



Simulated Autonomy: Uyghur Underrepresentation in Political Office



A report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project
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Cover Image: Shoret Zakir meets with Chen Quanguo in January 2017 © Xinjiangnet.com

SECTION 1: SUMMARY

Regional autonomy for ethnic minorities means that under the unified leadership of the state regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities; in these areas organs of self-government are established for the exercise of autonomy and for people of ethnic minorities to become masters of their own areas and manage the internal affairs of their own regions.¹

Chinese Government White Paper, *National Minorities Policy and Its Practice in China*

This report documents the underrepresentation of Uyghurs and women, particularly Uyghur women, in senior government and party positions in East Turkestan. Despite the Chinese government's efforts to cultivate a group of "elite" ethnic minority leaders in the region, distrust, and suspicion of Uyghurs in government and party positions is evident. The Chinese government's belief that it can foster improved relations with Uyghurs through such representatives is founded on a contradiction. Institutional suspicion of Uyghurs means Uyghur representatives in the party and government necessitates these individuals demonstrate overt loyalty to the state. However, such actions exacerbate mistrust of Uyghur representatives in Uyghur communities. Only through the free and fair selection of Uyghur representatives will ensure the genuine and meaningful participation of Uyghurs in decision making.

The research for this report focused on the ethnic and gender distribution of political and public office in East Turkestan at three scales, including the regional, prefectural and county. In each administrative jurisdiction at these scales, UHRP recorded every party secretary and mayor. At the regional scale, UHRP researched a broader range of officials from a several sectors, including party, military, judicial, administrative, executive, and social organizations.

The 81 regional positions documented show Han Chinese occupy 64% of senior posts and Uyghurs, the titular ethnicity of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, barely 20% of offices. At the prefectural scale Uyghurs comprise 21% of the 28 Party Secretary and Governor positions. Han occupy 50% and other ethnicities 39%. At the county level, Uyghurs occupy 24% of Party Secretary and Mayor posts. Han occupy 51%, other ethnicities 15%, and 10% are vacant. Most pronounced was underrepresentation of Uyghurs in the military and party, which are the centers of power in the region. According to Toops, "[i]n the Xinjiang 2010 census, Uyghur account for 45.84%, Han 40.48%, Kazakh 6.50%, Hui 4.51% and the rest account for 2.67%. In 2010 all ethnic minority groups amount to 59.52%."²

UHRP found the starkest demonstration of underrepresentation among women and in particular, Uyghur women. Eleven percent of Party Secretary and Mayor posts at the prefectural scale have female incumbents (four percent of this number are Uyghur females). At the county level, the figure is six percent (1.5% of this number are Uyghur females). There are no Uyghur women Party Secretaries at county and prefectural scales. The situation for women in senior positions at the regional scale is dismal and for Uyghur women almost nonexistent. According to the 2013

figures from the Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook, there are approximately 11,450,000 women in East Turkestan, representing 48.7% of the total population.

Human rights standards on the proper, genuine and meaningful representation of ethnic minorities and women in political and public life are outlined in several international legal instruments, including: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. China has ratified CEDAW and CERD. UHRP recommends the international community place pressure on China to ratify ICCPR.

Domestic law, such as the Chinese Constitution and the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, provide inadequate protections on the representation of ethnic minorities and women. The laws provide no quotas for these vulnerable populations and view the implementation of proper representation as a progressive right. As such, the proportion of marginalized communities in leadership roles is too low and the pace of advancement is too slow. The need for a vibrant civil society is urgent. Uyghurs should be free to establish educational institutions, media outlets and non-government organizations free of government interference. This development would assist with monitoring and enforcing state performance on ensuring the proper representation of vulnerable populations.

However, the problem is not just about underrepresentation. It is also about proper representation. Uyghurs are more likely to be represented in government positions, rather than in the structures of the party. The establishment of a shadow administration in Xinjiang directed and controlled by party interests reflective of Beijing is a typical strategy of totalitarian regimes.³ Uyghurs who occupy high party and government positions little authority in decision making without the approval of party officials, who are invariably Han Chinese.

The implications of the status quo are self-evident. An echo chamber of compliant officials has created a repressive approach to governance in East Turkestan. The directives of Beijing as implemented through the regional party secretary drive policy and in consequence belie the region's status as an "autonomous region." What is more concerning is that Beijing's policy priorities have focused on a wholesale denial of Uyghurs' fundamental human rights. Freedom of speech, assembly and association are routinely denied and punished. Linguistic and religious rights are similarly limited while Uyghurs experience discrimination that curbs their economic rights. Coupled with this denial of human rights, Beijing has elevated the militarization of the region in order to stifle opposition to its policies, which in many cases has manifested peacefully.

UHRP believes the genuine and meaningful representation of Uyghurs in public life across all sectors and scales would ameliorate the repressive conditions in East Turkestan. China must increase access to public office and eliminate barriers to proper political participation on the

basis of ethnicity and gender. If China is sincere in its efforts to bring stability to East Turkestan, it should descale the number of security personnel and technology and offer the region's Uyghur and female residents a voice in building an open and fair society.

