



China

Quality of Life

Summary score **N/A**

Economic and Social Rights (2022)

How well is China doing compared to what is possible at its level of income?



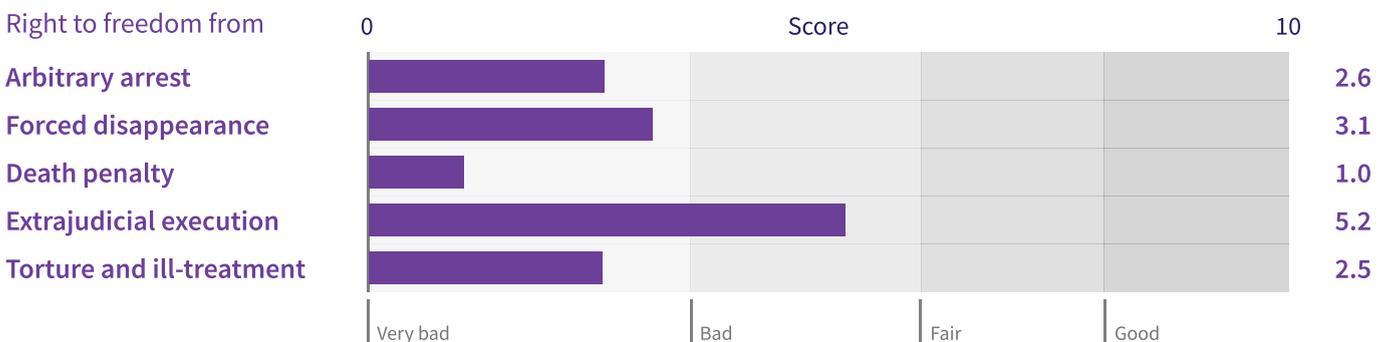
Compared with the other countries in East Asia, China is performing **better than average** when we look across the rights for which we have data (this comparison is calculated using the 'Income adjusted' benchmark).

Safety from the State

Summary score **2.3 / 10**

Civil and Political Rights (2024)

How well is China's government respecting each right?



China's Safety from the State score of **2.3 out of 10** suggests that **many people are not** safe from one or more of the following: arbitrary arrest, torture and ill-treatment, forced disappearance, execution, or extrajudicial killing.

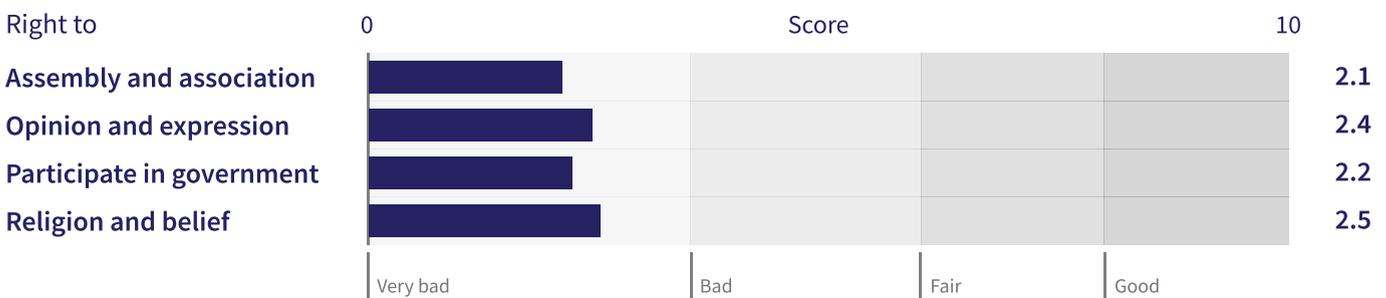
For civil and political rights, we don't have sufficient data across East Asia and Pacific countries to allow for a regional comparison. However, when compared to the other countries in our sample, China is performing **lower than average** on the right to be safe from the state.

Empowerment

Summary score **1.9 / 10**

Civil and Political Rights (2024)

How well is China's government respecting each right?



China's Empowerment score of **1.9 out of 10** suggests that **many people are not** enjoying their civil liberties and political freedoms (freedom of speech, assembly and association, democratic rights, and religion and belief).

For civil and political rights, we don't have sufficient data across East Asia and Pacific countries to allow for a regional comparison. However, when compared to the other countries in our sample, China is performing **lower than average** on empowerment rights.

Country details

Population
1,410.7m (2023)

