

V: Falun Gong

Degree of persecution:

Falun Gong

VERY HIGH

Trajectory of persecution:

Falun Gong



Minor
Decrease

Key findings

- 1 **Survival:** Despite a 17-year Chinese Communist Party (CCP) campaign to eradicate the spiritual group, millions of people in China continue to practice Falun Gong, including many individuals who took up the discipline after the repression began. This represents a striking failure of the CCP's security apparatus.
- 2 **Ongoing large-scale persecution:** Falun Gong practitioners across China are subject to widespread surveillance, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, and torture, and they are at a high risk of extrajudicial execution. Freedom House independently verified 933 cases of Falun Gong adherents sentenced to prison terms of up to 12 years between January 1, 2013, and June 1, 2016, often for exercising their right to freedom of expression in addition to freedom of religion. This is only a portion of those sentenced, and thousands more are believed to be held at various prisons and extralegal detention centers.
- 3 **Cracks in the crackdown:** Despite the continued campaign, repression appears to have declined in practice in some locales. President Xi Jinping has offered no explicit indication of a plan to reverse the CCP's policy toward Falun Gong. But the purge and imprisonment of former security czar Zhou Yongkang and other officials associated with the campaign as part of Xi's anticorruption drive, together with Falun Gong adherents' persistent efforts to educate and discourage police from persecuting them, have had an impact.
- 4 **Economic exploitation:** The party-state invests hundreds



Falun Gong practitioners meditating in public in Guangzhou in 1998, before the Communist Party banned the spiritual group in 1999. Such sessions remain forbidden.

Credit: Minghui

of millions of dollars annually in the campaign to crush Falun Gong, while simultaneously engaging in exploitative and lucrative forms of abuse against practitioners, including extortion and prison labor. Available evidence suggests that forced extraction of organs from Falun Gong detainees for sale in transplant operations has occurred on a large scale and may be continuing.

- 5 Response and resistance:** Falun Gong practitioners have responded to the campaign against them with a variety of nonviolent tactics. They have especially focused on sharing information with police and the general public about the practice itself, the human rights violations committed against adherents, and other content aimed at countering state propaganda. In recent years, a growing number of non-Falun Gong practitioners in China—including human rights lawyers, family members, and neighbors—have joined these efforts.

“[The Communist Party initiated] the worst instance of religious persecution since the Cultural Revolution, with the clampdown against Falun Gong.”

—André Laliberté, *Ottawa University, leading scholar on religion in China, 2015*¹¹

“Orders for arrests continue to come down from high-level authorities, but sometimes the Public Security Bureau agents will say no, they are only exercising to be healthy.”

—*Chinese human rights lawyer, 2013*¹²

Fierce crackdown on a popular qigong

Falun Gong is a spiritual practice whose key features are five meditative *qigong* exercises and teachings reminiscent of Buddhist and Taoist traditions, with particular emphasis placed on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance (*Zhen-Shan-Ren* in Chinese). Adherents perform the exercises, study spiritual texts, and attempt to conform to these values—believed to be in harmony with the spiritual nature of the universe—in their daily lives, with the understanding that doing so leads to better physical health, mental well-being, and spiritual enlightenment.³ While Falun Gong includes some spiritual attributes of religion, it is loosely organized and lacks a professional clergy, formal membership, acceptance of donations, and specialized places of worship.⁴

Throughout the early and mid-1990s, Falun Gong, its practitioners, and founder Li Hongzhi enjoyed substantial government support and positive coverage in state media. Li first introduced the practice to the public in China in 1992.⁵ For the next two years, he traveled the country under the auspices of the state qigong association, giving lectures and teaching the five Falun Gong exercises.⁶ State media reports from that period laud the benefits of Falun Gong practice and show adherents receiving “healthy citizen awards.” In an event that would be unimaginable today, Li gave a lecture at the Chinese embassy in Paris in 1995, at the government’s invitation.⁷

After Li completed his formal lecture series, the practice continued spreading by word of mouth and through an informal network of local volunteers who would teach the exercises and share copies of the spiritual texts with friends and at public exercise sites. Chinese people from every stratum of society—doctors, farmers, workers, soldiers, intellectuals, Communist Party members—began taking up the practice. Though students of Falun Gong would gather in groups to practice exercises, many saw the discipline as a personal rather than a collective endeavor to enhance their physical and mental well-being. There were no signs of a political agenda or even criticism of the CCP, as now appears in Falun Gong literature years after the persecution began. By 1999, according to government sources and international media reports, at least 70 million people were practicing; Falun Gong representatives claimed that the community had reached 100 million.⁸

In the 1990s, Chinese people from every stratum of society—including Communist Party members—began taking up Falun Gong.

In July 1999, the spiritual discipline was abruptly banned. Prominent adherents were arrested, and anyone who continued practicing was pursued as an enemy of the state. Reports began emerging of Falun Gong believers being abducted, tortured, and even killed. The name of the practice, the name of its founder, and a wide assortment of homonyms became some of the most censored terms on the Chinese internet. Any mention in state-run media or by Chinese diplomats was inevitably couched in demonizing language.

What went wrong?

The CCP’s dramatic about-face regarding Falun Gong was unusual, even in the context of the party’s restrictive religious policies. Observers have consequently speculated about why it happened and whether it could have been avoided.

The CCP generally displays low tolerance for groups that place any spiritual authority above

their allegiance to the party. Still, scholars, eyewitnesses, and other knowledgeable observers point to a constellation of processes and factors specific to Falun Gong that probably contributed to the particularly harsh assault against the group:

- **Popularity:** With over 70 million followers, Falun Gong exceeded the CCP's own membership of 63 million as of 1999,⁹ and represented the second-largest faith community in China after Chinese Buddhism.
- **Ideological competition:** Falun Gong's emphasis on the values of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance as part of its spiritual worldview appears to have attracted the party's ire, as it conflicted with principles underpinning Marxist ideology and the legitimacy of CCP rule, like materialism, political struggle, and nationalism.¹⁰ Falun Gong effectively offered an alternative moral compass, and its spread came to be seen as a fundamental challenge to the party's authority.¹¹
- **Party-state 'infiltration':** Falun Gong was becoming popular within parts of the party-state apparatus that were critical to maintaining CCP rule, including the military, internal security forces, state media, and the party disciplinary inspection committee.¹² Fear that these Falun Gong adherents could place their allegiance to the discipline's principles above loyalty to the CCP leadership apparently began to take hold.
- **Independent civil society network:** The CCP has long sought to co-opt and suppress independent civil society organizations and other forms of grassroots collective activity.¹³ The party attempted to bring all qigong groups under closer control in the mid-1990s. In 1996, the state-run qigong association, with which Falun Gong was linked, called for the establishment of party branches among the practice's followers and sought to profit from Falun Gong teachings. Li Hongzhi chose to part ways with the association, intending for Falun Gong to remain a personal practice without formal membership and shared free of charge.¹⁴ Falun Gong continued to spread through a loosely knit network of meditation sites and volunteer coordinators across the country.
- **A period of escalating repression:** From 1996 to 1999, many in the party-state still held favorable views of Falun Gong, publicly citing its benefits for health and even social stability.¹⁵ But several top cadres began perceiving it as a threat, resulting in periodic acts of repression. State printing presses ceased publishing Falun Gong books in 1996. Attempts to register with various government organizations were denied. Articles that appeared sporadically in state-run news outlets smeared Falun Gong. Security agents monitored practitioners and occasionally dispersed meditation sessions.¹⁶
- **High-profile appeal to the leadership:** In April 1999, the escalating harassment culminated in the beating and arrest of several dozen practitioners in Tianjin. Those calling for their release were told that the orders had come from Beijing. On April 25, over 10,000 adherents gathered quietly outside the national petitions office in Beijing, adjacent to the Zhongnanhai government compound, to ask for an end to abuses and recognition of their right to practice. Some observers have argued that this very public demonstration took party leaders by surprise and triggered the crackdown that followed.¹⁷ However, the mass petition itself was a response to growing persecution led by central

officials—including then security czar Luo Gan—suggesting that repression was already being implemented by parts of the party apparatus before the incident.¹⁸