SECTION 2: FINDINGS

A. Methodology

UHRP undertook the research for this report from May to June 2017. Therefore, the findings reflect the information on office holders in this two-month period. Researchers collected data on three scales of government: regional, prefectural, and county. UHRP did not gather information at the township and village/neighborhood scales due to insufficient sources. At the county and prefecture scales the following information was collected on Party Secretaries and Mayors: Name in English transliteration, name in Chinese characters, ethnicity, and gender. Overall population and the Uyghur population in all prefectures and counties were also gathered. At the regional scale, UHRP focused on ‘branches of power’ in East Turkestan that encompassed: Party, executive (including regional government departments), legislative, judicial, military, and social organizations. Within the regional government departments and social organizations category selected entities were chosen for their societal prominence. It should be noted that judicial jurisdictions cover more than East Turkestan. UHRP primarily collected data from these three websites:

- <http://ldzl.people.com.cn>
- <http://www.xzqh.org>
- <http://district.ce.cn/>

However, UHRP accessed a handful of other Chinese language websites to verify information and complete any gaps. All research was conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The researchers have attempted to maintain the highest standards of accuracy and welcome any corrections. A copy of the Excel spreadsheet used to store the data with links to biographical profiles on each official included in the survey is available upon request.

B. Ethnicity

Regional

The below table illustrates the numbers of Uyghurs, Han Chinese, and ethnic minorities holding senior leadership posts. The survey included the party, executive, legislative, and military branches of power in East Turkestan. In all branches, Han Chinese outnumber Uyghurs. If the totals of Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnicities are combined, Han Chinese comprise the majority or equal number of post holders in the party, executive and military branches.

	Uyghur	Han	Other Ethnicities	Total
PARTY				
9th CPC Xinjiang Standing Committee (2016-2021)				
	3	8	2	13
EXECUTIVE				
Government Leadership Group				
	4	5	1	10
LEGISLATIVE				
Regional People's Congress Leadership Group				
	3	4	3	10
Xinjiang CPPCC Leadership Group				
	4	8	5	17
MILITARY				
People's Liberation Army Xinjiang Military District Leadership Group				
	0	17	2	19
Southern Xinjiang Military District				
	2	10	0	12
Total	16	52	13	81

Table 1: Senior leadership at the regional scale in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by ethnicity

UHRP undertook research of various other regional scale institutions within these branches of power. For example, out of the 81 members of the 9th Communist Party of China Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Party Committee, 22 of that number are Uyghurs. Researchers also discovered a similar pattern of low participation among Uyghurs in the 27 listed regional government departments. The Party Secretaries of Ethnic Affairs Commission (Religious Affairs), Public Security Department and the Judicial Department are all Han Chinese. Ahmadjan Minam (阿赫麦提江·秘那木), a Uyghur, leads the Commission for Discipline Inspection as its “Head of Department.”

Among senior judicial posts impacting East Turkestan, Han Chinese dominate. The Presiding Judge, Deputy Presiding Judge, and Integrity Inspector of the Sixth Circuit of the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China are Han. The Secretary of the Sixth Circuit of the Supreme People's Court of the Communist Party of China and the Party Secretary of the People's Procuratorate of Xinjiang are similarly Han Chinese.

Among selected social organizations at the regional scale, UHRP observed more diversity. The Party Secretary of the regional branches of the Communist Youth League of China and the Chairperson of the All-China Women's Federation are Uyghurs. Furthermore, the Chairperson of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions is Kazak. However, in the leading regional academic institution, Xinjiang University, the leadership group comprised nine Han, one Uyghur, and one Kazak. While the President is Uyghur, the Party Secretary is Han. The three individuals

cited as the leadership group of state-media outlet Tianshan are Han. In addition, the Political Commissar and Head of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Military Affairs Department are Han Chinese.

Prefectural

Table 2 illustrates the strong preference for Han Chinese in Party Secretary roles at the regional scale. Of the 14 Party Secretaries UHRP researched only one is non-Han Chinese, Sharqit Aghajan (沙尔赫提·阿汗建利), a Kazak. Among Governors, non-Han ethnicities hold 13 out of 14 posts with Uyghurs comprising six of the 13. In total, Han Chinese hold 14 of 28 Party Secretary and Governor posts in the region, Uyghurs six and other ethnicities eight. Of the leadership group in the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Commander-in-Chief, Political Commissar, and Party Secretary) all are Han Chinese.

	Uyghur	Han	Other Ethnicities	Total
Party Secretary	0	13	1	14
Governor	6	1	7	14
Total	6	14	8	28

Table 2: Party Secretaries and Governors at the prefectural scale by ethnicity

County

Table 3 shows how Party Secretary and Mayor posts are distributed among ethnicities in the 96 counties of East Turkestan. In total, the combined number of posts available are 192. If the 21 vacant posts are disregarded, Han Chinese have a clear majority with 91 incumbents. Uyghurs occupy 46 positions and other ethnicities 28. If the number of non-Han Chinese post holders are combined, the total is 74. High numbers of Han Chinese officials are explained by their overwhelming dominance in Party Secretary positions. Only one non-Han Chinese, Ahmadjan Memet (艾赫麦提·买买提) in Pishan County, Hotan Prefecture, serves as a county-level Party Secretary. Of currently occupied Mayor posts at the county level, Uyghurs have a slim majority. UHRP also surveyed the ethnicities of the Party Secretaries at the nine city counties of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and noted eight out of nine are Han. The ninth, Li Yumei, a Hui, is Party Secretary of Aral City.

	Uyghur	Han	Other Ethnicities	Vacant	Total
Party Secretary	1	82	0	13	96
Mayor	45	15	28	8	96
Total	46	97	28	21	192

Table 3: Party Secretaries and Mayors at the county scale by ethnicity

C. Gender

Regional

At the regional scale, the dominance of male incumbents for regional leadership posts indisputable. Only four females are represented in the leadership committees and groups of party, executive, legislative and military branches of power in East Turkestan. Of the women represented, two are Uyghur and within the Xinjiang CPPCC Leadership Group. The under-representation of women is replicated in senior posts at regional government departments and in the judiciary. Among social organizations, Uyghur women lead the All-China Women's Federation and the Communist Youth League of China.

