

China's government most restrictive of religion globally, Pew says

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WASHINGTON (BP)—China is the most religiously oppressive government globally, Pew Research Center said in its latest study of 193 countries, citing the banning of religious publications, broadcasting and worship among 20 categories of persecution.

China's government restricted religion locally and/or nationally in 20 key categories, Pew found in its [report](#). Overall, government religious restrictions peaked in 2021 as global hostilities decreased, Pew said.

The March report comes as the U.S. Congress votes on a bill to ban TikTok as a national security threat unless the China-based owner of the platform, ByteDance, divests of its control. Congress is concerned about U.S. users' personal data being confiscated by the Communist government that widely uses [public surveillance](#) to monitor and police the public.

TikTok concerns

The U.S. House approved on March 13 the bill to ban TikTok, sending it to the Senate.

Religious persecution and propaganda are not explicit topics of the bill. But, the legislation purports China could weaponize its access to U.S. users' personal data to create content that influences perspectives on various issues, including the 2024 political elections.

"Communist China is America's largest geopolitical foe and is using

technology to actively undermine America's economy and security," the *New York Times* quoted House Speaker Mike Johnson—a Republican Southern Baptist from Louisiana—saying after the House vote.

"Today's bipartisan vote demonstrates Congress' opposition to Communist China's attempts to spy on and manipulate Americans, and signals our resolve to deter our enemies," Johnson said.

A December 2023 report from the Network Contagion Research Institute—an independent research group at Rutgers University—asserted TikTok probably ranks certain topics based on the company's perceived preferences of the Chinese government, NBC News [reported](#).

The group, composed of psychologists, engineers and analysts, reached its conclusions after analyzing the volume of posts with politically sensitive hashtags on TikTok compared to Instagram, NBC said.

TikTok disputed the study's findings and continues to dispute claims set forth by those promoting the congressional legislation.

Nearly 60 percent (58) of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 used TikTok daily in 2023, Pew Research said in a [study](#) released in January, usage surpassed only by teens' daily use of YouTube among other social media apps.

China's bans and limits on religion

China formally bans religious groups, has denounced religious groups as cults or sects, is physically hostile toward minority or non-approved religious groups, and has attempted to ban entire religious groups from the country, Pew found.

China limits public preaching, proselytizing, conversions, religious literature and broadcasting, Pew said. The country places restrictions on how foreign missionaries can operate in the country, a change from 2020

when such work was fully forbidden there, Pew said.

Pew did not cite specific religions or restrictive measures, but rather rated countries based on the countries' response to any or all religions.

Religious persecution watchdog groups have documented China's persecution of Christians for years, including raids on house churches, confiscation of church property and the beating and arrest of religious leaders and worshipers.

When considering whether government used force toward religious groups that "resulted in individuals being killed, physically abused, imprisoned, detained or displaced from their homes, or having their personal or religious properties damaged or destroyed," only China and Myanmar were discovered to have committed all offenses listed.

Following closely were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Russia, Rwanda, Syria and Uzbekistan, but Pew did not specify the particular abuses.

Religious restrictions elsewhere

Among the 25 largest countries studied, China, Russia, Iran, Egypt and Indonesia had the highest levels of government restrictions on religion, Pew said, with China ranking the highest on Pew's 10-point Government Relations Index.

Among the largest countries studied, Pew recorded the lowest levels of government restrictions in Japan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa and the Philippines.

Pew ranked the U.S. as having "moderate" levels of governmental persecution, but offered no specifics.

In its latest installment of the study, in its 14th year, Pew gathered factual

information from 19 sources it described as widely available and frequently cited. Primary sources included U.S. government agencies, independent nongovernmental organizations, and a variety of European and United Nations bodies.

Pew said it did not base its findings on the groups' commentary or opinions.

The report is available [here](#).