

# **Human Rights Record of the United States in 2013**

## **2013年美国的人权纪录**

**State Council Information Office of  
the People's Republic of China  
中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室**

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Feb. 28, 2014

## Foreword

The State Department of the United States, which posed as “the world judge of human rights,” made arbitrary attacks and irresponsible remarks on the human rights situation in almost 200 countries and regions again in its just-released *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. However, the U.S. carefully concealed and avoided mentioning its own human rights problems. In fact, there were still serious human rights problems in the U.S. in 2013, with the situation in many fields even deteriorating.

— In 2013, 137 people died in 30 mass killings, which caused four or more deaths each, in the U.S. A shooting

rampage in the headquarters of the Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, D.C. left 12 people dead.

- The U.S. engaged in a tapping program, code-named PRISM, exercising long-term and vast surveillance both at home and abroad. The program is a blatant violation of international law and seriously infringes on human rights.

- The use of solitary confinement is prevalent in the U.S. About 80,000 U.S. prisoners are in solitary confinement in the country. Some have even been held in solitary confinement for over 40 years.

- The U.S. still faces grave employment situation with its unemployment rate remained high. Rates of unemployment for the lowest-income families have topped 21 percent. The homeless population in the U.S. kept swelling and it had climbed 16 percent from 2011 to 2013.

- There are a large amount of child laborers in the agricultural sector in the U.S. and their physical and mental health was seriously harmed.

- Frequent drone strikes by the U.S. in countries including Pakistan and Yemen have caused heavy civilian casualties. The U.S. has carried out 376 drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004, causing deaths of up to 926 civilians.

– The U.S. remains a country which has not ratified or participated in a series of core UN conventions on human rights, such as *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, *the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, *the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and *the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

## **I. On Life and Personal Security**

The U.S. was haunted by an increasing number of violent crimes in 2013 with frequent occurrence of firearms-related criminal cases, public information show. American citizens' lives and personal safety are threatened by an increasingly dangerous environment.

The number of violent crimes has risen sharply. According to the Uniform Crime Reports, released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2013, the U.S. registered 1,214,464 violent crimes in 2012, of which 14,827 are murders and nonnegligent manslaughters, 84,376 forcible rapes, 354,522 robberies and 760,739 aggravated assaults. According to statistics revealed by the Bureau of Justice on October 24,



2013, the rate of violent victimization increased from 22.6 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older in 2011 to 26.1 in 2012.

On April 15, 2013, twin bombings ripped through Boston Marathon, leaving three dead and 264 injured. Among the killed was an 8-year-old. U.S. authorities called the bombings a terrorist attack (*USA Today*, December 6, 2013).

*The Washington Post* reported on January 1, 2014, that Robert Senquan Spencer, 21, was dead from a shotgun blast on a Southwest Washington street, becoming the District's 80<sup>th</sup> homicide victim of 2013. The District had 103 homicides in 2013 – a sharp increase from 88 in 2012.

American citizens keep the world's largest number of privately owned guns. According to figures released by the FBI in 2013, the total number of background checks conducted for gun sales in 2013 add up to 21,093,273, beating the previous 2012 record of 19,592,303 by 1,500,970 ([www.townhall.com](http://www.townhall.com), January 7, 2014). As of 2013, there were about 300 million guns in the U.S. On average, more than 100,000 Americans are being shot each year, and 30,000 deaths are caused by the use of guns. Victims are either killed in gun-related crimes or died in suicide or nonnegligent manslaughter. The U.S.

government failed to take effective measures to control guns. ([www.gunfaq.org](http://www.gunfaq.org), [www.guncrimestatistics.com](http://www.guncrimestatistics.com))

After the mass shootings in Colorado and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, there were strong calls in the United States for stricter controls on firearms. On April 17, a bipartisan bill to support expanded background checks on firearms was blocked in the Senate. Previously, plans for a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines had already been removed from the gun-control bill ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), April 17, 2013). At the same time, states in the U.S. continue to loosen their gun laws. On January 5, Illinois became the last state in the U.S. to allow average citizens to carry around concealed firearms. Anyone with firearm owner's identification card in the U.S. is allowed to pack heat in places except the no-go zones including schools, parks and restaurants ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com), January 8, 2014).

Gun violence is rampant in the U.S. There are 11,000 Americans killed by gun violence every year ([www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), December 17, 2013). Information collected regarding types of weapons used in violent crime showed that firearms were used in 69.3 percent of the nation's murders, 41 percent of robberies, and 21.8 percent of aggravated assaults,

according to the Uniform Crime Reports released by the FBI in 2013. Every year, there is serious gun violence in the U.S. On October 21, 2013, Attorney General Eric Holder said the average number of mass shooting incidents has tripled in recent years. According to Justice Department figures on mass shootings, 404 people were shot and 207 people were killed from 2009 to 2012 ([www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), October 21, 2013). According to a report published on *the USA Today* on December 16, 2013, 137 people died in 30 mass killings – four or more people killed, not including the killer – in 2013.

On September 16, 2013, civilian contractor and military veteran Aaron Alexis, a resident of Texas, went on a shooting rampage after he entered the headquarters of the Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, D.C. in the morning, killing 12 people and injuring several others. An eye witness said the gunman began shooting from a fourth-floor overlook in the hallway and was aiming down at people in the building's cafeteria on the first floor. Aaron Alexis was shot dead in a 30 minutes' exchange of gunfire with authorities ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com), September 17, 2013).

## II. On Civil and Political Rights

The U.S. government took liberty in monitoring its citizens, which shocked the world. Tortures in the U.S. prisons raised concerns. Elections and the checks-and-balances systems were plagued by malpractices and inefficiency, impairing civil interests.

