

**CONCEPTUAL AND NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATING CITIZENS INTO  
PUBLIC SECURITY IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: A SYSTEMATIC  
ANALYSIS OF LEGAL, POLITICAL, AND TECHNOLOGICAL INSTRUMENTS WITHIN  
THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC POLICY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article presents a theoretical and legal analysis of the system of involving citizens in ensuring public security in the People's Republic of China. The key normative acts defining the interaction between the state and society in this sphere, including the Law of the People's Republic of China "On National Security" and the Law of the People's Republic of China "On Countering Terrorism" are considered. The mechanisms of public participation through residents' committees, auxiliary police formations and digital technologies, including the social credit system, are analysed. Based on statistical data and expert assessments, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is characterised. Potential challenges, such as the need to improve the regulatory framework and the balance between security and civil liberties, are identified.

**Keywords:** Public security, legal regulation, People's Republic of China, residents' committees, auxiliary police, digital security, social credit, law and order, public policy, citizen participation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Public security and public order are the foundation of stability and an important condition for the sustainable development of any state. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), these aspects are of particular importance due to demographic characteristics, including high population density in megacities, intensive development of digital transformation processes, and the strategic task of ensuring social harmony in society. The PRC government implements a unique institutional model of integrating citizens in ensuring public safety and public order protection based on a combination of legal mechanisms, ideological, political tools and technological innovations.

**METHODS**

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the PRC practice of involving citizens in ensuring public security and public order protection, including the study of the legal framework, policy mechanisms and evaluation of the effectiveness of this system. The analysis is based on the study of normative legal acts, official statistical indicators of PRC government agencies, as well as scientific publications of leading researchers in this field and

is based on a methodology that implies a systematic approach to data collection, processing and interpretation.

## **RESULTS**

Citizen participation in the processes of ensuring public security in the PRC is an ordered model of interaction between the state and society, enshrined in a set of normative-legal acts. These documents define the responsibilities of citizens and include them in a multi-level system oriented towards preventing threats to public security and promptly responding to them. It should be taken into account that the very perception of the term "security" (安全) plays an important role in the formation of the philosophy of security, as the meaning put into it are one of the indicators of its uniqueness [1].

In the PRC, the participation of citizens in ensuring public security is regulated by a set of normative and legal acts that form a comprehensive institutional framework for the interaction of government structures with civil society institutions and citizens. The main strategic document that defines the concept of ensuring and improving public security is set out in the provisions of the "14th Five-Year Plan of National Economic and Social Development of the PRC and long-term goals for the period up to 2035" [2]. [2].

The document emphasises that ensuring national security and stability is one of the key tasks of the PRC in the implementation of both the current Five-Year Plan and the long-term goals until 2035. The strategic goal is to create a solid foundation for the country's comprehensive development, where security is seen as a necessary element of sustainable growth and prosperity.

In the context of public security, the provisions emphasise a comprehensive approach to ensuring stability and protecting the country's national interests. It is noted that strengthening the national security system and enhancing the capacity to protect the political, military, economic, cultural and information spheres, which provides the basis for comprehensive public security (Art. 52).

It is separately stated that the level of public safety shall be improved through the improvement of systems of risk prevention, emergency response, crime control, transport safety and infrastructure protection, with the use of innovative technologies and their implementation in practice being identified as one of the main factors in ensuring public safety (Art. 54). The need to maintain social stability by preventing conflicts, resolving social contradictions and strengthening citizens' trust in state institutions is emphasised (Article 55).

The main legal and regulatory document governing public security is the Law on National Security (中华人民共和国国家安全法) [3], which establishes the general legal framework for the establishment and operation of the national security system, providing for the interaction of state bodies, enterprises, public organisations and citizens. At the same time, special attention is paid to coordination between central and local governments, as well as to the synergy of civil society efforts in the process of risk prevention and response to threats (Articles 11, 49). In particular, the law obliges government bodies to create mechanisms for involving citizens in ensuring national security, including educational programmes, raising awareness of security and fostering a culture of vigilance (art. 78), which makes it possible to activate the

role of the public, local self-government bodies and citizens in addressing tasks related to the prevention of offences, the prevention of emergencies and the maintenance of social stability, which are an integral part of the society.