GDP/capita
\$12,614 (2023) \$22,138 (2023)
current US dollars 2021 PPP dollars

To explore this country's scores in more detail please go to rightstracker.org

Behind the numbers

Quality of Life

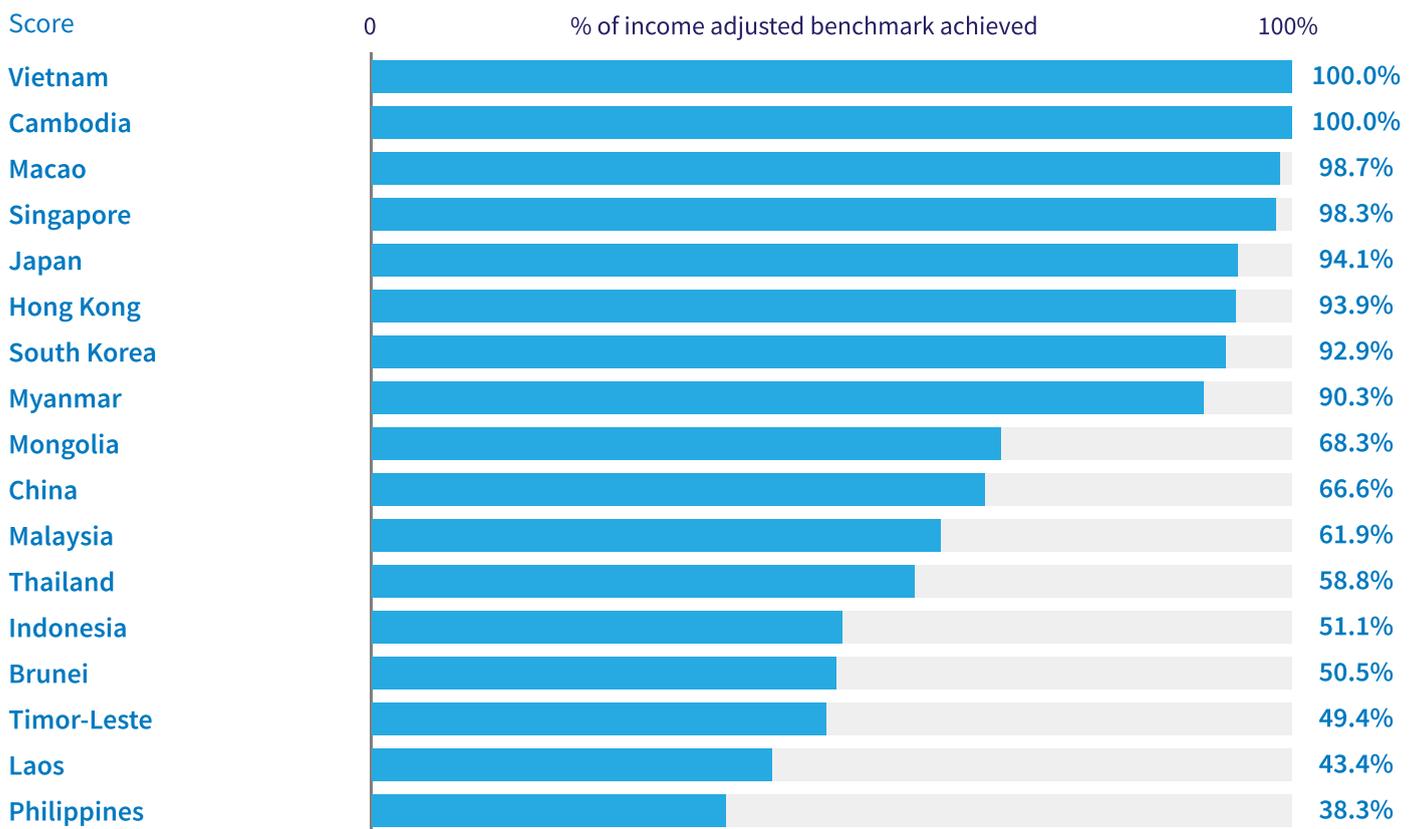
Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which China has signed, all countries agree to devote their maximum available resources to making things progressively better for their people in these areas.

HRMI has calculated what China could be achieving at its current level of income. The scores are given as a percentage of that realistic potential achievement. China's best score is for the right to work, where its score of 100% means it is doing as well as it possibly can, given its current level of income. To further improve, and make sure more people in China are fully enjoying their right to work, China would need to increase its income.

China also has good scores for the **right to health** (97.9%), the **right to food** (96.6%) and the **right to housing** (94.6%). For these rights, China is doing nearly as well as it possibly can, given its level of income. China could still afford to make some gains now, but then would need to increase its income to make further improvements.

Of the quality of life rights we measure, China needs to improve the most in the **right to quality education**, where it scores 66.6%, which falls in the 'very bad' range. Among 17 East Asian countries, this score puts China in the bottom half for quality education, just below Mongolia and Myanmar, and just above Malaysia and Thailand.

