

COMMENTARY Religious Liberty**May 12, 2021**

3 min read

Commentary By**Olivia Enos**

Former Senior Policy Analyst, Asian Studies Center

Hannah So

Spring 2021 Member of the Young Leaders Program at The Heritage Foundation



A woman wearing Uighur flag colors takes part during a demonstration in Tokyo, Japan, May 9 2021. Uighur Muslims are currently subject to some of the worst abuses in China.

Viola Kam / SOPA Images / LightRocket / Getty Images

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Imprisoning Christians in brainwashing camps is another step in the CCP's intensifying crackdown on religion.**
- 2 A cornerstone of human rights, religious freedom must remain a key priority of American foreign policy.**
- 3 The administration and Congress must step up efforts to hold the CCP accountable for its violations of religious freedom.**

The Chinese Communist Party's persecution of Christians has taken a disturbing new turn. According to a recent [Radio Free Asia](#) report, Chinese Christians are being detained at secretive "brainwashing camps."

Writing under the pseudonym of Li Yuese, a Chinese Christian detailed the conditions of his detention in a "[transformation facility](#)" where he was held for 10 months after the CCP raided his house church in Sichuan province in 2018. Most of the prisoners held in these mobile facilities, operated by the United Front Work Department in collaboration with the state security police, have been taken from house churches that operate outside of state approval.

Imprisoned in a windowless room without ventilation, Li was subjected to verbal and physical abuse. United Front officials use intimidation, threats, and beatings to force detainees to renounce their faith. The repression was so brutal that Li testified, "After you've been in there a week, death starts to look better than staying there." At his release, Li was in very poor health. He remains haunted by his experience.

Imprisoning Christians in brainwashing camps is another step in the CCP's intensifying crackdown on religion. The CCP believes independent religious practice threatens its power. Under President Xi Jinping's policy of "Sinicization," the party seeks to conform religion to its political goals. Religious groups deemed to "disrupt public order" face severe monitoring and persecution.

>>> [Religious Persecution in China Must Be Called Out](#)

The CCP's [persecution](#) of Christians has also involved demolishing churches and arresting leaders like Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church, who was sentenced to nine years in prison in 2019.

Tibetan [Buddhists](#) are targeted through strict state surveillance, destruction of religious sites, and mass eviction of clergy. More than 500 Tibetans are currently held as political [prisoners](#), including the Panchen Lama, the Dalai Lama's intended successor. These concerns are heightened by the CCP's new [forced labor transfer](#) policy, through which hundreds of thousands of rural Tibetans have been transported to "military-style" vocational training centers.

[Uighur](#) Muslims are subject to some of the worst abuses. Between 1.8 million and 3 million Uighurs have been interned in hundreds of political reeducation camps in Xinjiang Province since 2018. There, they face [brutalities](#) including forced labor, torture, sexual abuse, and forced abortion and sterilization. [Hui](#) Muslims have also witnessed tightening restrictions, including forced mosque closures and imprisonment of religious leaders.

Meanwhile, [Falun Gong](#) members are reportedly subject to forced organ harvesting and extrajudicial imprisonment.

A cornerstone of human rights, religious freedom must remain a key priority of American foreign policy. The Trump administration made religious freedom a focus, spearheading the [Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#) that brought global leaders together to advance religious liberty. It also made use of Global Magnitsky, which allows the executive branch to sanction individuals and entities for human rights abuses. On the administration's last day, Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo issued a genocide [determination](#) on the atrocities in Xinjiang. His successor, Antony Blinken, also [supports](#) that finding.

In response to the CCP's imprisonment of Christians and other threats to religious practice, President Joe Biden should continue to promote religious freedom in China. The promotion and preservation of religious freedom have historically been a bipartisan foreign policy priority, one the Biden administration has an opportunity to build upon.

[">>>> How China Targets Chinese Christians](#)

By continuing the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, the Biden administration could use it to press China on its severe threats to religious freedom and press for the release of all religious prisoners of conscience. As part of its diplomatic efforts to advance religious freedom, the Biden administration may choose to highlight specific examples of Beijing's abusive behavior, such as the extrajudicial imprisonment of Christian pastor [Wang Yi](#), or the persecution of family members of Uighur-Americans, like doctor [Gulshan Abbas](#), who is currently held in detention in Xinjiang.

Given the gravity of the situation in China, the administration and Congress must step up efforts to hold the CCP accountable for its violations of religious freedom. Continuing to shine a spotlight on the shared, bipartisan priority of advancing religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy is an excellent first step toward doing so.

This piece originally appeared in Providence Mag