	Male	Female Non-Uyghur	Female Uyghur	Total
PARTY				
9th CPC Xinjiang Standing Committee (2016-2021)				
	12	1	0	13
EXECUTIVE				
Government Leadership Group				
	10	0	0	10
LEGISLATIVE				
Regional People's Congress Leadership Group				
	9	1	0	10
Xinjiang CPPCC Leadership Group				
	15	0	2	17
MILITARY				
People's Liberation Army Xinjiang Military District Leadership Group				
	19	0	0	19
Southern Xinjiang Military District				
	12	0	0	12
Total	77	2	2	81

Table 4: Senior leadership at the regional scale in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by gender

Prefectural and County

Table 5 and 6 demonstrate a similar pattern at prefectural and county scales to the regional scale regarding gender and appointments to leadership positions. Out of 28 prefectural Party Secretary and Governor positions only three have female incumbents. One of the three is Uyghur. At the county scale, of 171 occupied posts, 11 have female incumbents. Of the 11, three are Uyghur women. There are no Uyghur women serving as Party Secretary at the county scale. In the

Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the leadership group of three is all male and two of the nine Party Secretaries of city counties are female; neither is Uyghur.

	Male	Female Non-Uyghur	Female Uyghur	Total
Party Secretary	13	1	0	14
Governor	12	1	1	14
Total	25	2	1	28

Table 5: Party Secretaries and Governors at the prefectural scale by gender

	Male	Female Non-Uyghur	Female Uyghur	Vacant	Total
Party Secretary	80	3	0	13	96
Mayor	80	5	3	8	96
Total	160	8	3	21	192

Table 6: Party Secretaries and Mayors at the county scale by ethnicity

D. Majority Uyghur Prefectural Level Administrative Units

Uyghur Majority Prefectures by Ethnicity and Gender

The following data is taken from the five Uyghur majority prefecture level administrative units. These are: Turpan City, Aksu Prefecture, Hotan Prefecture, Kashgar Prefecture, and Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture. In each of these prefecture level administrative units every county is majority Uyghur, except Kizilsu. Out of four counties in Kizilsu, two are majority Uyghur. Only these two counties are included in the survey. There are no Uyghur majority counties in prefectures that do not have a Uyghur majority. Table 7 shows how Han Chinese occupy all five Party Secretary positions and Uyghurs four of five Governor posts. All Party Secretaries and Governors are male.

	Uyghur	Han	Other Ethnicities	Male	Female
Party Secretary	0	5	0	5	0
Governor	4	0	1	5	0
Total	4	5	1	10	0

Table 7: Party Secretaries and Governors at the prefectural scale in Uyghur majority prefectures by ethnicity and gender

Uyghur Majority Counties by Ethnicity

Table 8 demonstrates the ethnic distribution of 68 Party Secretary and Mayor positions in Uyghur majority counties. Uyghurs hold 32 Party Secretary and Mayor positions, Han Chinese 28 posts, other ethnicities one, and there are seven vacant positions. In most of the counties UHRP researched, the pattern of Han Party Secretary and non-Han Mayor is maintained. One exception is the Uyghur Party Secretary of Pishan County and the Han Mayor of Hotan County.

	Uyghur	Han	Other Ethnicities	Vacant	Total
TURPAN CITY (Districts -1, Counties -2)					
Party Secretary	0	3	0	0	3
Mayor	3	0	0	0	3
AKSU PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -8)					
Party Secretary	0	6	0	3	9
Mayor	9	0	0	0	9
KASHGAR PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -10, Autonomous Counties -1)					
Party Secretary	0	12	0	0	12
Mayor	11	0	1	0	12
HOTAN PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -7)					
Party Secretary	1	4	0	3	8
Mayor	7	1	0	0	8
KIZILSU KIRGHIZ AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -3)					
Party Secretary	0	2	0	0	2
Mayor	1	0	0	1	2
Total	32	28	1	7	68

Table 8: Party Secretaries and Mayors at the county scale in Uyghur majority prefectures by ethnicity

Uyghur Majority Counties by Gender

Table 9 shows the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Uyghur majority counties. Men hold fifty-seven posts; women four and seven posts are vacant. Of the four female officeholders, three are Uyghurs.

	Male	Female Non-Uyghur	Female Uyghur	Vacant	Total
TURPAN CITY (Districts -1, Counties -2)					
Party Secretary	3	0	0	0	3
Mayor/Governor	3	0	0	0	3
AKSU PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -8)					
Party Secretary	5	1	0	3	9
Mayor/Governor	8	0	1	0	9
KASHGAR PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -10, Autonomous Counties -1)					
Party Secretary	12	0	0	0	12
Mayor/Governor	11	0	1	0	12
HOTAN PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -7)					
Party Secretary	5	0	0	3	8
Mayor/Governor	7	0	1	0	8
KIZILSU KIRGHIZ AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE (County Cities -1, Counties -3)					
Party Secretary	2	0	0	0	2
Mayor/Governor	1	0	0	1	2
Total	57	1	3	7	68

Table 9: Party Secretaries and Mayors at the county scale in Uyghur majority prefectures by gender

SECTION 3: ANALYSIS

A. Regional Data

UHRP's survey of state offices in East Turkestan demonstrates an underrepresentation of Uyghurs in senior leadership at the regional scale. The situation for women in senior positions at the same scale is dismal and for Uyghur women almost nonexistent. The 81 regional positions documented show Han Chinese occupy 64% of senior posts and Uyghurs, the titular ethnicity of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, barely 20% of offices. Other ethnicities almost match Uyghur representation with 16%. The findings show Uyghur underrepresentation is pronounced in the regional military hierarchy (Uyghurs hold 6% of posts and Han Chinese 94%) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) Xinjiang Standing Committee (23% of committee members are Uyghurs and 62% are Han). In the wider 'Xinjiang' 9th CPC Committee, Uyghurs comprise 27%. In none of the surveyed 'branches of state power' in East Turkestan do Uyghur outnumber Han Chinese in absolute numbers.