Right to Quality Education in East and Southeast Asia



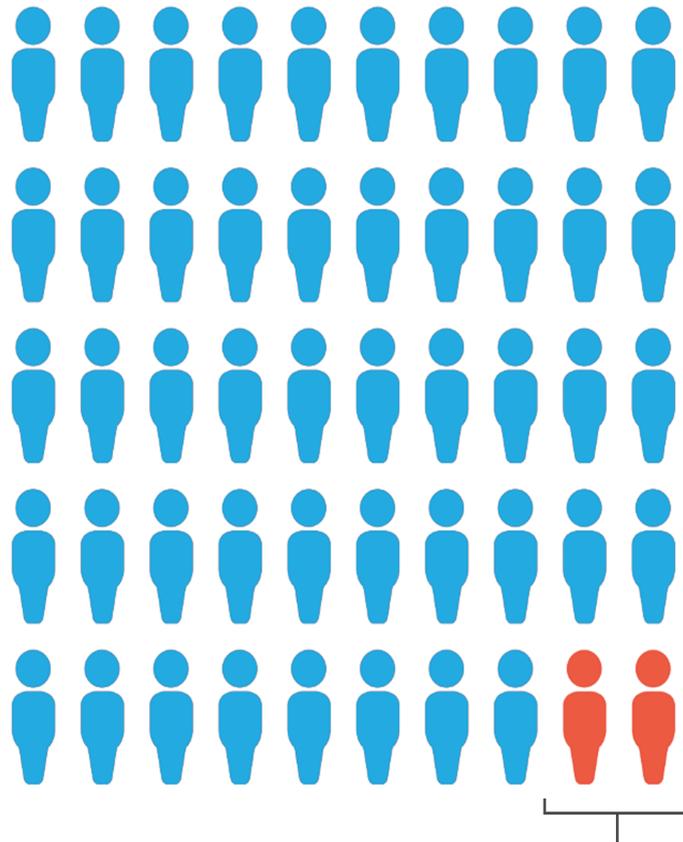
We further break the **right to housing** down into scores for the **right to sanitation** and the **right to water**.

With a GDP per capita of US\$12,614 we calculate that China has the resources to ensure all of its people have running water and toilets in their homes.

However, China’s **right to sanitation** score of 92.7% shows that many people are missing out, even though China could afford to do better. If China efficiently used its available resources, it could achieve a score of 100%, which would mean that 58 million additional people living in China would gain access to basic sanitation in their homes.

How many people have access to at least basic sanitation in their homes?

1,354 million people already have access to basic sanitation



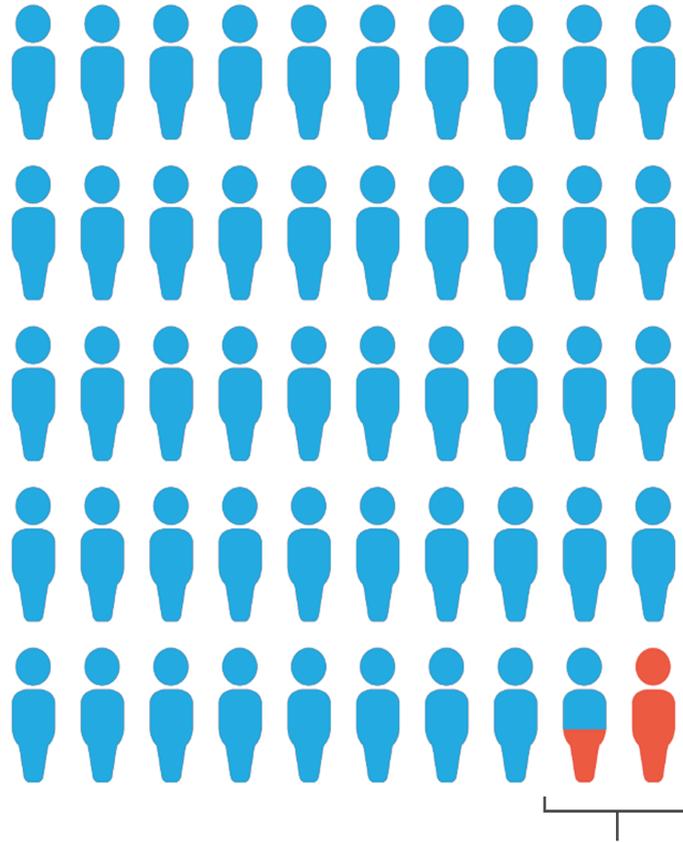
58 million more people could have access to basic sanitation.

- Enjoying right
 - Not enjoying right
- = 28 million people

If China improved its performance for the **right to water** from 96.5% to 100%, 38 million more people would have water on their premises.

How many people have access to water on their premises?

1,374 million people already have access to water on premises.



38 million more people could have access to water on premises.

- Enjoying right
- Not enjoying right

1 icon = 28 million people

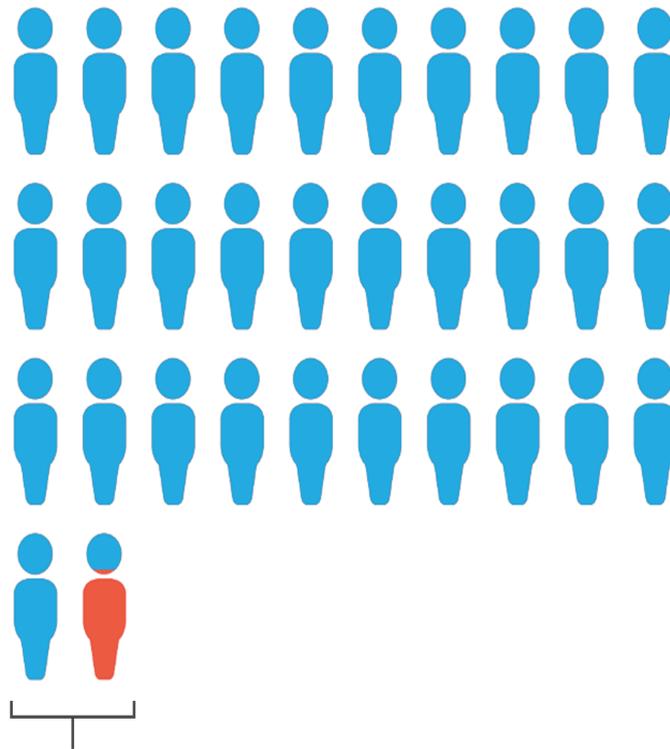
The good news is that China's scores for the **right to housing** have been steadily improving since 2001, when the nation scored 69.8%. The progress from 2021 to 2022 suggests that around 21 million people gained access to basic sanitation over that period, and around 12 million people gained access to water in their homes. China's scores on the right to water is higher than that for basic sanitation—96.5% versus 92.7%— but the gains in its score for the right to sanitation over the past five years have been more marked—9.1 versus 4.6 percentage points.