- **Jiang Zemin's personal role:** Then premier Zhu Rongji took a conciliatory stance toward Falun Gong after the April 25 demonstration.¹⁹ He met the petitioners' representatives and orchestrated the release of the adherents in Tianjin, after which those in Beijing voluntarily dispersed. But Jiang Zemin, then the CCP general secretary and state president, overruled Zhu, calling Falun Gong a serious challenge to the regime's authority, "something unprecedented in the country since its founding 50 years ago."²⁰ In a circular dated June 7, Jiang issued an unequivocal order to "disintegrate" Falun Gong.²¹ The decision was unusually abrupt and ran contrary to earlier investigations by domestic intelligence agencies that concluded Falun Gong posed no threat.²² Some experts have claimed that Jiang was unsettled by the evident enthusiasm for Falun Gong at a time when he saw his own standing with the public was flagging.²³

Chinese state media and officials have offered their own explanation for the crackdown, seeking to frame the campaign as a necessary move against an alleged "evil cult" that had a nefarious influence on society. But such claims run counter to internal party documents and the lack of harmful outcomes in other countries where Falun Gong has spread. International scholars have repeatedly concluded that Falun Gong does not have the attributes of a cult.²⁴ Even in China, the label only appeared in party discourse in October 1999, months after the crackdown was launched, as the propaganda apparatus seized on a manipulated English translation of the Chinese term *xiejiao*. This suggests that the term was applied retroactively to justify a violent campaign that was provoking international and domestic criticism. David Ownby, a leading scholar on Chinese religions, notes:

The entire issue of the supposed cultic nature of Falun Gong was a red herring from the beginning, cleverly exploited by the Chinese state to blunt the appeal of Falun Gong and the effectiveness of the group's activities outside China.²⁵

In the context of China's authoritarian political system, once Jiang made the arbitrary and arguably illegal decision to ban Falun Gong and asserted his will over other members of the Politburo Standing Committee, there were few institutional or legal obstacles to stop what came next. Over the following months, Jiang created a special party leadership group with an extralegal, plainclothes security force to lead the fight. Established on June 10, 1999, it came to be known as the 6-10 Office.²⁶

In July 1999, the campaign began in earnest, and the full weight of the CCP's repressive apparatus was brought down on Falun Gong. Demonizing propaganda flooded the airwaves, thousands of people were detained, and millions were forced to sign pledges to stop practicing. Zhao Ming, a former Falun Gong prisoner of conscience from Beijing, explained that "the party's machinery of persecution was there—Jiang pushed the button."²⁷

Falun Gong had been allowed to grow in part because it operated in the grey zone of qigong, outside the scope of the broader restrictions on organized religion that were already in place in the 1990s. It essentially slipped through a tenuous loophole in the CCP's ideological defenses, and from that perspective, a conflict between the loosely organized, independent-

minded spiritual group and the authoritarian, atheist regime may have been inevitable. Still, under another paramount leader, the party's belated response might not have been as violent or deadly, or even taken place at all.

The Falun Gong community in China today

Given the force of the CCP's crackdown, few observers inside or outside China would have expected Falun Gong to survive. Indeed, the conventional wisdom among many scholars, journalists, and policymakers is that it was successfully crushed inside China.²⁸ In an environment of long-standing repression, it is nearly impossible to know how many people practice Falun Gong in China today. Yet 17 years after it was banned, there is reason to believe that the number remains in the millions,²⁹ and possibly the tens of millions.³⁰

Several points of information suggest that a reasonable estimate of the minimum number of people in China practicing Falun Gong today would fall in the range of 7 to 10 million, while overseas Falun Gong sources have estimated that the total is 20 to 40 million.³¹

As part of nationwide campaigns launched since 2010 to reduce the number of Falun Gong practitioners, local government websites often refer to adherents who have yet to renounce the practice and to "relapses," in which individuals resume practice following release from custody.³² In some cases, government directives provide quotas to low-level officials regarding these populations. For example, an April 2009 work plan in Jiangxi Province called for officials to reduce by 50 percent the number of people who had not renounced Falun Gong and to keep the proportion of "recidivists" within 10 percent of the local Falun Gong practitioners who had renounced the practice.³³ Applying a 10 percent return rate to the 70–100 million who were practicing in 1999 yields an estimated 7 to 10 million remaining adherents, though not all have been forced to recant in the first place, while others abandoned the practice voluntarily.

Minghui, a Chinese-language, overseas-based Falun Gong website with a robust network of contacts in China, reported in May 2009 that users uploaded and downloaded material on the site through approximately 200,000 secure internet connections in China. Official documents indicate that the sites remain active throughout the country.³⁴ Freedom House interviews with Falun Gong activists involved in coordinating such sites found that each one typically relays printed materials or discs to several dozen adherents.³⁵ This information similarly produces a minimum estimate of 7 to 10 million people practicing and sharing Falun Gong–related information, particularly since not all people practicing are necessarily engaged in such risky activity.

In terms of trajectory, lawyers interviewed by Freedom House noted numerous cases of individuals taking up the practice in recent years, long after the 1999 ban.³⁶ Documents published in mid-2013 on local government websites in Zhejiang and Hunan Provinces also speak of Falun Gong's "resurgence" and "expansion" in the area.³⁷

Given its rapid growth in the 1990s, the Falun Gong community in China might have expanded well beyond 70 million if the practice had not been banned. Accounts by adherents

Over 17 years after Falun Gong's ban, there is reason to believe that millions, and possibly tens of millions, in China continue to practice.

point to the combination of its reputed effectiveness in improving physical health and its offer of spiritual advancement without the requirement of a monastic lifestyle as a key factor that makes it attractive vis-à-vis other qigong disciplines or religious faiths.³⁸ As described in more detail below, repression has apparently eased in some locales despite the continuation of severe abuses nationally. If the perceived risk of punishment ultimately wanes in the coming years, many in China could resume their practice or take it up for the first time.

Falun Gong under Xi Jinping

After the launch of the crackdown in 1999, it became clear that Falun Gong adherents would not simply cease practicing on government orders, and the party began intensifying its efforts in 2001. A new round of demonizing propaganda flooded the airwaves in January,³⁹ and by midyear a *Washington Post* investigation found that central authorities had sanctioned the systematic use of violence to force people to renounce their belief in Falun Gong.⁴⁰ When Hu Jintao took over as general secretary of the CCP in 2003, Jiang retained significant influence as head of the military. Meanwhile, a number of Jiang's associates—including Luo Gan and later Zhou Yongkang—were placed in top positions that enabled them to continue Jiang's Falun Gong campaign after his full retirement in 2004.

