Lampstand](#) house church in Shanxi. The breadth and depth of the campaign can also be seen by the highly unusual reaction of unregistered house-churches in Beijing issuing a [joint-statement](#) in July 2018 calling on the authorities to respect freedom of religion enshrined in China's Constitution. Over 600 house-church pastors [all over China signed this](#). Finally, more South Korean Christians have been expelled, who had been living in the border region close to North Korea.

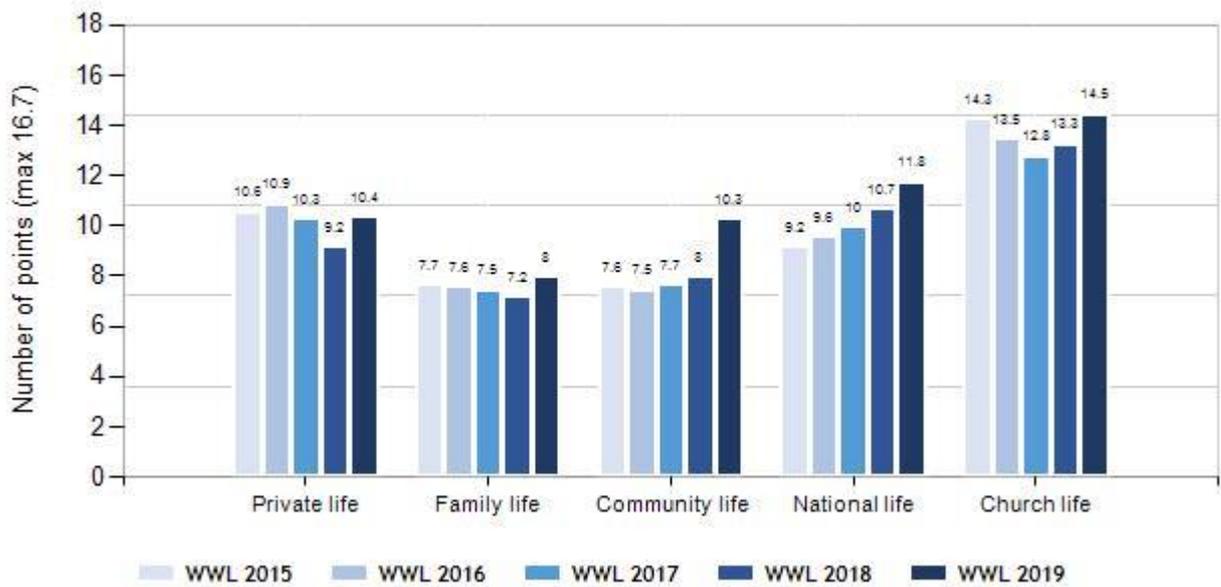
For a summary of the statistics on violence and further examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

In chart 1 it can be seen that the level of pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres* has increased in the most recent reporting period and reached the level of five years ago. That it 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