When it comes to the **right to food**, if China lifted its score from 96.6% to 100%, around 1.4 million more children under five years old would have enough nutritious food to grow well – that would mean *all* children in China under five would have enough nutritious food to grow well. This is an achievable goal.

With a current score of 96.6%, China has improved in respecting people's **right to food** over the last 20 years, with its score increasing markedly from 84.6% in 2000.

How many children have enough nutritious food to grow well?

63 million children under 5 have access to enough nutritious food.



1.4 million more children could have access to enough nutritious food.

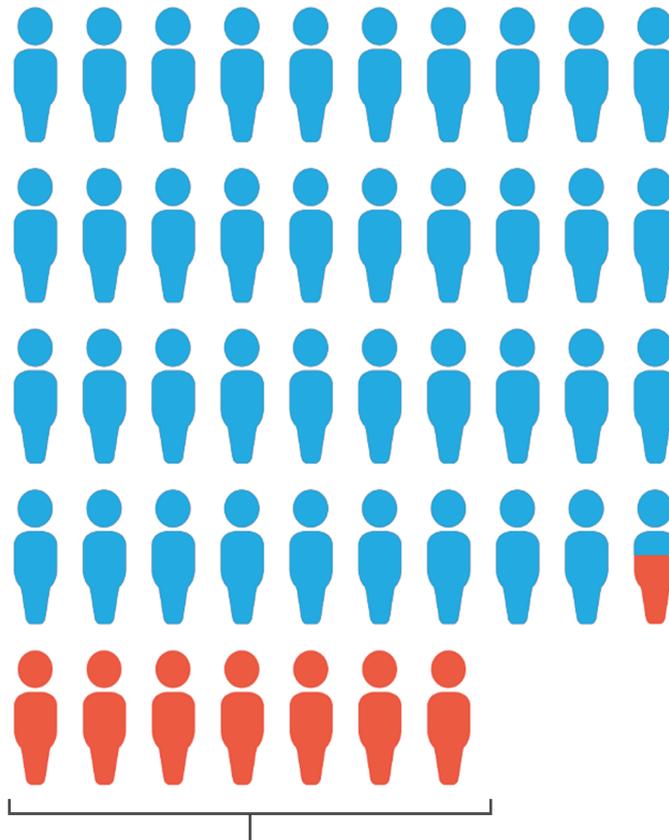
- Enjoying right
- Not enjoying right

 = 2 million people

On the **right to work**, China has made dramatic progress in eliminating absolute poverty. Its score on ensuring people enjoy at least a subsistence income (that is, income above the absolute poverty line of \$3.65 per day, measured in 2017 PPP\$), has risen from 42.5% in 2002 to 100% in 2021, effectively eliminating absolute poverty.

How many people are not relatively poor?

1,115 million peoples' income is at least half the median income.



210 million additional people could be lifted out of relative poverty.

- Enjoying right
 - Not enjoying right
- = 28 million people

The bigger challenge China currently faces, however, is eliminating relative poverty. That is, ensuring people enjoy at least half the median income and so can enjoy a decent life. China's score on a fair (relative) income stood at only 37.6% in 2018 (the most recent year with data). Projecting the relative poverty rate forward to 2022, this means that while 1,115 million people have enough money to enjoy decent lives, 210 million are unnecessarily denied this right.

China comes in second in the world in ensuring people's **right to health** is fulfilled, with a score of 98.2%, when using the low and middle income assessment standard. When using the high- income assessment standard and the income adjusted benchmark, China still comes in 11th in the world. Among the four rights for which China has complete data using the low and middle income assessment standard, this is the right where China is most constrained by resources. An increase in income will be necessary to make significant further improvements.

As to where gains are most needed, for the **right to health**, expert respondents noted inequities in access to healthcare, including regional differences, and differences in access according to wealth and political influence.

At its current income level, China should already be able to do as well as any country in the world in meeting the rights to food, housing, and work as assessed by the low and middle income standard.