[Since November 2012, at least 900 people have been imprisoned for practicing Falun Gong or disseminating information about it.](#)

As a result, during the period of Hu's leadership, hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong adherents were sent to labor camps and prisons, where they were subjected to horrific forms of torture.⁴¹ Many were detained and punished for simply possessing spiritual texts in the privacy of their homes.⁴² Central authorities periodically launched new rounds of arrests, including around the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.⁴³ In 2006, the first allegations emerged of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience being killed so that their organs could be used in transplant operations.⁴⁴

Since November 2012, when Xi Jinping took the helm of the CCP, the party-state's relationship with Falun Gong has been marked by two seemingly contradictory dynamics—ongoing severe and large-scale violations on the one hand, and reduced persecution in some locales on the other.

Ongoing violations, some escalation

Xi has made no official change to the party's policy toward Falun Gong and its stated aim of eradicating the practice. Falun Gong practitioners throughout China continue to be detained, imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes killed in what is still a massive campaign of religious persecution.

In 2013, the central 6-10 Office launched a two-year nationwide campaign titled the "final battle on education and transformation."⁴⁵ Notices of the campaign appeared on government websites throughout China and included quotas on the percentage of local Falun Gong residents who "must undergo education-study classes" each year.⁴⁶ Despite the abolition of the "reeducation through labor" (RTL) camp system in 2013, large numbers of Chinese citizens known to the authorities to practice Falun Gong remain at risk of incarceration, either through the normal court system or in extralegal detention facilities where forced renunciation sessions are conducted.⁴⁷

Freedom House analysis of Chinese court documents found evidence of at least 597 Falun Gong adherents sentenced to prison by a first instance court between January 1, 2014, and June 1, 2016, with punishments of up to 12 years.⁴⁸ In addition, the Duihua Foundation reported documenting the trials of 336 Falun Gong prisoners of conscience in 2013,⁴⁹ bringing the total to at least 933 Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned since Xi assumed leadership of the CCP. Cases of imprisonment were found in 29 out of China's 31 provinces and provincial-level municipalities.

This total is not comprehensive, however. According to Duihua, Chinese government sources suggest that the number of Falun Gong practitioners tried in 2013 could reasonably be three times the number it was able to document.⁵⁰ Falun Gong sources like Minghui have recorded over 2,500 practitioners sentenced to prison during that time period, and at least 22,000 individuals arrested since January 2013, although at least a third were later released.⁵¹ Thousands of Falun Gong practitioners are also believed to be held at extralegal "legal education centers," "black jails," and pretrial detention centers, and many others sentenced during the Jiang and Hu eras remain imprisoned.⁵²

Once in detention, Falun Gong adherents—young and old, male or female—are routinely subject to various forms of psychological and physical torture in an effort to break their will. The most prevalent methods are being forced to watch videos slandering Falun Gong and its founder, sleep deprivation, beatings, stretching in awkward postures for long periods of time, and shocks with electric batons, including to the breasts and genitals.⁵³ Such abuse has been known to cause long-term disability and sometimes death. In one high-profile case in Heilongjiang Province, 45-year-old Gao Yixi died in police custody in April 2016, just 10 days after he and his wife were taken from their home under apparent suspicion of practicing Falun Gong and disseminating information about it.⁵⁴ Minghui recorded another 292 deaths of Falun Gong practitioners as a result of abuse in custody or other forms of persecution between January 2013 and November 2016.⁵⁵

A thorough online search of references to the 6-10 Office and its work found evidence that as of June 2016, the extralegal security force remained active in all of China's provinces, autonomous regions, and provincial-level municipalities, with the exception of Tibet. A key aspect of the agency's work appears to be monitoring local residents known to practice Falun Gong and being vigilant around politically sensitive dates, such as May 13 (the anniversary of Falun Gong's introduction), April 25 (the date of the 1999 appeal at Zhongnanhai), and July 20 (marking the launch of the persecutory campaign), when Falun Gong adherents may attempt to gather together privately or engage in a public display of resilience and community education, for instance by hanging banners or disseminating literature. Indeed, interviewees repeatedly noted that large-scale arrests often occur around such dates.⁵⁶

Two developments could indirectly exacerbate conditions for Falun Gong practitioners:

- 1. Harsher penalties under Article 300 of the criminal code:** An amendment to the criminal code that came into effect in November 2015 raised the penalty under Article 300 from 15 years to life imprisonment.⁵⁷ The article, which punishes "using a heterodox religion to

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undermine implementation of the law," was added to the criminal code in October 1999 in a retroactive attempt to legalize the ban on Falun Gong.⁵⁸ Chinese judges have used the article as the basis for sentencing thousands of Falun Gong adherents, a small number of human rights lawyers, and members of various other banned faiths to prison. As of November 2016, Freedom House found no evidence that the amended article had been employed to sentence a Falun Gong practitioner to life in prison.

2. Crackdown on rights lawyers who defended Falun Gong clients: In July 2015, Chinese security agencies launched an aggressive assault on the country's contingent of human rights lawyers and the broader "rights defense" movement, detaining over 300 lawyers and their assistants. Most were subsequently released, but others remain in detention and face serious political charges of "subversion." Several of the detained—including Wang Yu, Wang Quanzhang, and Li Heping—had assisted detained Falun Gong practitioners, including in the period shortly before their own arrests. Obtaining a lawyer has become slightly more difficult for Falun Gong practitioners as a result, but hundreds of attorneys still appear willing to take up the sensitive cases.⁵⁹ This is a stark contrast to the early 2000s, when finding a lawyer who would enter a "not guilty" plea for a Falun Gong defendant was nearly impossible.

Cracks in the crackdown

Considering the CCP's track record regarding Falun Gong, a trajectory of rigid or endlessly escalating persecution might be expected. In a 2015 article, scholar Stephen Noakes and researcher Caylan Ford argue that the party is caught in a path-dependency dilemma when it comes to the group.⁶⁰ Billions of dollars have already been invested, the party's legitimacy would be seriously undermined if it were to suddenly announce a reversal of its policy, and such a change would generate pressure to loosen its grip on other religious groups. Meanwhile, one of the underlying factors that contributed to the ban—the party's deep-seated fear of any large, independent civil society group—remains firmly in place.

Surprisingly, however, there is now evidence of cracks in the repressive apparatus that have allowed some local officials to refrain from persecuting Falun Gong residents. Dynamics that were unimaginable a few years ago—the release of a veteran practitioner after only a few days detention,⁶¹ police permitting adherents to meditate in custody,⁶² or officers actively protecting people⁶³—have emerged across the country and do not appear to be isolated incidents.

The trend may have begun to affect judicial decisions, a remarkable development for a repressive campaign that has epitomized the "rule by man" attributes of China's legal system. In June 2015, a judge in Shaanxi Province issued the first known "exemption from punishment" verdict for a Falun Gong practitioner, Pang You, who was immediately released after an intense campaign on his behalf.⁶⁴ More adherents have apparently been sentenced to regular prisons since the 2013 abolition of the RTL camp system removed that alternative form of incarceration,⁶⁵ but available data indicate that the total number of people incarcerated remains far lower than when the RTL system was in place.