The dominance of Han Chinese in Party Secretary posts in East Turkestan is an enduring feature of governance in autonomous regions. Writing in 2008 Chinese academic Cheng Li notes:

At the same time as it has appointed minority leaders to top posts in the ethnic minority regions, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has also maintained its firm control over these provinces by giving the most important leadership posts—the Party secretary positions—to cadres who come from Han Chinese backgrounds. Indeed, none of the Party secretary posts in any of the five provincial-level minority autonomous regions are currently held by an ethnic minority leader.⁴

Through a clear bias in ethnic distribution of the powerful the Party Secretary positions in East Turkestan, decision-making lies largely outside of the hands of the Uyghur in the region. A similar pattern of exclusion toward ethnic minorities is found in senior military positions. In a September 9, 2017 article published in the Asia Times researcher Zi Yang states: “An examination of the PLA's ethnic officers shows two outstanding patterns. Ethnic representation is most visible among junior ranking officers, but thins out considerably at higher levels. There are comparatively few generals of ethnic minority backgrounds.”⁵ The author adds that in their home regions Uyghurs and Tibetans are excluded from senior posts citing the absence of chief commanders from ethnic minority backgrounds in East Turkestan and Tibet. Zi Yang's analysis concludes this bias stems from “[a]n institutional lack of trust,” which “impedes the rise of exceptional officers of ethnic minority origins. While the Han high command has fewer qualms about sharing power with members of highly Sinicized groups – the Zhuang or Manchus, for example – it remains skeptical about the less Sinicized peoples of China's far west, where separatist ideologies have a strong pull.”⁶

The dominance of Han Chinese in senior party posts and in the military's higher echelons in East Turkestan draws a link between the two entities. As a 2015 analysis on reforms to the People's

Liberation Army indicates: “the Party will be quick to slow and even reverse reforms if the careful balance between Party control and military effectiveness tips too far away from the Party. Whatever impact the reforms may have on the military's capabilities, the People’s Liberation Army will remain the Party’s gun.”⁷ The preference for Han Chinese in senior positions in the military and the party demonstrates a distrust of ethnic minority representations and the lack of any meaningful autonomy in East Turkestan. In August 2017, a military parade held on China’s Army Day was described as “an unprecedented one to reaffirm the CPC’s absolute control over the army. The theme of ‘following the Party’s command’ dominated the whole event.”⁸



CPPCC Chairman Yu Zhengsheng shakes hands with senior PLA officers in Urumchi © Xinhua

According to an International Parliamentary Union survey on female representation in national legislation, China ranks 72nd best out of 190 places. The survey cites a figure of 24% female representation in the national legislature.⁹ However, women are heavily underrepresented in regional senior leadership. It is difficult to substantiate claims of a ‘popular representative democracy’ in East Turkestan and in China if only 5% of senior positions are occupied by women. Given ‘Xinjiang’ is a Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uyghur women hold only 2.5% of senior positions in the region, claims to popular representation appear even weaker. According

to the 2013 figures from the Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook, there are approximately 11,450,000 women in East Turkestan, representing 48.7% of the total population.

B. Prefectural and County Data

At the prefectural scale Uyghurs comprise 21% of the 28 Party Secretary and Governor positions. Han occupy 50% and other ethnicities 39%. The latter number illustrates that non-Uyghur minorities are overrepresented, as they make up approximately 12% of the population. Out of the fourteen prefectural-level administrative units outside of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), seven are ‘autonomous.’ These autonomous prefectures are designated to Hui, Kazak, Kyrgyz, and Mongol ethnicities and Governor posts are usually designated to the titular minority. However, large numbers of Uyghur live in some of these autonomous prefectures as illustrated in Table 10. It should be noted these population statistics are taken from Chinese state sources, which are contested by some Uyghurs. According to the website of the Uyghur American Association “Uyghur sources indicate that Uyghur population in East Turkistan exceeds 15 million,” which contradicts the 2010 census figure of approximately 10 million.¹⁰

	Population	Uyghur Population	% Uyghur
Ili Kazakh A.P.	2,917,210	731,717	25
Chochek Prefecture	1,047,814	42,087	4
Altay Prefecture	663,410	9,685	2
Sanji Hui A.P.	1,402,107	68,025	5
Börtala Mongol A.P.	484,491	64,901	13
Bayin'gholin Mongol A.P.	1,374,726	459,041	33
Kizilsu Kirghiz A.P.	560,627	360,792	64
Total	8,450,385	1,736,248	21

Table 10: Uyghur population of autonomous counties in absolute numbers and percentage

According to Table 10, 21% of Uyghurs in non-Uyghur autonomous prefectures have no representative of their own ethnicity at the prefectural level. While this reflects the situation that Uyghurs in autonomous prefectures are ‘minorities within minorities,’ in the case of Kizilsu, where the majority of the population is Uyghur, it means existing boundaries exempt Uyghurs from holding posts at the prefectural scale. Analysts believe the autonomous prefecture system as applied in East Turkestan was created with the intention of breaking up Uyghur claims to autonomy over large contiguous spaces of the region.¹¹ This patchwork of ‘autonomy’ is further fragmented with the addition of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps territories.