People at risk

While China has room for improvement in all the rights we measure, a further consideration is inequity. There are several groups of people who experts identified as being at higher risk of missing out. These include:

- People with lower social or economic status, including farmers and people in rural areas, remote, mountainous or underdeveloped areas
- Human rights advocates, protesters, activists, and anyone who criticises the government; and their family members
- People from ethnic minorities
- People in Xinjiang, especially Uyghurs
- People in Tibet
- Disabled people
- Older people
- People in prison
- People from religious minorities
- People who are stateless or are not in the household registration system

See the people at risk tab on the Rights Tracker for the full lists. The data also show a strong connection between political activity, especially criticism of the government, and lack of enjoyment of economic and social rights.

Room for improvement

China has made outstanding progress in ensuring all people enjoy at least a subsistence income. However, all of China's other Quality of Life scores show that China could still make significant improvements to its people's lives, even without more resources.

If China were using its resources more efficiently to ensure its people's wellbeing, it could achieve 100% for all the rights we measure. Yet, while its best score reaches that gold — 100% on right to a subsistence income — its worst score using the low and middle income country assessment standard — 66.6% on the right to quality education — is far from that level.

If China better upheld its rights obligations, and achieved a full 100% score on all the rights we measure, we would see millions more Chinese people living lives of dignity, even without income growth. For example, if China reached 100% we would see the following number of extra people benefitting:

- If China were to operate at its full potential given its current resources, we would expect an **additional 1.37 million children under five to grow well and not be stunted.**
- If China were operating at best practice, each year we would expect **an extra 30,000 newborn babies to survive until their fifth birthday.**
- If China were to operate at its full potential given its current resources, we would expect **an additional 99,000 newborns to be born at a healthy birth weight.**
- If China were reaching its full potential, given its income constraints, **an extra 447,000 15-year-olds could eventually reach the age of 60.**
- If China used its resources efficiently, **an additional 58 million people could have a toilet at home, and an extra 38 million people could have access to water in their homes.**
- If China were operating at its full potential given its current resources, it could **lift 210 million people out of relative poverty.**

Safety from the State

China scores 2.3 out of 10 for our overall **Safety from the State** category, telling us that a great many people are at risk of arbitrary or political arrest or detention, torture and ill-treatment, forced disappearance, execution, or extrajudicial killing. This is one of the lowest scores in our sample of 37 countries.

China's worst score in this category is 1.0 out of 10 for **freedom from the death penalty**, the lowest score among all the countries we measure.

The human rights experts we surveyed said that people protesting against or criticising the government, and people from ethnic and religious minorities, were at extra risk of being executed.

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that human rights advocates, protesters, journalists, and people who criticised the Chinese Communist Party were at particular risk of a wide range of rights violations, especially arbitrary arrest and detention, forced disappearance, and torture and ill-treatment. Respondents particularly noted risks to political dissidents, detainees, and people supporting democracy.

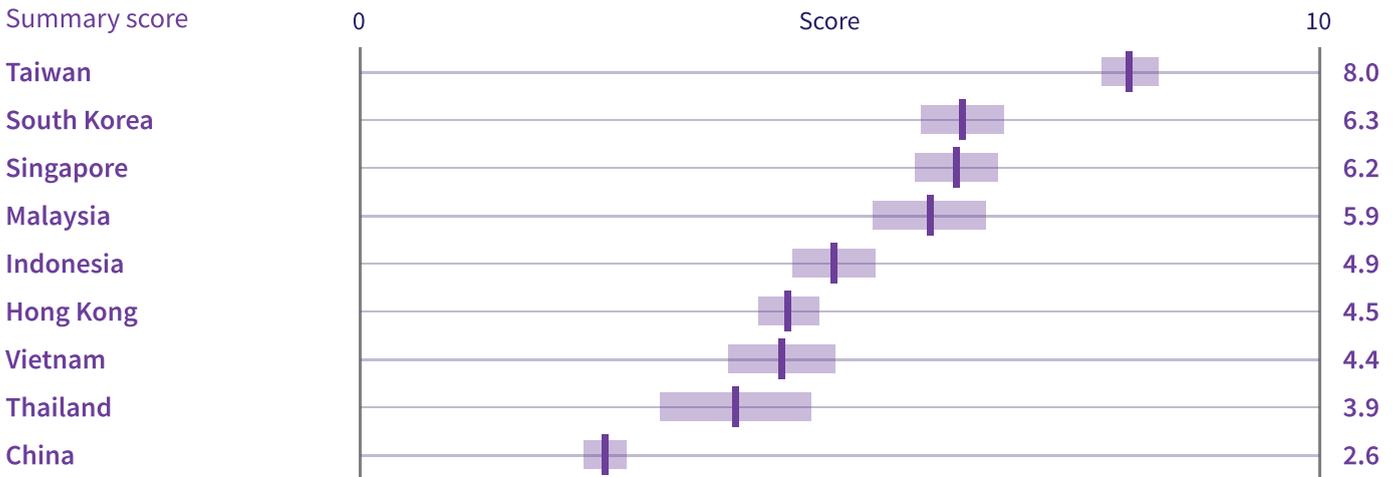
Detainees, human rights defenders, and people who protest or engage in non-violent political activity were at extra risk for all five Safety from the State rights.

Other vulnerable groups include:

- Detainees and those accused of crimes, especially people suspected of terrorism
- Anyone criticising the government
- Journalists
- People in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong
- Muslims, Christians, and people following other religions such as Falun Gong

Among other East and Southeast Asian countries and territories where we measure these rights, China has the lowest scores for all five Safety from the State rights.