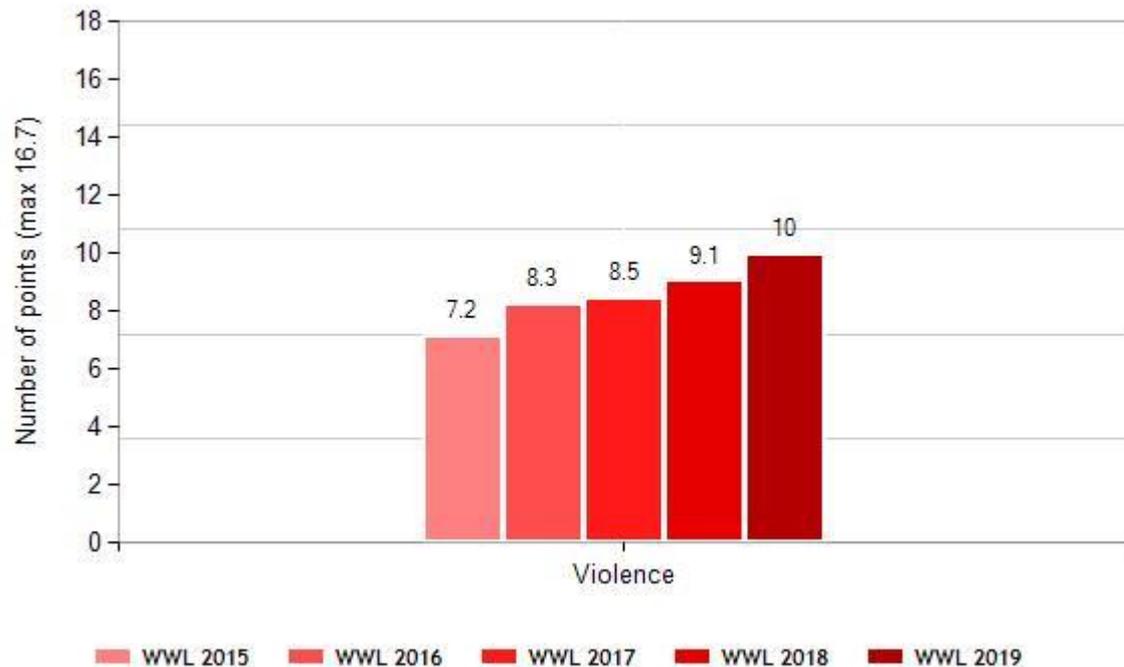
is heavily restricted. Not surprisingly, the scores for *National life* increased over the years, in WWL 2019 particularly strongly, reflecting the ever stronger pressure caused by the authorities bringing everything and everybody into the framework of Communist ideology. The scores for *Church life* rose as well, 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 house-churches. This increase in pressure over several *spheres of life* can also be seen in the average pressure score as well, which jumped up to a very high level (11.0) in WWL 2019 after a period of stability at the high level 9.7-9.9, as can be seen in chart 2. The scores for violence against Christians - always in the category "very high" - have steadily increased over the 5 reporting periods, as chart 3 shows clearly.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for China (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: China	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	11.0
2018	9.7
2017	9.7
2016	9.8
2015	9.9

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for China (Violence)



Gender specific persecution

There is no information available on the gender-specific persecution of Christians in China. Since many churches, especially house-churches, are led by women and leaders are generally the main target, women are as affected by persecution as men. The latter, however, are still usually the financial providers of the family. Consequently, if they are taken away - e.g. through arrest or even if they are just threatened with losing their jobs - this puts the whole family under financial strain. In many cases, being held in custody for weeks or months and being treated harshly there, leaves physical and psychological trauma, so that (in some cases) continuing to work is out of question. In more extreme cases, the persons themselves need special treatment. This is true for women and men alike. One exception to this (socialist) rule of equal treatment in persecution is the situation of converts from a Muslim or Tibetan background. After their conversion, women are more vulnerable as they can lose custody of their children more easily and the right to inherit. They may also be put under stronger pressure to divorce because of their new-found faith.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Besides Christians, Muslims in Xinjiang and Tibetan Buddhists face strong pressure from the government, as does Falun Gong. Details can be found in the Freedom House Special Report of February 2017: "[The Battle for China's Spirit](#)". Meanwhile, China 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 as making such measures necessary. More details about human rights violations can be found in the [CSW report](#) dated 16 October 2018.

Future outlook

The political outlook:

The first term of President Xi Jinping's rule has seen an (in recent times unprecedented) reduction in freedom in all sectors of society. The preferred line of thinking has been emphasized by introducing President Xi's own [brand of "political thought"](#) into the Party constitution at the 19th Party Congress, the first time this has happened for a living president since Mao Zedong. This emphasis was also clear when Xi Jinping was given [a new title](#), which referred to him as the "core" of the party leadership – a title unheard of for the last 15 years. Although Chinese media produced a complex [mindmap](#) of Xi Jinping's ideology highlighting 30 different elements, each broken down into separate sub-sections, in reality things are much simpler: Whoever does not toe the Party line closely, is in high danger of being replaced. And whichever group does not embrace Communist ideology (as is the case for most churches), risks persecution on various levels.

