

**GRIEVANCES OF CHINA'S ETHNIC
MINORITIES: ANALYSING
THEIR POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

SHAN Wei

EAI Background Brief No. 515

Date of Publication: 25 March 2010

Executive Summary

1. The riots in Tibet and the recent violent ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang revealed deeply rooted ethnic tensions in China, which call into question the official claim that China is a “harmonious family for the 56 ethnic groups.”
2. One of the major reasons for ethnic conflicts is “grievance,” a feeling of suffering from unfair treatments, such as income inequality, lack of political rights, cultural discrimination, etc.
3. A nationwide survey in 2008 asked Chinese respondents how they evaluate their life, their interest in public affairs, their participation in politics, and so forth.
4. The data show that ethnic minorities in China do have grievances and feel politically disadvantaged. They are less satisfied with their life, and less happy than their Han neighbors. Economically, minority citizens perceive fewer gains than the Han group in the past five years.
5. Minority groups are largely indifferent to Chinese political issues, showing they are psychologically alienated to the political regime. Though minorities generally feel competent in participating in public affairs, those in the western provinces have the lowest level of such sense of capacity.
6. Minorities are also less likely to believe that the government is responsive to their needs, and has less trust in the government than the Han. They generally prefer a more rapid political reform, somehow reflecting their discontentment with the current regime.
7. In general minorities are less likely than the Han to identify themselves as “Chinese,” especially so in the central and western provinces, where most Uyghurs and Tibetans live.

8. Substantial measures need to be taken to close the gaps between the Han and minorities in terms of political attitudes including reducing income inequalities across ethnicities, improving life satisfaction of minorities, boosting minorities' participation capability, and enhancing governmental responsiveness.
9. Promoting Chinese identity among minority groups should be pursued as a long-term goal. It is when the Han and non-Han groups begin to share more political and social opinions that there are higher possibilities of them living harmoniously and peacefully in a multi-ethnic China.