Several overlapping factors appear to be driving these changes:

- **Purge of key officials affiliated with the anti-Falun Gong campaign:** As part of Xi's crackdown on corruption, several high-ranking "tigers" who played a pivotal role

in promoting and implementing the anti-Falun Gong effort have been purged and sentenced to prison. The two most important are former security czar Zhou Yongkang and former 6-10 Office chief Li Dongsheng. On June 11, 2015, state media announced that Zhou had been sentenced to life imprisonment; this was almost the same day that the Shaanxi practitioner was effectively acquitted in the case mentioned above. Falun Gong activists who interact with security forces have been adept at capitalizing on such events to encourage lower-level cadres to distance themselves from the persecutory campaign.⁶⁶

- **Bureaucratic weakening of repressive institutions:** The purge of Zhou and Li, along with the abolition of the labor camp system, appears to have weakened the influence of institutions that had been critical to the campaign. Since Li's initial arrest in 2013, the central 6-10 Office has had three different leaders in as many years, with the most recent appointee—Huang Ming—assigned to the post in May 2016.⁶⁷ Such turnover, with periods of vacancy, stands in contrast to Li's four-year tenure. Meanwhile, since the conclusion of the 2013–15 "transformation" campaign, Freedom House found no evidence of a new centralized push against Falun Gong. By comparison, almost as soon as the 2010–12 effort ended, the next mobilization was launched in 2013.

In an additional sign of dwindling enthusiasm, the CCP's powerful central disciplinary inspection committee initiated a first-ever, two-month inspection tour of the central 6-10 Office in July 2016.⁶⁸ Local branches of the agency continue to function throughout the country, but with uncertainty and weaker leadership at the upper echelons, there is more room for foot-dragging by local police who find the task of persecuting Falun Gong distasteful, or are concerned that they could later be punished for any abuses.

- **Long-term impact of direct outreach to legal-security apparatus:** For over a decade, Falun Gong practitioners inside and outside China, along with their lawyers and family members, have been directly communicating with security agents and judges by phone and in person, urging them not to arrest local Falun Gong residents or arguing that the campaign is illegal and the defendant innocent. Gradually, these efforts appear to be bearing fruit. One interviewee who has made thousands of such calls reflected that "in places all over China, [police] are clearer about the true situation; there are many cases of police secretly helping Falun Gong."⁶⁹ A lawyer who has represented Falun Gong clients made a similar observation that "because Falun Gong practitioners have talked to local officials, some of them have changed their attitude and realize that Falun Gong members are not that threatening, so they won't arrest them."⁷⁰

A new set of Supreme People's Court guidelines to ease filing procedures came into effect on May 1, 2015, and adherents in China and abroad have taken advantage by initiating an even more daring effort: filing criminal complaints with the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate regarding the abuses they have suffered, and naming Jiang Zemin as responsible for the crimes (see below).⁷¹ While many factors appear to drive torture victims to file such complaints, one motivation repeatedly raised by interviewees was the desire to inform those at the highest echelons of the legal system as to Jiang's culpability, with the hope that they will make "the right choice" and either "bring Jiang to justice" or at least avoid participating themselves.⁷²

Key methods of political control

Since July 1999, the full array of CCP suppression tactics have been deployed against Falun Gong. In the first days and months of the campaign, the party's methods were very public, reminiscent of a Cultural Revolution–like “struggle”: a state media propaganda blitz, public book burnings, mass detentions in stadiums, televised show trials, beatings of protesters on Tiananmen Square.⁷³ Over time, especially once it became apparent that Falun Gong would not be so easily crushed and that public displays of repression were hurting China's international reputation, the tactics became more discreet.

Seventeen years into the campaign, measures like detention, imprisonment, torture, and censorship remain routine in the party's handling of Falun Gong. However, a number of trends in the past five years provide additional insight into Chinese officials' evolving priorities and methods:

[Falun Gong practitioners have been jailed for leaving voicemail recordings, posting messages to WeChat or QQ, or circumventing censorship to access blocked websites.](#)

1. Electronic surveillance to supplement physical monitoring: Chinese citizens known to practice Falun Gong have long been under intensive surveillance by both security forces and neighborhood committee members, who track their movements and make periodic home visits to determine whether they continue to practice. Authorities have also monitored targets' phone and internet use since the early days of the persecution, but the Chinese government's surveillance capabilities have expanded significantly over the past decade. Today, Chinese security forces also draw on video cameras in public places and geolocation data to identify Falun Gong practitioners and catch those disseminating information. Court documents and anecdotes provided by Falun Gong refugees illustrate the varied and detailed types of evidence that authorities collect to convict adherents, from video footage on a bus to internet browsing histories and mobile phone records.⁷⁴

2. Continuing focus on ‘transformation’ as a key goal: In 2008, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China defined “transformation” as “a process of ideological reprogramming whereby practitioners are subjected to various methods of physical and psychological coercion until they recant their belief in Falun Gong.”⁷⁵ From the start, it has been a central goal of the anti-Falun Gong campaign, a way of “eradicating” the practice by forcing its believers to renounce it, often in writing. Authorities use any means necessary to achieve this aim, including physical torture, punishing family members or fellow inmates, and administering drugs to weaken adherents' mental resolve.⁷⁶

Government websites refer to “transformation quotas” and the need to check on those who have been released to make sure they do not resume practice.⁷⁷ Though recanting one's beliefs is often a precondition for early—or any—release from custody, submitting to such pressures does not necessarily put an end to a detainee's persecution. Many “reformed” adherents are simply moved to another section of the prison to focus on forced labor, and some are required to prove the sincerity of their own transformation by pressuring other Falun Gong detainees to recant. Former prisoners who have recanted under pressure speak about the long-lasting psychological impact of having been forced to betray deeply held beliefs.

3. Countering Falun Gong information efforts: Censorship and propaganda have been critical

components of the anti-Falun Gong campaign since its inception, as the CCP had to convince the majority of Chinese people that a popular qigong was suddenly a threat. Studies of online censorship in China have consistently found that terms related to Falun Gong are among the most heavily restricted.⁷⁸ Practitioners have responded with their own massive, multifaceted, and sophisticated public education campaign, both online and offline.⁷⁹

Making headway in the resulting cat-and-mouse game has become a core element of routine anti-Falun Gong work in the Chinese security services. In a sample of 59 available court verdicts from 2016 analyzed by Freedom House, all of the Falun Gong activists sentenced to prison were punished for exercising their right to free expression or access to information. Their alleged “crimes” included leaving voicemail recordings, posting messages to the social media platforms WeChat or QQ,⁸⁰ using a virtual private network (VPN) to download content from Minghui,⁸¹ or simply possessing large numbers of leaflets or discs for apparent dissemination.