At the county level, Uyghurs occupy 24% of Party Secretary and Mayor posts. Han occupy 51%, other ethnicities 15%, and 10% are vacant. Disregarding vacant posts, the percentages are: Uyghurs 27%, Han 57%, and other ethnicities 16%. As is the case at the prefectural scale, non-Han Chinese occupy the Governor/Mayor positions. At the county level, there is only one

Uyghur serving as Party Secretary. Out of the 110 Party Secretaries at the prefectural and county scales, only two are non-Han. This reflects the long-standing pattern, explained above in regard to regional scale appointments, of placing Han Chinese officials in real positions of power. Bovingdon explains the prevalence of Han Chinese Party Secretaries through the scales of autonomous government:

While showcasing long series of figures on non-Hans at various levels of government, books vaunting the system of self-government delicately sidestep the key indicator of political authority: Party secretaryships. As McMillen put it, in the Mao era “every government organ and enterprise from the regional level down” had a party official, ‘normally a Han,’ who exercised real control (McMillen 1979: 48). Another observer notes dryly that there was “never... any suggestion that Party leaders in the nationality areas would need to be members of the relevant nationality” (Mackerras 1994: 156). This pattern has not changed appreciably: More than two decades into the reform period, non-Han party committee heads are still exceedingly scarce.¹²

Bovingdon’s observation made in 2004 has not changed 13 years since it was made. Party Secretaries are drawn from the Han while the less potent offices of Governor and Mayor are delegated to non-Hans. Examining UHRP’s data from 2017 from the five Uyghur majority prefectures shows this pattern is holding in southern East Turkestan. However, the data from 2017 also indicates that Hans occupy 15 of the 88 Mayor posts at the county scale as a whole. Six of these are in Urumchi City and a further three in Karamay City, which represent the two pull destinations for Han Chinese migrants. In Urumchi’s case, the pull factor is its role as the political and economic center of the region and in Karamay’s case it is as the base for the natural resources sector. Furthermore, both locations have high incomes per capita.¹³ As the government encourages more Hans to settle in the Uyghur majority south of the region,¹⁴ albeit with mixed success, the extension of this trend toward county scale Han mayors in the region is feasible. However, other arrangements could be implemented in the southern prefectures. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC) administered counties in the south (Aral City, a XPCC enclave in Aksu Prefecture and Tumushuke City, a XPCC enclave located in Kashgar Prefecture) have Han Party Secretaries with no Mayor posts.

Gender distributions of Party Secretary and Governor/Mayor posts at the prefectural and county scale reflect the regional condition: that is, a vast underrepresentation of women in these positions. When representation of women does occur, Uyghur women are worse off than their Han Chinese counterparts. Eleven percent of Party Secretary and Mayor posts at the prefectural scale have female incumbents (four percent of this number are Uyghur females). At the county level, the figure is six percent (1.5% of this number are Uyghur females). County scale female officials total eleven of which three are Uyghur. The three Uyghur women serve as Mayors in counties within Uyghur majority prefectures. There are three non-Uyghur women in Party Secretary positions at county level and one non-Uyghur woman in a Party Secretary position at prefectural level. There are no Uyghur women Party Secretaries at county and prefectural scales.

C. Prior Research

For the early part of the period between 1884 and 1949, East Turkestan was caught up in the ‘Great Game’ between the Russian, Chinese and British empires. Following a period of warlordism, an independent state of East Turkestan was founded first in 1933, and again in 1944. However, with the fall of the East Turkestan government in 1949 following withdrawal of Soviet support, East Turkestan was drawn into the PRC, becoming a province-level administration in 1955. When the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was established as an autonomous region of the PRC in 1955, it was given special powers of self-government under the concept of ‘regional autonomy.’ This concept appears in Article 4 of the Chinese Constitution states: “Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority ethnic groups live in compact communities.”¹⁵

Despite Beijing’s promise of ‘regional autonomy,’ Uyghurs have never had powers of self-government. One scholar notes how:

Beijing has allowed Uyghurs almost no independence of action. The party-state has actively and premeditatedly thwarted the emergence of a political elite in Xinjiang capable of pressing for Uyghur collective interests, and it has similarly squelched ordinary Uyghurs’ attempts to respond to or influence policies in Xinjiang. For those silenced voices, Beijing has substituted an official line that most Uyghurs are quite satisfied with the way Xinjiang is ruled... The granting of Uyghur influence over affairs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has taken a back seat to the consolidation of CCP control and the crushing of any movements that advocate independence, or even the more modest goal of real autonomy... It has selected and promoted officials who exercise power only in a fashion consonant with CCP goals, and reserved the decisive authority at virtually all levels for trusted Hans imported from posts in China proper.¹⁶

In his 2010 book *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*, academic Gardner Bovington writes how the number of party members among ethnic minorities in East Turkestan falls far below their proportion of the regional population. He cites statistics putting the percentage of ethnic minority cadres in the region at 38.4%. In 1994, the proportion fell to 36.7%; however, by 2004, the percentage was recorded at 40.3%.¹⁷ As Bovington adds in 2005 testimony to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China there has “consistently been a substantial gap between the proportion of non-Hans in government and in the population, though massive Han immigration has narrowed the gap considerably.”¹⁸ A further conclusion made in *The Uyghurs* is that although there has been discussion over the “nativization of government ranks in autonomous regions, there has never been a corresponding initiative in the party.”¹⁹ Cappelletti writes in a 2015 edited volume how Uyghur cadres experienced a degree of discrimination from colleagues while conducting their work, thus discouraging other Uyghurs from membership.²⁰ Consequently, given the bearers of power lay within the party, the lack of any push toward greater ethnic minority representation has a significant impact on who directs policy in East Turkestan.