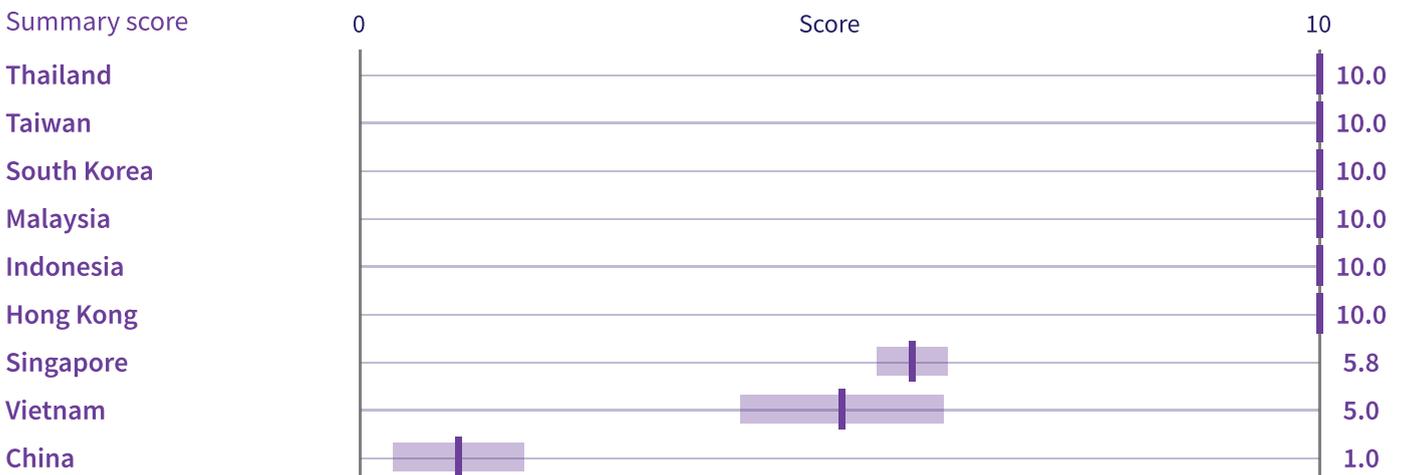
Right to Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Detention in East and Southeast Asia



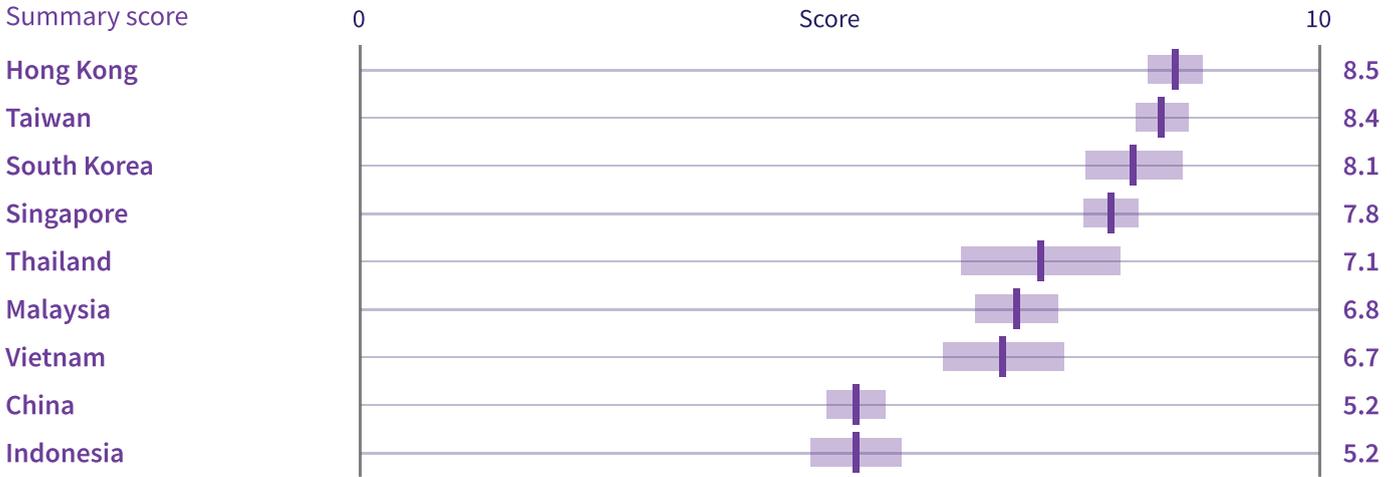
Right to Freedom from Forced Disappearance in East and Southeast Asia