Meanwhile, local 6-10 Office websites across the country constantly reference the need to clean up Falun Gong literature circulating in their district,⁸² encourage residents to turn in currency notes with pro-Falun Gong messages printed on them,⁸³ and prevent installation of satellite dishes that allow viewers to access otherwise blocked foreign and Chinese dissident stations.⁸⁴ On the propaganda side, authorities in Shaanxi Province have engaged in their own innovations, commissioning the April 2016 production of an apparent anti-Falun Gong “microfilm”—a short online video of the kind that has become increasingly popular in the smartphone era.⁸⁵

4. Isolating Falun Gong from societal support: In recent years, a growing number of nonpractitioners have taken steps to support Falun Gong, including human rights lawyers who defend practitioners in court and ordinary citizens who sign petitions to free a detained Falun Gong neighbor.⁸⁶ In response, Chinese authorities have employed various tactics to drive a wedge between Falun Gong believers and their existing or potential supporters. Lawyers who take Falun Gong cases or challenge abusive practices have been beaten, disbarred, harassed, and imprisoned. Collective punishment tactics threaten landlords, colleagues, and fellow inmates if someone in their midst is found to be practicing Falun Gong.⁸⁷ And anti-Falun Gong propaganda initiatives have encouraged the public to participate, for instance by signing “pledge cards” or writing essays for a school contest.⁸⁸

Wherever known Falun Gong practitioners go and whatever they do, they are at risk of detention simply for self-identifying as a believer.

Taken together, these repressive activities seep into every corner of life and society—schools and workplaces, supermarkets and public transportation, passport requests and *hukou* residency registrations, laptops and smartphones. Wherever known Falun Gong practitioners go and whatever they do, particularly if it involves interaction with official agencies, they are under constant surveillance and at risk of detention simply for self-identifying as a believer.

Many of these measures and the way they are implemented are also illegal. They contravene China’s international human rights commitments, many Chinese laws, and even the CCP’s own stated policies, like the declaration that “any action which forces a believer not to believe” is an “infringement of freedom of religious belief.”⁸⁹

The money trail: Expenditures, exploitation, and organ harvesting

The campaign against Falun Gong is very expensive, requiring significant investments of material and human resources. Determining the full annual cost is arguably an impossible task. Nevertheless, some official data are available online, including the annual reported expenditure calculations of 13 local 6-10 Office branches in various counties and districts across nine provinces in 2014 and 2015. The total expenditure for these branches, covering a population of some 14 million, was 8.9 million yuan (\$1.37 million). If that per capita investment is applied to China's total population of 1.37 billion, the estimated annual budget for all 6-10 Office branches nationwide is 879 million yuan (\$135 million).⁹⁰ And this is only for one part of the party-state apparatus involved in the suppression of Falun Gong.

The role of money in the CCP's campaign goes beyond simple expenditures, however. Various forms of economic incentives and exploitation have given individuals within the party-state apparatus a financial interest in continued repression. They include:

- Opportunistic extortion, bribe taking, or theft of property by local police⁹¹
- Officially sanctioned bonuses or financial demerits for security personnel, rewards for residents who report Falun Gong activities, and fines imposed on adherents by the courts⁹²
- Systematic forced labor by detained Falun Gong adherents, a phenomenon that continues at prisons and transitional detention centers even after the abolition of RTL camps⁹³

It is in the context of dehumanizing propaganda, severe abuse in custody, and economic inducements that the ultimate form of financial exploitation has been reported: the killing of Falun Gong detainees and the extraction of their organs to be sold at high prices to Chinese patients and foreign "transplant tourists" as part of a multibillion-dollar industry. The allegations first surfaced in 2006, and several investigations by foreign journalists and legal specialists have found them to be credible;⁹⁴ some members of the medical community have voiced their own concerns.⁹⁵

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There are indubitably serious problems surrounding the sources of organs for transplants in China.⁹⁶ A thorough investigation into these sources is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, Freedom House reviewed available evidence compiled by other investigators (including phone calls made to Chinese doctors), interviewed former Falun Gong prisoners of conscience who provided detailed accounts of blood tests in custody, spoke to a Taiwanese doctor whose patients have traveled to China for transplants, and met with the friend of a military hospital employee who had firsthand knowledge of organ extraction from a Falun Gong detainee as recently as 2011.⁹⁷ The above review found credible evidence suggesting that beginning in the early 2000s, Falun Gong detainees were killed for their organs on a large scale.

There are reasons to believe that such abuses continue. The organ transplant industry in China remains enormous and growing, even as the number of judicially executed prisoners has declined over the past decade.⁹⁸ After admitting that extracting organs from executed prisoners was problematic, the Chinese government has initiated a voluntary organ-donor

system, but its capacity remains small. Moreover, in 2014, a top health official announced that organs from prisoners would be embedded within the same database, even though prisoners are not in a position to provide free consent for “voluntary” donations.⁹⁹

A detailed June 2016 study of publicly available data on the number of transplants being conducted at medical institutions in China found that the scale is many times greater than the 10,000 transplants per year often cited by officials.¹⁰⁰ This would indicate that the discrepancy between known supply and actual transplant volume may be even larger than previously appreciated, increasing the risk to Falun Gong practitioners, other prisoners of conscience, and criminal detainees.

Community response and resistance

Falun Gong believers in China have responded to CCP persecution with tenacity, nonviolence, and creativity. In the first days and weeks of the ban, many picketed local government offices. When these lower-level officials proved unreceptive, adherents began writing letters to higher authorities or petitioning directly in Beijing. They shared their positive experiences with the practice in an effort to convince officials that Falun Gong posed no threat to society. By 2000, practitioners unfurling banners and performing qigong exercises were a daily presence on Tiananmen Square, though most were immediately arrested.

Falun Gong believers in China have responded to CCP persecution with tenacity, nonviolence, and creativity.

In 2001, as it became clear that a top-down reversal of the ban was unlikely, adherents turned their focus to the Chinese public and local police, engaging in a proactive effort to educate them about Falun Gong and urge them not to participate in the persecution. Printed leaflets and homemade videos were produced and disseminated en masse in a form of activism that one scholarly account likens to a “Chinese samizdat.”¹⁰¹ Falun Gong devotees in the diaspora designed censorship circumvention software, produced videos for dissemination inside China, and developed newspaper, radio, and satellite television outlets to relay uncensored news about Falun Gong and other human rights issues to audiences inside and outside China.

The Minghui website has itself played a critical role, serving as a communications channel between overseas and Chinese practitioners, a clearinghouse for accounts of persecution, and an activist resource. One section of the website serves as something of a toolkit, replete with the latest versions of circumvention tools, videos for download, and instructions for hanging banners and making automated phone calls.¹⁰²

These distribution channels and content have evolved as practitioners gauge what might resonate with Chinese audiences, and as many lost faith in the CCP’s willingness—or even ability—to reverse the campaign. Some types of content have been consistent: personal accounts of the benefits of the practice, examples of rights abuses occurring nationwide and locally, evidence of Falun Gong’s spread around the world, and specialized content to debunk claims in party propaganda.¹⁰³

Over the past decade, a broader array of information has joined this regular repertoire for circulation in China, including DVDs of classical Chinese dance performances and the *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party (Jiuping Gongchandang)*, a book-length series

of articles first published in 2004 that offers a critical narrative of the CCP's history and a moral vision for how the country might recover from decades of violent political campaigns, including the one against Falun Gong. Such content suggests that Falun Gong activists are no longer focused simply on clearing the practice's name and ending the persecution, but are also seeking to help revive traditional culture and prepare the Chinese population for a future without the CCP.