Research on ethnic minority representation in East Turkestan conducted by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) in 2005 concluded: “Minorities are still underrepresented in Xinjiang’s party and government leadership, according to a series of reports on the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC) Web site.”²¹ CECC found: “The Hetian Government Web site says that Uighurs account for 96.53 percent of the prefecture’s total population, and that the prefecture has 6 counties, 1 municipality, and 86 townships. Han Chinese, therefore, constitute less than 3.5 percent of the prefecture’s population, yet hold 66 percent of the top-ranking government positions at the township level and 100 percent of senior government posts at the county level. Moreover, the absence of any reference to minorities holding top Party positions at any administrative level suggests that Han Chinese continue to dominate these influential positions.”²²



Delegates from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to the National People’s Congress in 2017 © Reuters

Academics have written about the Chinese Communist Party’s cultivation of a Uyghur elite class to serve as a bridge between the party state and the Uyghur communities. In a 1999 article, Sautman describes how: “For many minority people, their key ‘representatives’ are not elected delegates but state and party decision makers, administrators, and professionals of the same ethnicity at all levels who are part of China’s governing cadres. These minority cadres constitute one part of a new minority elite in a variety of high prestige occupations.”²³

Li adds the motivations for encouraging an elite class of ethnic minority representatives goes beyond providing a point of entry for the party into non-Han Chinese communities. Li writes that of the propaganda value of ethnic minority elites in demonstrating the possibilities for upward mobility in China. Furthermore, there is a belief among the party hierarchy that ethnic minority elites provide an aspirational example to others and as a result help to quell the expression of grievances aimed at the government. As Li and Sautman assert, ethnic minority representatives have usually been carefully vetted for loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party in order to ensure there is little deviation from party directives.²⁴

In his 2009 article *Islam, Local Elites, And China's Missteps in Integrating the Uyghur Nation*, Stephen Hess acknowledges the utility of ethnic minority elite to the Chinese authorities. However, he adds these efforts have been largely counterproductive largely due to the restrictions placed on cadres, in particular over religious observance: "This situation has limited the ability of Uyghur cadres to act as intermediaries between the Chinese state and the Uyghur population, undermining the Chinese government's attempts to integrate Uyghurs into the PRC and challenge the popular appeal of Uyghur separatism."²⁵ Hess concludes: "In the interest of more effective governance, state policies that restrict religious practice among CCP cadres and public officials should be relaxed, allowing Uyghur cadres to fully embrace the religious aspects of their Uyghur national identity without threatening their professional status or marking their disloyalty to the Chinese state."²⁶

Hess' research highlights a paradox for the Chinese Communist Party in governing autonomous regions through ethnic minority elites. In sum, due to the inherent distrust of the Han-led party leadership toward ethnic minorities, higher standards of loyalty to the party are considered the norm. Such elevated demonstrations of loyalty to the party through statements and actions on government policy merely heighten distrust of ethnic minority representatives among Uyghur communities.

In a revealing study conducted by Herbert Yee in 2003 and cited by Joanne Smith Finley in her book *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*, distrust of party cadres among Uyghurs was exceptionally high. Among Uyghur participants in the study, 52.4% stated cadre-community relations were either 'fair' or 'poor.' Yee recorded distrust of Han cadres at 39.5% and of Uyghur cadres at 23.5%. Smith comments: "Yee also stated that those who adhered more closely to Islam tended to view indigenous cadres—who are also CCP members—as 'traitors to their fellow Uyghurs.'"²⁷

The problems associated with Uyghur representatives were a subject of Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti's essay entitled: *Present-Day Ethnic Problems in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region: Overview and Recommendations*. Ilham Tohti asserts: "Widespread official distrust of ethnic minority cadres and intellectuals is one blatantly obvious and tremendously important facet of Xinjiang's ethnic problem."²⁸ In tackling this issue, Ilham Tohti sees education and the increase in numbers of ethnic minority representatives at the highest levels of regional government: "Overall, there are too few Uighur cadres, particularly in the upper echelons. We should look to

the long run and begin to train a cohort of qualified, top-tier ethnic minority cadres.”²⁹ In a section focused on “Governmental Competence and Credibility,” Ilham Tohti criticizes the role of Han Chinese cadres in Uyghur majority areas: “In southern Xinjiang in particular, Chinese cadres are very nearly regarded as “stand-ins” for all Han Chinese, representatives of an entire race of people. As such, if their methods of governing are unjust or inept, conflicts between citizens and officials can easily escalate into ethnic conflict.”³⁰



10th Tibetan People's Congress in the Great Hall of the People in Lhasa, 2017 © vtibet

In comparison with Tibet, a similar pattern of Han Chinese control over Party Secretary positions is also discernable at the regional level. From 1950 to the present all fourteen Party Secretaries have been Han Chinese. However, a survey of the prefectural level Party Secretaryships shows a greater proportion of Tibetans in this position when compared to Uyghurs.³¹ Furthermore, the percentage of Tibetan cadres at the regional level has been higher than that recorded for Uyghurs since the 1990s. According to academic Baogang He: “By 1994, there were 37,000 Tibetan cadres, or 66.6 per cent of the total number of cadres in the region...According to the Chinese government’s 2009 White Paper on ‘Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet,’ in 2007 Tibetans and other minorities held 94 per cent of local congress seats.”³² A 2013 CCTV article claimed 80 percent of regional cadres came from ethnic minority communities.³³

