

CHINA'S ETHNIC POLICY SINCE 2009

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Executive Summary

1. A strong political will to revamp China's ethnic policy prevailed among the top leadership after the 2009 Ürümqi Riot. However, China has been hesitant about overhauling this celebrated system of "Ethnic Regional Autonomy". It is too big to fail.
2. Heavy measures to maintain stability dominated the ethnic landscape. In Xinjiang, campaigns seek to conduct full-scale surveillance on the daily life, especially on religion, of the ethnic minorities. In Tibet, anti-separatist work focuses more on the flow of people and sensitive information. Measures against self-immolation have been hardened.
3. More than ever, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) believes that the wide-range coverage of social welfare will strengthen its influence in the ethnic areas. Comprehensive public services are rendered in terms of medical care, pensions, housing, education and employment.
4. At the CCP's high-profile Central Conference on Ethnic Work (CCEW) held in September 2014, Xi Jinping laid out his ethnic policy. Xi proclaimed the success of the Ethnic Regional Autonomy policy; he adopted a multi-culturalist outlook, celebrating ethnic diversity under an overarching "Chinese culture".
5. Xi emphasises equal access to public services in a given area and stronger local governance to monitor mobility of population and information. He also aims to "legalise the governance of ethnic affairs". Clearly, his ethnic policy seeks to combine CCP's pre-1978 and post-1978 heritages.
6. Under Xi's leadership, policies in Xinjiang and Tibet converge in a number of shared goals: perpetual stability, sustainable development, solid grass-roots governance, full-scale public service, rule of law and the nurturing of new ethnic elites. Major differences appear in the religious sector.

7. The CCEW and subsequent documents also laid out four areas for economic development—infrastructure, poverty alleviation, urbanisation and ecology.
8. Education was top in priority, suggesting that Beijing is determined to cultivate a new generation of ethnic minorities who are loyal, law-abiding and bilingual, with competitive vocational training.
9. Challenges however remain. Maintaining stability is becoming costly and unsustainable. Religious policy may radically alter the religious landscape. For the locals, economic development may bring little benefit. Ethnic migrants may have difficulties integrating into urban life.