Falun Gong practitioners' grassroots resistance and advocacy efforts in China since 2012 can be sorted into five major categories:

1. Campaigns to win the release of detained practitioners: When a Falun Gong practitioner is detained, particularly if the person is well known within the community, adherents inside and outside China have developed various tactics for applying grassroots pressure on local officials to secure the detainee's release. For example, several teams of volunteers outside China make phone calls to local police, 6-10 Office agents, prosecutors, and judges, using numbers obtained from inside China (sometimes from sympathetic police). According to the coordinator of one such team, over 3,000 calls might be made on behalf of 350 detained individuals in a given week.¹⁰⁴ Within China, adherents write letters to local authorities, hire human rights lawyers to represent the detained believer, and increasingly circulate petitions among nonpractitioners calling for the individual's release.¹⁰⁵

Although it is difficult to track the impact of these efforts, there have been cases in which the detainee was released, as with Pang You in Shaanxi, noted above. Pang's lawyer reported that when he met with an officer to gain access to his client, a stack of letters was handed to the officer and phones were constantly ringing; the policeman said the calls were from friends of the detainee.¹⁰⁶ At least 1,000 residents in Pang's hometown of Beijing also signed a petition calling for his release.¹⁰⁷

2. Adapting public education to new technology and censorship: Increases in mobile phone and internet penetration in China have created both challenges and opportunities for Falun Gong practitioners' public education efforts. Certain types of media, like video discs, have become less prevalent and therefore less effective. Some activists have switched to social media applications like QQ or WeChat, which allow them to share links to videos or other content in a manner that does not trigger automated keyword filtering.¹⁰⁸ Yet increased government censorship, tighter surveillance, and more consistent enforcement of real-name registration have created new obstacles, requiring constant innovation. For example, rather than making individual calls, it is now safer and more efficient to obtain a large number of registered phone cards and devices, then use them to make simultaneous calls with automated recordings. After a Beijing adherent was tracked down by authorities via geolocation technology, activists in that city began urging practitioners to move from place to place while making the calls.¹⁰⁹

3. Using legal channels to challenge persecution: The Chinese legal system, with its institutionalized political control, is better suited to serve as a tool of repression than as a guarantor of justice. Nonetheless, as a matter of principle and with the hope of giving those within the system a chance to play a positive role, Falun Gong adherents have regularly engaged in legal activism. As a larger number of human rights lawyers have been willing to take Falun Gong cases, more adherents and their families have

been hiring attorneys to enter not guilty pleas and appeal convictions. Court documents analyzed by Freedom House found that between January 2014 and June 2016, second instance courts had issued at least 275 decisions in Falun Gong cases, indicating that a certain percentage of jailed adherents decided to appeal despite the extremely slim—or even nonexistent—chances of a reversed decision.

4. Lodging legal complaints against Jiang Zemin to seek accountability: Since May 2015, large numbers of Falun Gong torture survivors have gone on the offensive, taking advantage of a change in regulations to lodge criminal complaints that name Jiang Zemin as the one responsible for their suffering. New Supreme People’s Court guidelines that took effect on May 1, 2015, require judicial authorities to accept criminal complaints submitted by individual citizens; previously, they had the leeway to reject the complaints. A number of articles on Minghui raised awareness of the change and proposed that adherents take advantage of Xi’s anticorruption drive—which had brought down key Jiang allies—by submitting their accounts of persecution and calling for Jiang to be investigated.

Victims of persecution inside and outside China began drafting complaints and mailing them to the Supreme People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, either individually or jointly. One interviewee who had done so reported that he was able to track the package and received confirmation that it had arrived at its destination and was signed for, though he had received no further news of its processing.¹¹⁰ As of July 2016, Minghui reported that over 200,000 practitioners had submitted complaints, often sharing a copy for publication on the website. Although unable to verify such a large number of cases, Freedom House researchers obtained copies of several complaints and spoke to individuals from Beijing, Shanghai, Heilongjiang, and the United States who had submitted complaints and personally knew dozens of others who had done the same. Many noted that while some plaintiffs had been imprisoned, the vast majority had not experienced retribution or had been quickly released.

5. Encouraging fellow citizens to renounce the CCP: Since late 2004, a centerpiece of content disseminated by Falun Gong practitioners has been the *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party* mentioned above, including text, video, and audio versions. Noakes and Ford explain that the book’s publishers also “encourage citizens to issue ‘tuidang’ [‘withdraw from the party’] statements, symbolically severing their affiliations with the Party, youth league, or young pioneers as a form of catharsis and a way to clear the conscience.”¹¹¹ Freedom House interviews with Falun Gong activists and references in Chinese official documents indicate that this has become a focus of outreach efforts in China.¹¹²

A 2011 study of the phenomenon found that the aim of those involved was not to overthrow the CCP. Rather, the campaign stems from the belief that the CCP is on its last legs, but that in order to ensure a peaceful transition to a less repressive form of government, the Chinese people must undertake a process of moral awakening and a commitment to nonviolence.¹¹³ As of November 2016, the overseas website tracking the tuidang movement claimed that over 255 million people inside and outside China had published statements. Although this figure could not be verified, Chinese court documents from early 2016 identify multiple cases in which Falun Gong adherents were sentenced to prison for possessing tuidang literature, indicating that the CCP itself is taking the movement seriously.¹¹⁴

Falun Gong outreach efforts and advocacy campaigns appear to have had at least some success, despite the harsh environment in which Falun Gong adherents in China operate. The sheer scale of information sharing is evident from court documents, in which a single defendant is often accused of possessing hundreds of leaflets, DVDs, or phone cards. Some practitioners have been released after intense campaigns on their behalf, and some proportion of police who receive phone calls have reportedly changed their attitudes and committed to treat detained practitioners more humanely.¹¹⁵

Perhaps most impressive is the large contingent of nonpractitioners who have joined Falun Gong initiatives. Despite the 2015 crackdown on human rights lawyers, hundreds continue to represent Falun Gong clients.¹¹⁶ Tens of thousands of people around China have signed petitions, not only for the release of detained neighbors, but more recently in support of Jiang Zemin's prosecution.¹¹⁷ The aforementioned 2011 study of tuidang statements and accounts from Freedom House interviewees indicate that the majority of people making such commitments are not Falun Gong adherents. Meanwhile, a number of high-profile human rights and democracy activists have published their own separation statements over the years, including Gao Zhisheng, Hu Jia, Wei Jingsheng, and Yang Jianli.

The simple fact that Falun Gong has survived the CCP's onslaught is impressive and amounts to a genuine failure of the party's repressive apparatus.

Future outlook

In today's China, Falun Gong remains a taboo subject. Many Chinese still believe party propaganda that leads them to fear or even hate Falun Gong practitioners. And on a daily basis, large numbers of judges, prosecutors, and police play an active role in the arrest, imprisonment, and torture of Chinese citizens who persist in their devotion to Falun Gong. Nevertheless, in July 1999, few people inside or outside China would have suspected that 17 years later, millions might still be practicing Falun Gong, neighbors would be signing pro-Falun Gong petitions, and Jiang Zemin would be the subject of a wave of criminal complaints.

The simple fact that Falun Gong has survived the CCP's onslaught is impressive and amounts to a genuine failure of the party's repressive apparatus. When one considers this reality and the factors that led to the ban, it is hard not to conclude that Jiang and the CCP have created a self-fulfilling prophecy, generating the very threats they feared by turning tens of millions of politically loyal citizens and party members into an army of dedicated activists at odds with the CCP.