The outlook for Christians - viewed through the lens of:

- Communist oppression:** The fact that the law on religion is not being implemented by the government but by the Communist Party itself does not bode well for Christians; the Party is much more relentless in following its goals and preserving its national ideology and will do whatever it deems necessary. The emphasis on ideology and a budding personality cult around President Xi have all been signs of the emerging pressure to Sinicize. Restrictions are still coming in indirect ways, such as through the renewed emphasis on Communist ideology and rhetoric, and by limiting the space in which churches can operate, as they come under pressure to adapt their ministry. But increasingly, open restrictions and violence are being used as well. The restrictions on internet access and news consumption, by closing VPN services which enable access to information blocked by China's [Great Firewall](#) (which is a vast internet surveillance and content-control system that prevents people in China from accessing certain websites and pages, including Google, Facebook and Twitter), point in the same direction. China hosts the [largest number of internet consumers](#) worldwide with 802 million users, most of them via mobile access. So the new keyword appears to be "Active guidance". This is the ["new new normal"](#) which Christians need to adapt to, as long-term observer China Source put it.
- Dictatorial paranoia:** Plans to introduce a [Social Credit System](#) (SCS) in China have emerged, by which authorities are planning to rate each and every citizen by 2020. While this may appear logical for a country developing online and mobile paying systems, such a rating has very serious implications. Provided the plans are serious and even giving a possible delay in implementing them, questions arise not just about fraud or buying a better rating. What happens if citizens are following socially unwanted behavior, like – for example – being religious or Christian? What will be the consequence of that?
- Secular intolerance:** Hand in hand with an increase in Communist ideology goes a boost in *Secular intolerance*. The socialist theory that religion is opium for the people, in practice not enforced for many years, has seen a strong revival in the WWL 2019 reporting period. The Communist Party despises not necessarily all religion, but at least all religion it cannot control or infuse with Communist thinking. Reports that schoolchildren, teachers and medical staff were forced to sign documents confirming that they are 'not religious' or reports that elderly believers were threatened to or actually cut off from social benefits and told to venerate the Communist Party or even its chairman instead of God, (referred to earlier in this report), are signs of this.

- **Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism:** These Persecution engines are mainly driven by family, society and religious leaders and aimed against the few thousand converts among the Muslim and Tibetan people groups. Pressure on converts will remain high and potentially even increase as the urgency for unity among these minority communities grows due to the increasing pressure being placed on them by government policing measures.

Conclusion:

China's claims on the South China Sea are also causing international headaches, most recently in August 2018 when China's Foreign Minister admitted the [militarization](#) of these waters, "forced by outside forces". China has also managed to influence its unruly neighbor, North Korea, making Kim Jong Un visit Beijing and Dandong at least three times before and after the historic meeting with US President Trump in June 2018. The [military standoff](#) with its neighbor India (at the so-called "chicken neck" close to Bhutan) seems to have cooled down as well. While a face-saving solution was found for both sides, this incident served as a reminder that this is also a region for potential major conflict in the future. The government's current biggest challenge is the unilateral tax the US has placed on many export goods. This "trade war" has left China in the uncomfortable and unexpected position of promoting free trade, vitally needed for the country's economic growth. Of course all this will not have direct implications for Chinese Christians, but in an increasingly insecure world the Chinese government will step up its ideological drive, grow even more conservative and - despite going ahead with free trade - follow a more nationalistic path. While reports emerging in August 2018 that President Xi's power have [passed its zenith](#) may be exaggerated, it seems that China will tone down any boasting in its foreign relations for the moment. The 'active guidance' on Christians will not be affected by this toning down, on the contrary, further tightening is expected.

In the plethora of challenges the government faces, China's leadership tries to keep everything under control. Its goal of maintaining power includes strict control of all religions, and hence the strongly growing Christian minority as well. The question for the future is whether the governing authorities will start looking to Christians as a positive force in society. Local churches could be valued as an asset or rejected as a threat. The growing restrictions as well as Xi's increasing personality cult point strongly to the latter and so it looks like Christians will continue to be affected by *Communist and post-Communist oppression*, but there is still room for both directions, as some churches still enjoy a certain amount of freedom as well. However, the room to manoeuvre for churches is narrowing. As one Chinese blogger [put it](#): "No matter what kind of religion you believe in, there is only one norm - they must obey the command of the Party and acknowledge the Communist Party's superior position over all churches. If you believe Christianity, the Communist Party is the God of your God; if you believe in Buddhism, the Communist Party is Buddha of your Buddha; for Muslims, the communist party is Allah of your Allah; for the living Buddha, only the Communist Party can approve who will be the living Buddha. The Party wants you to say what she wants you to say; do what she wants you to do. Believers of different religions should uphold their faith to follow the Party's will. If you are not doing so, you will be suppressed by the dictatorship." And with the implementation of the Social Credit System referred to above, [the authorities will have the means](#) to follow their plans up. In any case, for the foreseeable future, Christians and churches in China will see tougher times ahead.

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