

**ISOLATED BUT HAPPY:
THE SOCIAL PROFILE OF
UIGHURS IN CHINA**

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Executive Summary

1. The rising presence of militant Uighurs in terrorist incidents in Southeast Asia has once again put the spotlight on Uighurs, the Muslim minority in China's northwest Xinjiang region.
2. In a national survey conducted in China, respondents were asked about their life conditions and attitudes towards their life, community and broader society. Results show that Uighurs' educational levels and health conditions are not significantly worse than other groups, and in some aspects even better than Han Chinese or other ethnic minorities in the country.
3. Yet Uighurs are considerably disadvantaged in the Chinese language, which may lead to their high rate of unemployment and a much lower level of income.
4. Although being swept by the rapid modernisation process introduced by Han Chinese, the local Uighur community is still in good shape. Social order is generally better than that of communities of other ethnic groups.
5. In comparison with Han and other minorities, Uighurs are more likely to trust their neighbours and less likely to trust strangers in society, a sign that their community is internally coherent but relatively alienated from the broader Chinese society.
6. Uighurs are more confident in and optimistic about future improvement of their social status. They are more content with what they have gained in life. Consequently, they are generally happier than other ethnic groups.
7. In short, Uighurs as a whole are a relatively isolated group in Chinese society. They are economically less developed and more suspicious of broader society. However, as long as they stay in their own community, they are happier, more trustful and optimistic.

8. A major challenge may come from religion. Data shows that Uighurs are far more religiously active than other groups in China. The spread of political Islam from the Middle East and Beijing's restrictive policy are contributors to the radicalisation of some Uighurs.
9. In the long term, Chinese leaders will have to figure out a more flexible religion policy and make greater efforts to integrate Uighurs into a multi-ethnic Chinese nation.