The contradictory trends evident since Xi became general secretary make it difficult to predict how the party will treat Falun Gong in the future, but this very uncertainty represents a change from the previous outlook of unrelenting repression. Given how unimaginable it was a few years ago that powerful figures like Zhou Yongkang would be imprisoned, it is not entirely outside the realm of possibility that Jiang Zemin might also come under fire, if only on corruption charges rather than for his pivotal role in the anti-Falun Gong campaign.

Absent such a move, which could clear the path for a top-down reversal of the campaign, the choices of individual local officials will continue to be both critically important and widely divergent, sometimes making the difference between life and death.¹¹⁸

NOTES

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 62. Matthew Robertson, "Falun Gong Looks Forward to a New China," *Epoch Times*, June 30, 2016, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/2062536-falun-gong-looks-forward-to-a-new-china/>.
 63. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Tianjin, who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 64. Interview with Wang Youqun and interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 65. Sarah Cook, *Politburo's Predicament*.
 66. One interviewee, who regularly makes phone calls to police, explained that adherents refer to the cases as a way of demonstrating to lower officials that no one is able to protect them from the consequences of the crimes they are committing, saying, "This [point about Zhou and Li's purge] has the most power to shock them. The top of the 6-10 Office is taken down, so what kind of future do you guys have?" Interview with overseas Falun Gong practitioner who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 67. Larry Ong, "Chinese Regime Inspection of 'Chinese Gestapo' Begins with Unusual Announcement," *Epoch Times*, July 8, 2016, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/2110591-inspection-of-chinese-gestapo-begins-with-unusual-announcement/>; Yunshi Lin, "62 Sui Fu Zhenghua Ren Gonganbu Changwu Fubuzhang" [62-year-old Fu Zhenghua took up the post of administrative vice minister of Ministry of Public Security], *Caixin*, May 9, 2016, <http://archive.is/gQozJ> <http://archive.is/mdWTV>.
 68. Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, "Zhongyang Di Shixi Xunshizu Zhuangxiang Xunshi Zhongyang Fangfan He Chuli Xiejiao Wenti Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi Gongzuo Dongyuan Hui Zhaokai" [Mobilization meeting of the special inspection of the 14th central inspection team on the Offices of the Central Leading Group on Dealing with Heterodox Religions was convened], July 7, 2016, <http://archive.is/cyFVI> <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/2110591-inspection-of-chinese-gestapo-begins-with-unusual-announcement/>.
 69. Interview with overseas Falun Gong practitioner who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 70. Interview with human rights lawyer A, November 2013.
 71. Falun Dafa Information Center, "As Xi Jinping Visits U.S., Torture Victims Sue Ex-leader Jiang Zemin in China," September 22, 2015, <http://faluninfo.net/article/1323/As-Xi-Jinping-Visits-US-Torture-Victims-Sue-Ex-leader-Jiang-Zemin-in-China/?cid=84>.
 72. Interviews with Falun Gong practitioners from Beijing and Shanghai who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 73. Noakes and Ford, "Managing Political Opposition Groups in China: Explaining the Continuing Anti-Falun Gong Campaign."
 74. Case of Deng and Chen Bingyu from January 14, 2016: Chen Bingyu, one of the two defendants, was caught on a bus spreading Falun Gong material; bus and road video footage was later used as evidence to charge her. See Shanghai Huangpu District People's Court, "Cao Yueling Zuzhi Liyong Huidaomen Xiejiao Zuzhi Liyong Mixin Pohuai Falv Shishi Yishen Xingshi Panjueshu" [Judgement of the first trial of Cao Yueling undermining the practice of law by organizing and using

- superstitious sects and heretical organization, and using feudalistic superstition], *China Judgements Online*, April 26, 2016, <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=d227f882-f7b3-4118-833f-90049cbba7a0>.
75. U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "2008 Annual Report," October 31, 2008, <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/annual-reports/2008-annual-report>.
 76. Interview with Chen Zhenping, August 2016.
 77. Noakes and Ford, "Path-Dependence and the Management of Political Opposition Groups."
 78. Ibid.
 79. Falun Gong adherents have made use of older media like homemade leaflets and shortwave radio, as well as cutting-edge technologies like internet circumvention tools, social media applications, and multimedia mobile-phone messages, to share information debunking state propaganda, exposing abuses, and questioning the legitimacy of CCP rule.
 80. Noakes and Ford, "Path-Dependence and the Management of Political Opposition Groups"; Shandong Province Guan County People's Court, "Ni Mou Liyong Huidaomen Xiejiao Zuzhi Liyong Mixin Pohuai Falv Shishi Yishen Xingshi Panjueshu" [Judgement of the first trial of Ni for undermining the practice of law by organizing and using superstitious sects and heretical organization, and using feudalistic superstition], *China Judgements Online*, April 28, 2016, <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=ab6a7014-6396-4450-b5af-41f8973eb734>.
 81. Heilongjiang Province Baoqing County People's Court, "Gai Mou Mou Jiang Mou Mou Liyong Xiejiao Zuzhi Pohuai Falv Shishi Yishen Xingshi Panjueshu" [Judgement of the first trial of Gao and Jiang for undermining the practice of law by using heretical organization], *China Judgements Online*, March 29, 2016, <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=d-cc49862-5359-449f-b021-93644b91ce12>.
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 86. Sarah Cook, *The Politburo's Predicament*.
 87. Donghai County Niushan Street Office, "Niushan Zhashi Tuijin Wu Xiejiao Chuangjian" [Niushan Steadily Promotes the Achievement of Zero Heretical Organization], November 3, 2014, <https://archive.is/U6Re8>.
 88. U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "Communist Party Calls for Increased Efforts to 'Transform' Falun Gong Practitioners as Part of Three-Year Campaign"; Noakes and Ford, "Path-Dependence and the Management of Political Opposition Groups."
 89. Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Zhonggongzhongyang Guanyu Yinfa 'Guanyu Woguo Shehuizhuyi Shiqi Zongjiao Wenti De Jiben Guangdian He Jiben Zhengce' De Tongzhi" [Notification from Central Committee of the Communist Party of China about distributing 'The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period'], State Administration of Religious Affairs of PRC, March 31, 1982, <http://www.sara.gov.cn/zcfg/zc/497.htm>. An English translation is available here: Donald MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 8–26, https://www.purdue.edu/crcs/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Document_no_19_1982.pdf.
 90. See the following link for example; the remaining 12 are on file with the author. Zhangzhou Municipal Government, "2015 Niandu Zhonggong Zhangzhou Shiwei 610 Bangongshi Yusan Shuoming" [2015 Budget Introduction of the Communist Party of China Zhangzhou Municipal Committee 610 Office], May 27, 2016, <http://archive.is/8OP8e>.
 91. Falun Gong adherents and their families often report small-scale extortion or theft by local police. Relatives are asked to pay various "fees" to cover the food and lodging costs of a family member taken away to an extralegal "forced conversion" center, or must bribe police to secure the release of a loved one. Refugees report that when police raid a home in search of evidence of Falun Gong-related activism, personal property, cash, and electronic devices are often seized and never returned. Court documents corroborate this, often listing multiple computers, phones, and printers that were taken from the defendants' home. Driving these dynamics is the need to cover the costs of the campaign, an air of impunity for harassing a demonized minority, and general corruption in China's law enforcement bodies.
 92. Some monetary rewards and demerits have an official imprimatur. Court documents indicate that alongside prison sentences, judges imposed fines ranging from 1,000 to 20,000 yuan in early 2016 on Falun Gong practitioners who were caught engaging in personal practice, outreach, or activism. Local websites have been found to advertise rewards for residents who report a Falun Gong practitioner to the police. Promotions and monetary bonuses are offered to officers who effectively crack down on or "transform" adherents. By contrast, journalist Ian Johnson recorded in detail how a provincial party secretary in Shandong imposed fines on lower-level officials if a Falun Gong adherent from their area lodged an appeal in Beijing, creating incentives for torture that led to numerous deaths in custody in 1999–2000. Ian Johnson, "Death Trap: How One Chinese City Resorted to Atrocities to Control Falun Dafa," *Wall Street Journal*, December 26, 2000, <http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/ian-johnson>.
 93. Forced labor in custody has been a common experience for many detained Falun Gong adherents and has received international attention when detainees' hidden notes appear in products purchased by foreign consumers. Although many of China's prisoners (criminal and political) are forced to engage in such work, the connection to Falun Gong has been especially

