

China: one in five arrests take place in 'police state' Xinjiang

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Xinjiang, home to about 12 million Muslims, has been the focus of an intense government crackdown

One in five arrests in China last year took place in Xinjiang, the nominally autonomous western territory that critics say has been [turned into a police state](#) rife with human rights violations.

Analysing publicly available government data, the advocacy group Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), found 21% of all arrests in China in 2017 were in Xinjiang, which accounts for about 1.5% of China's population. Indictments in [Xinjiang](#), accounted for 13% of all charges handed down in the country last year.

"For both arrests and indictments, the sudden increases in 2017 from 2016 are staggering," the organisation [said in its report](#), released jointly with a Chinese group, the Equal Rights Initiative, on Wednesday. "Given that China's conviction rate is 99.9%, nearly every individual indicted is likely to be convicted."

The report comes ahead of a UN review, beginning 10 August, of China's implementation of the convention on racial discrimination. This week, the US state department is holding the country's first summit on religious freedom and a US congressional commission is holding a hearing on the situation in Xinjiang.

"This data, coming from the Chinese government itself, must force the international community to act", said Frances Eve, a researcher with CHRD.

Xinjiang, home to about 12 million Muslims, mostly ethnic Uighurs as well as Kazakhs, has been the site of a government "strike hard" campaign, aimed at rooting out religious extremism and potential separatist movements. The region, almost half the size of India, has seen outbreaks of ethnic violence in the 1990s and again in 2009.

Human rights groups say the crackdown has gone too far. Controls over religious and cultural expression have increased under hardline communist party secretary, Chen Quanguo, drafted to Xinjiang in 2016. Those under the age of 17 are forbidden to enter mosques or make unauthorised pilgrimages to Mecca. Islamic names, beards, face veils, and long skirts have reportedly been outlawed.

Advocates and researchers say at least tens of thousands of minorities, mainly ethnic Uighurs, have been detained in "re-education" camps where they can be held indefinitely. In April, a group of US lawmakers called the camps, "the largest mass incarceration of a minority population in the world today."

Anything from reading foreign websites to speaking to relatives abroad can land residents of Xinjiang in detention. One ethnic Uighur in the state told CHRD his uncle had asked a friend to help him download songs onto his mobile phone. When he lent the phone to someone to play music, he was reported to the police and given a seven year prison sentence for broadcasting banned content.

Another said a neighbour of his had been detained for attending classes on the Koran a decade ago. One ethnic Uighur told CHRD his brother had been sentenced to prison after a former classmate of his had been detained. The classmate detailed a video the two had watched as boys that inspired them to pledge to get strong and cause an “ethnic incident.”

“My brother received a seven-year sentence for that misguided adolescent boasting which happened a decade before”, the family member said. “It was just 10-year-old chatter by teenagers, and they never did anything.”

According to CHRD’s report, the arrests in Xinjiang between 2013 and 2017 marked a 306% increase from the previous five years. The arrests cover all types of criminal cases, but CHRD said the dramatic increase is likely due to the strike hard campaign.

“The world cannot sit by while Uighurs and minorities in Xinjiang are forced into camps and criminally prosecuted for no reason other than their ethnicity and Islamic faith,” said Eve.

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The Guardian

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