The Chinese Communist Party has long promoted its role in the emancipation of women. Often invoking Chairman Mao’s quote that “Women hold up half the sky,” the Communist Party leadership has neglected to acknowledge its poor record of women’s representation in public life

at senior levels. Any understanding that the representation of ethnic minority representation is woefully inadequate has not been recognized in Beijing. In a New York Times article dated July 16, 2017, Cheng Li, director of the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institution, stated: “It would take a miracle for a woman to become head of the People’s Republic of China in the foreseeable future.”³⁴ The same article notes that “the percentage of women among full members of the party’s Central Committee has declined in recent years, from 6.4 percent in 2012 before the last party congress to 4.9 percent today.” Such declines in representation put China at odds with global trends towards greater involvement of women in representative government. Indeed, in 2016, Taiwan elected its first female president, Tsai Ing-wen and in 2017 Hong Kong swore in its first female chief executive in Carrie Lam. As Cheng Li notes in a March 30, 2017 essay: “Unless Xi and the CCP leadership prioritize vigorous institutional reforms to address this issue now, the insufficient representation of women leaders will remain a notable deficiency of the PRC party-state system for the years to come.”³⁵

4. LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

The right to participation in public affairs is an internationally recognized human rights standard. The United Nations (UN) system of human rights instruments includes several articles protecting the rights of citizens to proper representation and of ethnic minorities and women to fair access to political office. The primary instruments outlining these rights are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Other international human rights instruments specifically articulate the rights of participation among vulnerable populations. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Article 21 of the UDHR establishes a framework for participatory rights that includes standards on non-discriminatory access to political office, as well as the free and fair choice of political representatives:

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.³⁶

ICCPR also offers a clear basis for broad participatory rights. Article 2 (1) describes how rights the standards within the covenant apply “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”³⁷ Article 25 highlights equality of access to public office and the elimination of barriers to genuine political participation:

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

These rights standards are also articulated in international legal instruments protecting vulnerable populations from exclusion in public life. Article 7 of CEDAW unequivocally defines the obligations of parties to the convention on the rights of women to stand for public office and participate in policy decision-making. Article 7 also outlines the rights of women to join non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as equal members:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.³⁸

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination delineates states' obligations regarding non-discrimination based on race. Article 5 (c) unambiguously sets forth the non-discriminatory foundation of political life:

... States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:

(c) Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections-to vote and to stand for election-on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service.³⁹

Article 2 (1) of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities further establishes the rights standard of participation in public life among minority populations. However, Article 2 (2) distinguishes the right of minorities to participate in regional scale policy making:

(2) Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.

(3) Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation.⁴⁰

The above legal instruments articulate standards toward participatory rights in public life as agreed upon by the international community. These standards should be considered an expression of universal rights to which no individual should be denied. However, legal applicability of the various international human rights instruments varies according to signatory and ratification status. China has ratified CEDAW in 1980 and CERD in 1981. In 1998, China became a signatory to the ICCPR and until ratification it is not bound to its provision. At China's second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review over 30 states raised the need for China to ratify the ICCPR to protect the political and civil rights of its citizens.⁴¹ As a member of the UN General Assembly and a signatory to the UN Charter, China also has an obligation to respect the articles of the UDHR.

Despite the protections articulated in Article 25 of the ICCPR, the provision has come under criticism for not fully guaranteeing the participatory rights of ethnic minorities. Article 25 appears to safeguard political participation; however, academic Helen Quane observes this is "due to the states' own discretion rather than any perceived obligation under Article 25...While [Article 25] may result in the election of representatives of indigenous peoples, there is no guarantee that it will do so. This means that Article 25 will not guarantee that the interests of indigenous peoples are represented in government or in the formulation of development policy."⁴²

China's domestic laws also establish obligations on political representation and participation in general and in specific instruments related to women and ethnic minorities. The primary document covering Chinese citizens is the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Laws aimed at the protection of vulnerable populations include the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law and the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests Law of the People's Republic of China.

The above national laws predominately focus on legislative representation without specific reference to participation in the judiciary, military, and state administration at senior levels. UHRP was unable to determine if the Chinese legal system allows for quotas of women and ethnic minorities in these 'branches of power.' For example, the Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China contains no reference to affirmative action policies toward marginalized populations.⁴³ Likewise, this research could not reference quotas on ethnic minorities and women's participation in party leadership roles.

Articles 59 and 65 of the Constitution of the PRC articulate the provision of ethnic minority representation in the National People's Congress and the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress; however, no quotas are stated and as Quane comments minority

representation at this national scale is at the discretion of the state. Nevertheless, the Constitution of the PRC sets out clear laws against discrimination of ethnic minorities and women. Article 4 states:

All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited.⁴⁴

Article 48 states:

Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, cultural and social, and family life.⁴⁵

In Article 113, the Constitution of the PRC outlines representation rights of ethnic minorities in autonomous administrative units, including the allocation of “chairmanships” to minorities “exercising regional autonomy.”