- notable given the large influx of prisoners from among the group's believers following the 1999 crackdown, particularly at RTL camps. This exploitative dimension of the anti-Falun Gong campaign has not subsided with the recent abolition of the RTL system, however. Both judicial prisons and transitional detention centers are sites of forced labor, sometimes on a scale even larger than at an RTL camp. With larger numbers of Falun Gong cases being handled by the courts following the RTL abolition, adherents have inevitably become a larger contingent of the workforce at formal prisons.
94. Kilgour and Matas, "Bloody Harvest," Ethan Gutmann, *The Slaughter: Mass Killings, Organ Harvesting, and China's Secret Solution to its Dissident Problem* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2014).
 95. See for example A. Sharif, M. Fiatarone Singh, T. Trey, and J. Lavee, "Organ procurement from executed prisoners in China," *American Journal of Transplantation* 14, no. 10 (2014): 2246–2252, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ajt.12871/pdf>.
 96. A lack of transparency is exacerbated by Chinese officials' vacillating explanations of their sources. For example, after years of denying that executed prisoners were used to supply organs for transplant, officials admitted in November 2006—shortly after the emergence of the more damning allegations regarding Falun Gong—that the majority came from prisoners. Anna Schecter, "China Admits Selling Prisoners' Organs," *The Blotter* (blog), ABC News, November 27, 2006, http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2006/11/china_admits_se.html.
 97. Interview with Taiwanese urologist who wished to remain anonymous, March 2016; interview with a technologist and Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016. The Beijing interviewee's friend apparently relayed the highly sensitive incident to him as a warning, knowing that he was a Falun Gong practitioner.
 98. Duihua Foundation, "China Executed 2,400 People in 2013," October 20, 2014, http://duihua.org/wp/?page_id=9270.
 99. A. Sharif, M. Fiatarone Singh, T. Trey, and J. Lavee, "Organ procurement from executed prisoners in China,"
 100. David Kilgour, Ethan Gutmann, David Matas, "Bloody Harvest/The Slaughter: An Update," June 22, 2016, http://endorganpiling.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Bloody_Harvest-The_Slaughter-June-23-V2.pdf.
 101. Noakes and Ford, "Path-Dependence and the Management of Political Opposition Groups."
 102. See "Basic Technologies of Information Spot," Minghui, <http://www.minghui.org/mh/fenlei/79/>.
 103. Noakes and Ford, "Managing Political Opposition Groups in China: Explaining the Continuing Anti-Falun Gong Campaign"; interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Shanghai who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 104. Interview with overseas Falun Gong practitioner who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 105. Interview with Wang Youqun; interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing; see also Sarah Cook, *Politburo's Predicament*.
 106. Interview with Wang Youqun, who helped hire the lawyer for Pang.
 107. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing, June 2016. See also Frank Fang, "Once an Official, Now a Target in China," *Epoch Times*, January 25, 2015, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/1220423-once-an-official-now-a-target-in-china/>.
 108. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Shanghai, June 2016.
 109. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing, June 2016.
 110. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Shanghai, June 2016.
 111. Noakes and Ford, "Managing Political Opposition Groups in China."
 112. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Shanghai, June 2016; interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Tianjin now living in the United States, April 2016; Shandong Province Junan County People's Court, "Wangmou Zuzhi Liyong Huidaomen Xiejiao Zuzhi Liyong Mixin Pohuai Falv Shishi Yishen Xingshi Panjueshu" [Judgement of the first trial of Wang for undermining the practice of law by organizing and using superstitious sects and heretical organization, and using feudalistic superstition], *China Judgements Online*, May 20, 2016, <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=7e68a163-05c4-4e67-9b1b-c63bb7bafdde>.
 113. Caylan Ford, "Tradition and Dissent in China: The Tuidang Movement and Its Challenge to the Communist Party," master's thesis, George Washington University, May 15, 2011, https://www.allmystery.de/dateien/79056_1337890746_Ford_Caylan2011Tradition_and_Dissent_in_China-The_Tuidang_Movement_and_its_Challenge_to_the_CP_MA-Thesis.pdf.
 114. See for example this case of a Falun Gong practitioner from Shandong Province who was sentenced to three years in prison in April 2016 for possessing, among other items, copies of the *Nine Commentaries* for apparent dissemination to others. Shandong Province Junan County People's Court, "Wangmou Zuzhi Liyong Huidaomen Xiejiao Zuzhi Liyong Mixin Pohuai Falv Shishi Yishen Xingshi Panjueshu" [Judgement of the first trial of Wang for undermining the practice of law by organizing and using superstitious sects and heretical organization, and using feudalistic superstition], *China Judgements Online*, May 20, 2016, <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=7e68a163-05c4-4e67-9b1b-c63bb7bafdde>. See also this case of a Falun Gong adherent from Shandong who was sentenced to three years in prison in January 2016 for possessing, among other items, instructions on how to renounce the party: Shandong Province Mengyin County People's Court, "Zhangmou Jia, Zhangmou Yi Zuzhi Liyong Huidaomen Xiejiao Zuzhi Liyong Mixin Pohuai Falv Shishi Yishen Xingshi Panjueshu" [Judgement of the first trial of Zhang A and Zhang B for undermining the practice of law by organizing and using superstitious sects and heretical organizations, and using feudalistic superstition], *China Judgements Online*, January 30, 2016, <http://wenshu.court.gov.cn/content/content?DocID=bc33df52-ab28-46b9-804a-30f5db18fbc2>.
 115. Interview with overseas Falun Gong practitioner who wished to remain anonymous, June 2016.
 116. "Minghui Human Rights Report 2015: 501 New Trials of Falun Gong Practitioners," Minghui, January 20, 2016, <http://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2016/1/20/154880.html>.
 117. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner in Beijing, June 2016.
 118. One interviewee described variation in official attitudes even among districts within the same city. Interview with Falun Gong practitioner from Shanghai, June 2016.