The U.S. government exercises massive and unrestrained information tapping on its own citizens. Edward Snowden, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) employee, revealed a tapping program carried out by the National Security Agency (NSA), code-named PRISM. Under the program, the U.S. intelligence, by virtue of data provided by nine Internet companies, including the Microsoft, Google, Apple, Facebook, and Yahoo, and other major telecom providers, tracked citizens' private contacts and social activities recklessly ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), June 7, 2013).

The website of *the Washington Post* revealed on June 7, 2013, that the NSA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were tapping directly into the central servers of some Internet companies, and users' data, extracting their emails, chats, audio and video data, documents and photos in real time, and putting certain targets and their contacts under full

surveillance. According to a government document disclosed by *the New York Times* on September 29, 2013, the NSA, since November 2010, had been exploiting its huge collections of U.S. citizens' data to identify their associates, their locations at certain times, their traveling companions, and other personal information. The scrutiny program, which links U.S. citizens' phone numbers and e-mails in a "contact chain," exposed large amount of citizens' privacy to the government. The website of *the Guardian*, a British newspaper, revealed on June 6, 2013, that one of the largest U.S. telecommunications providers, the Verizon Business Network Services Inc., was required to provide to the NSA all the telephony metadata within its system, including telephone numbers, locations and call durations. Germany's Spiegel Online reported on September 7, 2013, that internal NSA documents showed that the U.S. intelligence has the capability of tapping user data from the iphone, devices using Android as well as BlackBerry, a system previously believed to be highly secure. The NSA developed cracking programs and tapped users' data held on the three major smart phone operating systems, including contact lists, SMS traffic, and location information about where a user has been. The NSA is able to infiltrate the computer a person

uses to sync their iphone, and the script programs enable additional access to at least 38 iphone features.

The journal.ie reported on June 14, 2013, nine major international civil liberties groups issued joint declaration that the U.S. federal government's secretive scrutiny program, PRISM, is a breach of international conventions on human rights. The joint declaration said, "Such vast and pervasive state surveillance violates two of the most fundamental human rights: the right to privacy and to freedom of expression."

The U.S. federal narcotics officers and other agents, in cooperation with American Telephone & Telegraph, can not only gain access to all the clients' phone records, but also all the phone calls made through the company's telephone exchangers (*The Huffington Post*, December 20, 2013). *The Los Angeles Times'* website, [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), reported on September 26, 2013, the FBI has long used drone aircraft in domestic investigations, exercising clandestine surveillance over the public. The website also reported, the U.S. federal prosecutors secretly obtained records of telephone calls from more than 20 telephone lines belonging to the Associated Press and its journalists in a two-month period in early 2012 ([www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), May 13, 2013).

Inmates treated inhumanely in prisons. The use of solitary confinement is prevalent. According to news reports, in U.S. prisons, inmates in solitary confinements are enclosed in cramped cells with poor ventilation and natural lights, isolated from other prisoners, a situation that will take tolls on inmates' physical and mental health ([www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), June 12, 2013). About 80,000 U.S. prisoners are in solitary confinement, including nearly 12,000 in California. The California's Pelican Bay prison has more than 400 prisoners who have been in isolation for over a decade. In many cases, the inmates are isolated for up to 23 hours per day in cells measuring 3.5 by 2.5 meters ([www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com), August 23, 2013). Some have even been held in solitary confinement for over 40 years([www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca), October 4, 2013). In the prison system of the New York state, about 3,800 prisoners are in solitary confinement every day ([online.wsj.com](http://online.wsj.com), Feb. 19, 2014). The then 49-year-old prisoner, William Blake, had been held in solitary confinement for 26 years, locked in a cell furnished with only one iron bed ([www.dailymail.com](http://www.dailymail.com), March 15, 2013). In 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture Juan Mendez repeatedly urged the U.S. government to abolish the use of solitary confinement. He argued, even short-term solitary

confinement can be counted as torture ([www.bayview.com](http://www.bayview.com), October 14, 2013). In California state prisons, 30,000 inmates began hunger strikes on July 8, 2013 in protest of the use of solitary confinement. The hunger strikes lasted two months ([www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), September 15, 2013).

On January 29, 2014, the British *Daily Mail*'s web edition published New York photographer Scott Houston's photos featuring working and living conditions of inmates in Arizona State's prisons. The images show, inmates are shackled together while working and eating, five on one chain, with just nine feet between them. Houston said, he was left with the impression that the chain gangs working together were similar to the days of slavery. "You could go back 200 years."

Election becomes the game of a few. A great number of researches showed that the American's influence on policy is proportional to their wealth. About 70 percent of the population, who are on the lower wealth and income scale, have virtually no influence on policy whatsoever. They are effectively disenfranchised. Only a tenth of one percent essentially get what they want, i.e. they effectively influence policies ([www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com), August 17, 2013). The U.S. citizens get less and less enthusiastic about election. The mayoral election of Los



Angeles in May 2013 only had 23.3 percent of the city's registered voters cast a ballot. And the winner got 222,300 votes, just 12.4 percent of the registered voters (www.latimes.com, June 11, 2013).

The checks-and-balances system has become an impediment to actions. On October 1, 2013, the U.S. federal government, except for its core functions, entered a shutdown, after Congress failed to pass the budget bill as the Democrats and Republicans failed to agree on the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act." Francis Fukuyama, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, wrote in an article published on October 4, 2013, on *the Washington Post's* website, the American system of checks and balances gradually becomes a "vetocracy." "It empowers a wide variety of political players representing minority position to block action by the majority and prevent the government from doing anything." The U.S. government shutdown is the very result of such vicious checks and balances. A new poll found "Americans entered 2014 with a profoundly negative view of their government, expressing little hope that the government can or will solve the nation's biggest problems." According to the poll conducted by the