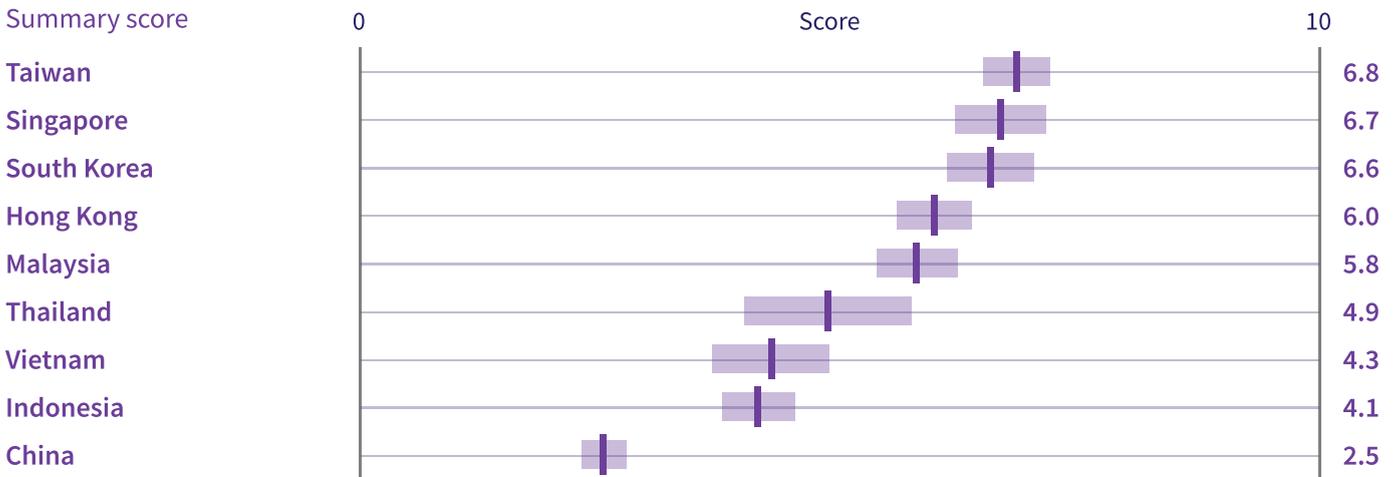
Right to Freedom from Death Penalty in East and Southeast Asia



Right to Freedom from Extrajudicial Execution in East and Southeast Asia



Right to Freedom from Torture and Ill-treatment in East and Southeast Asia



Empowerment

The Chinese government limits civil liberties and political freedom, with China scoring a very low 1.9 out of 10 in empowerment rights. This is one of the lowest scores in our sample of 37 countries.

For the **rights to assembly and association, opinion and expression, participation in government, and freedom of religion and belief** all of China's scores fall into the 'very bad' range. For all four rights, the human rights experts we surveyed agreed overwhelmingly that 'all people' were at risk of violations of these rights.

When it comes to the **right to assembly and association**, China scores 2.1 out of 10, and human rights experts identified a wide range of people not enjoying their rights, including human rights advocates, protesters, and people criticising or opposing the government, as well as those from ethnic and religious minorities.

China's score for the **right to opinion and expression** is a very low 2.4 out of 10, with no improvement over the four years we have measured this right. Respondents noted that online expression is also restricted.

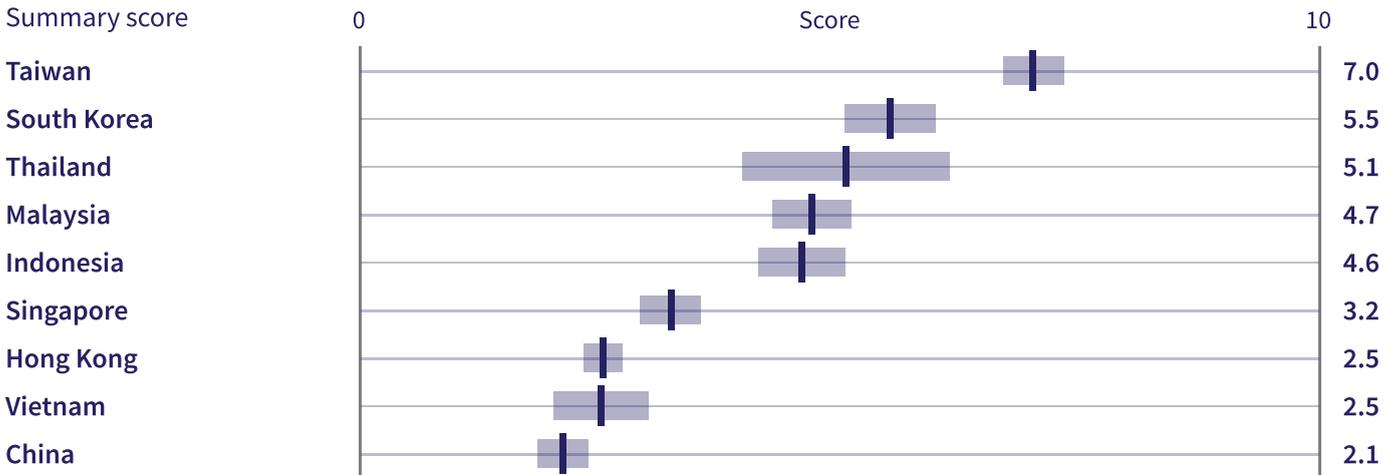
China also scores in the 'very bad' range for the **right to participate in government**, with a score of 2.2 out of 10. Respondents noted that pro-democracy supporters, including those in the New Citizens' Movement, the China Democracy Party, and independent candidates were not free to participate in government.

