

# Study: Uyghur population policies could lead to 4.5 million lives lost by 2040

August 25 2021

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A Uyghur rally. Credit: Michael Brown

A new study out today provides the most compelling evidence to-date that China is deliberately reducing its population of Uyghurs—a Muslim minority ethnic group—through enforced birth control, forced

displacement of citizens and internment in sinister "re-education camps."

World-leading expert on the topic and lead author of the new paper, Dr. Adrian Zenz, suggests this campaign to destroy an ethnic minority [population](#) could class as genocide under the 1948 U.N. Genocide Convention.

His findings, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Central Asian Survey*, also show it could also cost a potential 2.6 to 4.5 million lives by the year 2040.

There are more than 10 million Uyghurs living in Xinjiang, an autonomous territory in northwest China. Predominantly Muslim, they speak a Turkic language and more closely resemble the peoples of Central Asia than they do China's majority population, the Han Chinese.

In 2018, research by Dr. Zenz, Senior Fellow in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, uncovered compelling evidence that up to one million Uyghur people were detained in what the Chinese state defines as "re-education" camps.

China initially denied the existence of the camps, before defending them as a necessary measure against terrorism following separatist violence in the Xinjiang region.

However, a series of leaked official documents make clear that many of those detained are accused only of harboring "strong religious views" and "politically incorrect" ideas.

In 2020, Dr. Zenz published a further study revealing that Xinjiang authorities are administering unknown drugs and injections to Uyghur women in detention, forcibly implanting them with intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs), coercing women to accept surgical

sterilization, and using detention as punishment for birth control violations.

Now in this new study, Dr. Zenz provides further evidence of a sustained, organized campaign to reduce [population growth](#) amongst Muslim Uyghurs, using [birth control](#) as well as other measures.

His findings provide the strongest evidence yet that Beijing's policies in Xinjiang meet the criteria for genocide, as cited in the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

In the study, Zenz systematically analyzes a trove of publicly available documents in Xinjiang, alongside articles written by prominent academics in the region. Throughout, he finds a common narrative revealing a wish to "optimize" the ethnic population structure in Xinjiang.

This instruction comes right from the top, with the central government in Beijing "attaching great importance to the problem of Xinjiang's population structure and population security."

In most cases, the need to 'optimize' the Uyghur people is seen as key response to a perceived terrorism threat in the region. Zenz cites prominent academics and public officials in Southern Xinjiang who have publicly argued that to reduce terrorism, changes in the population structure need to be made so that the Uyghur are no longer the dominant ethnic group.

As well as rhetoric, the study reveals the presence of a state-run scheme to forcibly uproot, assimilate, and reduce the population density of Uyghur people. A string of extremely draconian measures have been introduced by the Chinese government since 2017, ranging from mass internment of Uyghurs for political re-education, to systematic birth

prevention, mass sterilization and forced displacement.

The expressed goal of these measures is to "optimize" southern Xinjiang's population structure by increasing the number of Han Chinese and decreasing the number of Uyghurs in the region.

As a consequence, natural population growth in Xinjiang has declined dramatically in recent years, with growth rates falling by 84% in the two largest Uyghur prefectures between 2015 and 2018, and declining further in 2019, according to the paper. In comparison, the birth rate in Han majority counties declined by only 19.7 percent.

Zenz argues that in order to 'optimize' the ethnic population, Beijing will increase southern Xinjiang's Han population share to 25 percent. In doing so, he estimates that birth prevention could result in a potential loss of between 2.6 and 4.5 million lives by the year 2040.

"My study reveals the presence of a long-term strategy by Beijing to solve the Xinjiang "problem" through "optimization" of the ethnic population structure," says Dr. Adrian Zenz.

"The most realistic method to achieve this involves a drastic suppression of ethnic minority birth rates for the coming decades, resulting in a potential loss of several million lives. A smaller ethnic minority population will also be easier to police, control and assimilate."

"The most concerning aspect of this strategy is that ethnic minority citizens are framed as a "problem." This language is akin to purported statements by Xinjiang officials that problem populations are like "weeds hidden among the crops" where the state will "need to spray chemicals to kill them all. Such a framing of an entire ethnic group is highly concerning."

**More information:** Adrian Zenz, 'End the dominance of the Uyghur ethnic group': an analysis of Beijing's population optimization strategy in southern Xinjiang, *Central Asian Survey* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2021.1946483](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1946483)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

Citation: Study: Uyghur population policies could lead to 4.5 million lives lost by 2040 (2021, August 25) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-08-uyghur-population-policies-million-lost.html>

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