In the people's congress of an autonomous region, prefecture or county, in addition to the deputies of the nationality or nationalities exercising regional autonomy in the administrative area, the other nationalities inhabiting the area are also entitled to appropriate representation. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanships of the standing committee of the people's congress of an autonomous region, prefecture or county shall include a citizen or citizens of the nationality or nationalities exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned.⁴⁶

Articles 16 and 17 of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law reaffirm the allocation of legislative leadership roles to titular ethnic minorities with an additional reference to the control over the distribution of delegates to people's congresses and governments at various scales:

Article 16 In the people's congress of an ethnic autonomous area, in addition to the deputies from the nationality exercising regional autonomy in the administrative area, the other nationalities inhabiting the area are also entitled to appropriate representation.

The number and proportion of deputies to the people's congress of an ethnic autonomous area from the nationality exercising regional autonomy and from other ethnic minorities are decided upon by the standing committee of the people's congress of a province, an autonomous region, or directly-administered municipality in accordance with the principles prescribed by law and are reported to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for the record.

Among the chairman and vice-chairmen of the standing committee of the people's congress of an ethnic autonomous area shall be one or more citizens of the nationality exercising regional autonomy in the area.

Article 17 The chairman of an autonomous region, the prefect of an autonomous prefecture or the head of an autonomous county shall be a citizen of the nationality exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned. Other posts in the people's government of an autonomous region, an autonomous prefecture or an autonomous county should be equitably allocated among people of the nationality exercising regional autonomy and other minority nationalities in the area concerned.⁴⁷

The Protection of Women's Rights and Interests Law of the People's Republic of China stipulates the role of women in public life. As observed in the provisions described in the Constitution of the PRC, the law offers no quotas on local representation merely stating, "an appropriate number" for National People's Congress delegates. Furthermore, the law sees equality of women representation as a progressive right in which the state reserves control over the pace of implementation:

Women enjoy the equal right, with men, to vote and to stand for election.

Among deputies to the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at various levels, there shall be an appropriate number of women deputies. The State takes measures to gradually increase the proportion of the women deputies among deputies to the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at various levels.⁴⁸

The legal framework at the domestic and in particular at the international scale offer a range of protections for citizen participation in public life across all sectors. While China's legal instruments offer some guarantees for women and ethnic minorities to assume leadership roles in society, vagaries over the extent and kind of participation lead to a weak set of obligations placed upon the state. Furthermore, the Chinese state exercises control over the levers of participation in public life. The pace of implementation is firmly at the Chinese government's discretion and the expression of interests from marginalized communities is neither free nor fair given the ascendancy of party interests.

SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Chinese Government

- Realize the genuine and meaningful participation of Uyghurs in public life. This includes the opportunity to choose political representatives freely and fairly.
- Set quotas and target implementation dates for these quotas on the participation of Uyghurs and women in all aspects and all scales of state-managed public life. This includes positions in the legislative, executive, judicial, and military branches of power.
- Permit the flourishing of Uyghur civil society entities to evaluate state performance independently and transparently. Uyghurs should be able to establish social organizations, media outlets and educational institutions free from government interference.
- Respect genuine and meaningful autonomy in East Turkestan with state and civil society representatives given the freedom to oppose political, economic, social, and cultural policies. The Chinese government should immediately remove all barriers to freedom of speech, assembly and association.
- Take action to the genuine inclusion of women and Uyghur women in political representation and in public life.
- Meet the human rights standards as outlined in Article 21 of the UDHR, which establishes a framework for participatory rights, including standards on non-discriminatory access to political office, as well as the free and fair choice of political representatives.
- Ratify the ICCPR and meet obligations under Article 25, which highlights equality of access to public office and the elimination of barriers to genuine political participation.
- Recognize Article 7 of CEDAW and meet its obligations as a ratifying state. Article 7 defines the obligations of parties to the convention on the rights of women to stand for public office and participate in policy decision-making. Article 7 also outlines the rights of women to join NGOs as equal members.
- Realize the human rights standards in Article 5 (c) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which delineates states' obligations regarding non-discrimination based on race.
- Demonstrate commitments to Article 2 (1) of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which outlines the right of minorities to participate in regional policy making.

- Amend articles of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law and the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests Law of the People’s Republic of China concerning representation of ethnic minorities and women to include quotas. Furthermore, China should not relegate genuine implementation of such quotas to the status of progressive rights. Enforcement should be carried out as a priority in minority policy.

For Concerned Governments

- Raise concerns at bilateral human rights dialogues with the People’s Republic of China over limitations placed on Uyghurs, especially Uyghur women, to genuinely participate in public life in East Turkestan.
- Open consulates in the East Turkestan regional capital of Urumchi that will permit a closer observation of human rights conditions.
- Establish a “Special Coordinator for Uyghur Affairs” in national foreign ministries.
- Pass a “Uyghur Policy Act” that incorporates protection of Uyghur rights to genuine political participation and representation in decision-making.

For the International Community

- Send observers, particularly the Special Rapporteurs on Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, to East Turkestan with unfettered access to Uyghur communities to impartially conduct an assessment of China’s compliance to its international obligations to protect the human rights of the Uyghur people.
- Guarantee human rights standards, especially in regard to political representation, and are fully met by the Chinese government before multilateral assistance and projects, through agencies such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, are approved.
- Ensure proper monitoring and enforcement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

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Uyghur Human Rights Project
Washington, D.C
September 2017

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The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) was founded by the Uyghur American Association (UAA) in 2004 with a supporting grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). UHRP's mission is to promote human rights and democracy for the Uyghur people. In 2016, UHRP became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

UHRP works to raise the profile of the Uyghur people by:

Researching, writing and publishing commentary and reports in English and Chinese covering a broad range human rights issues involving civil and political rights, through to social cultural and economic rights;
Preparing briefings – either written or in person – for journalists, academics, diplomats and legislators on the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people.

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