For the **right to freedom of religion and belief**, China scored 2.5. Respondents noted that the government restricts all religious practices, and is particularly repressive towards people following unregistered minority religions such as Christians, Uyghur Muslims, Falun Gong members, and people who attend house churches.

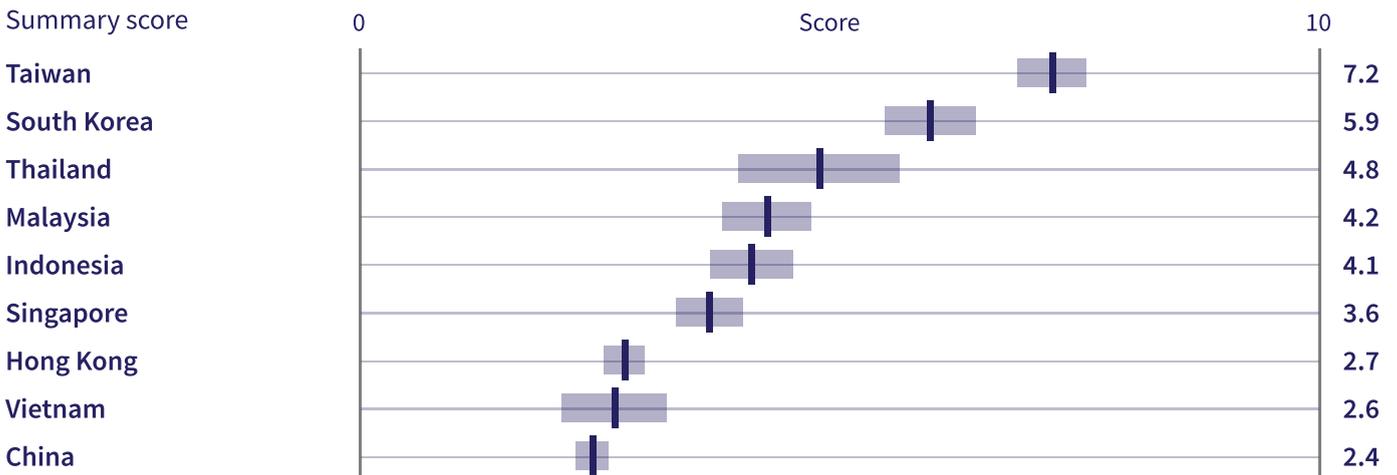
Groups that are particularly vulnerable to empowerment rights violations include:

- Human rights advocates, protesters, and anyone who criticises the government; and their families, including children
- Pro-democracy supporters
- Journalists
- People from ethnic and religious minorities
- Detainees and those accused of crimes
- Women's rights and labour rights activists

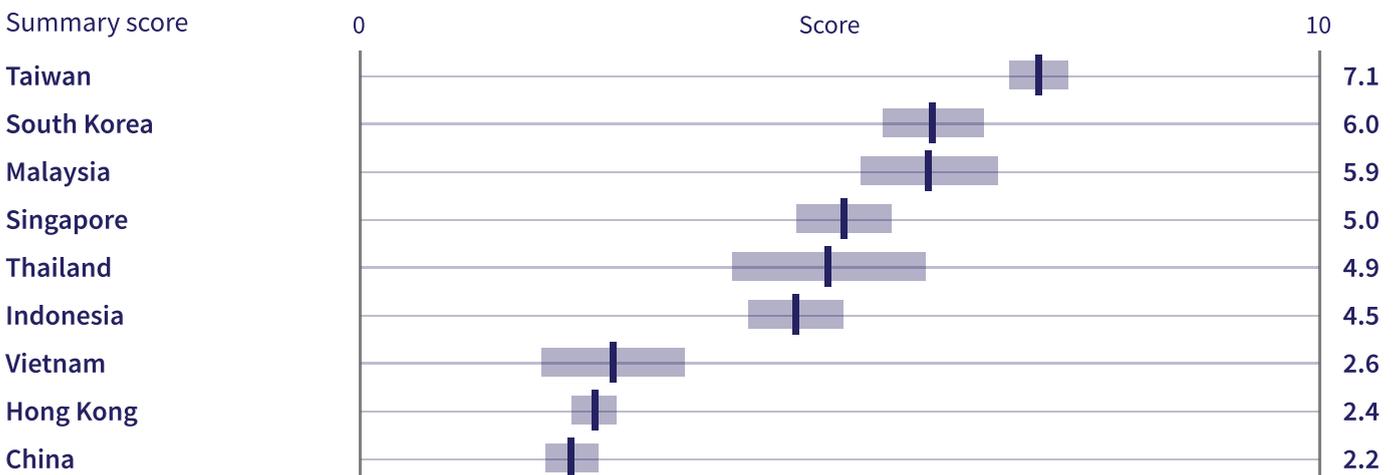
Right to Assembly and Association in East and Southeast Asia



Right to Opinion and Expression in East and Southeast Asia



Right to Participate in Government in East and Southeast Asia



Right to freedom of religion and belief in East and Southeast Asia

