



# China: Minority Exclusion, Marginalization and Rising Tensions

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## SPECIAL FOCUS: Limited and ineffectual political participation

Instead of empowering self-governance in ethnic minority regions, the autonomy system functions as a mechanism for minority exclusion and state control.

### EXISTING LEGAL STRUCTURES INEFFECTIVE

- Minorities are unable to shape policy decisions or exercise any significant legislative or administrative powers.
- Limited devolution of authority to autonomous regional level
- Legislation on autonomous regions' self governance is subject to stringent review by the central government.
- Sensitive issues, such as civil and political rights or protection of cultural identity, are not addressed in any autonomous region-level legislation to date.

*"There are many details [in the autonomy law], including language and cultural rights, that we could use to protect the rights of minorities. But in real practice, this is not the case. There are many reasons for this, the main ones being that the government intervenes too much and has failed to honor its commitments."*

- Tibetan interviewee

### GENDER IMBALANCE IN POLITICS

- Minority women's participation in local People's Congresses has steadily increased, but nationally the gender imbalance remains drastic.
- The Communist Party of China's (CPC) Central Committee has only one minority woman out of 17 minority representatives in the 198-member body.

### EXCLUSION FROM DECISION-MAKING

- Minority individuals have little impact on substantive issues and are excluded from key decisions affecting their land and livelihoods.
  - ⇒ **Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR):** Mongols have been left out of major initiatives such as the Ecological Migration Project, the Livestock Grazing Ban, the East-West Gas Pipeline project, and the Western Electricity to the East project.
  - ⇒ **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR):** Locals have limited say in major development initiatives, such as the Golmud-Lhasa Railway, which drastically impacts the demography and geography of TAR.
  - ⇒ **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR):** Uyghurs have had limited participation in the design, formulation and implementation of the state-driven East-West Gas Pipeline project.
- Ethnic minorities have minimal representation in the CPC, which, in practice, has more authority than the legislative National People's Congress (NPC). The CPC is where China's real policy-making takes place.

- NO minority individual has ever been a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC's Central Committee (highest level of authority in CPC structure).
- The second highest level of leadership, the Central Political Bureau, has only had 2 minorities.

While the central government encourages ethnic minorities to be trained and actively participate in the running of autonomous governments, Han Chinese officials are often given high positions in the name of facilitation—they "transfer, help, and lead" ethnic minorities.

## CONTROL AND REPRESSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

- Despite official reports of growth among civil society organizations (CSOs), they are still subject to strict regulations, difficult registration procedures, and crackdowns.

Many international non-governmental organizations work on minority issues from outside China because their presence in China is not feasible under the current government.

- Most CSOs that focus on minorities are not involved in issues of political participation. They focus on cultural issues of less sensitivity, such as folk dancing or language study.
- The Nationalities Unity and Progress Association of China (NUPAC), a government-run CSO, is the only organization that examines political issues related to minorities.

## NO FREEDOM OF OPINION OR EXPRESSION

- Websites and online discussion forums serving minorities are closed down by the central government, often for allegedly hosting ‘separatist’ content.

- ⇒ **IMAR:** In September 2005, two websites, <<http://www.ehoron.com>> and <<http://www.monhgal.com>> were closed down, allegedly for discussing political issues and posting ‘separatist’ materials.
- ⇒ **XUAR:** In 1992, historian **Turgun Almas** was placed under house arrest after publishing a *The Uyghur People*, a history book on the XUAR.

- Any efforts to form an independent party are rapidly crushed, and the leaders imprisoned and detained.
- Tight regulations on information dissemination undercut the development of a robust discussion necessary for more inclusive policy-making.
- Defending or asserting political or civil rights guaranteed under the PRC constitution often results in imprisonment.

- ⇒ **IMAR:** In 1996, human rights activist **Hada** was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment due to his involvement in the Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance.
- ⇒ **XUAR:** In 2000, prominent Uyghur businesswoman **Rebiya Kadeer** was sentenced to eight years imprisonment for divulging state secrets to foreigners. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

## ADDITIONAL READING

- ⇒ Sangay, Lobsang. “China’s national autonomy law and Tibet: a paradox between autonomy and unity,” *Harvard South Asia Journal* 4:1 (2006).
- ⇒ Yu Xingzhong. 2004. “From State Leadership to State Responsibility—Comments on the New PRC Law on Regional Autonomy of Ethnic Minorities” [Working paper]. Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004.
- ⇒ Bovington, Gardner. *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent*. Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004.
- ⇒ *China Rights Forum*: Ethnic Groups in China, 4 (2006).

**For the full HRIC/MRG report, contact:**

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