The involvement of citizens in ensuring public safety and protecting public order is regulated in more detail by a number of normative acts that outline the powers and functions of various state actors. One of the central elements in this system is the Law on Countering Terrorism (中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法) [4], which, along with the obligations of citizens and organisations to report potential terrorist threats, also establishes their participation in prevention activities organised by public authorities (Articles 9, 61, 43), awareness-raising programmes and digital platforms to promptly inform the authorities.

Also, the Law on Penalties for Violations of Public Order (中华人民共和国治安管理处罚法) [5] contains provisions that regulate the participation of citizens in ensuring public order and prevention of offences and a number of articles of the law provide for measures of liability for concealing information about offences and facts that may threaten public safety or disturb public order.

At the same time, the country has other regulatory documents, programmes and directives aimed at implementing the concept of active involvement of citizens in ensuring public security and protecting public order. Thus, the Chinese government is implementing the concept of "Integrated Public Security Management" (社会治安综合治理 - "综治"<sup>1</sup>) [6], which is the key system for ensuring public safety.

The main goal of this concept was to create an integrated security management system that combines the efforts of various actors (the state, local authorities, law enforcement agencies, public organisations and citizens). The main principles of "综治" include preventing offences and social conflicts, integrating the actions of all stakeholders, broad involvement of citizens and public organisations in addressing security issues and working at the national, regional and local levels to achieve a common goal.

At the central government level, the Central Commission for Integrated Public Security Management (中央社会治安综合治理委员会) coordinates the work and develops strategic goals, directives and programmes. At the regional and local levels, tasks are assigned to local governments, law enforcement agencies, businesses, community organisations and citizens (volunteers).

One of the elements of the system of public policy implementation at the local level are local self-government bodies - "residents' committees" (committees of neighbours) (居民委员会), which perform the coordinating function of civic participation, promoting mass involvement of the population in activities to ensure public order, crime prevention, information gathering, as well as ensuring effective interaction with law enforcement agencies.

According to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, "urban people's committees and rural people's committees set up by place of residence are grassroots mass self-government organisations... The committees form people's conciliation committees, public order

<sup>1</sup> The term "综治" (Zōngzhì) is an abbreviation of the Chinese expression "社会治安综合治理" (Shèhuì zhí'ān zònghé zhìlì), which can be translated as "integrated public security management" or "integrated public order management".

committees, public health committees and other committees that are engaged in public work and socially useful affairs, settle disputes among the people, assist in maintaining public order, and convey opinions and opinions to the people's governments [7].

The activities of residents' committees are regulated by the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Organisation of Urban Residents' Committees (中华人民共和国城市居民委员会组织法) [8], according to which one of the key tasks of residents' committees is to involve citizens in the process of managing local affairs, including public safety.

According to the Ministry of Civil Administration of the People's Republic of China, by the end of 2022, the programme had covered more than 90 percent of the urban population and had more than 661,000 committees [9] of residents, indicating the mass implementation of this system. In addition, according to research by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, more than 70 percent of residents in urban neighbourhoods have a positive view of neighbourhood committees, noting their contribution to improving the quality of life and solving local problems [10].

According to the People's Police Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国人民警察法) [11], police agencies have the right to involve citizens in cooperation in crime prevention, intelligence gathering on offences, and participation in public order protection activities (Article 34). One of the main tools for the implementation of this norm is the Volunteer Police Assistants (辅警) programme, which provides for patrolling public places as part of police units, recording and transmitting data on suspicious persons, and participating in preventive raids aimed at suppressing offences. Citizens participating in these programmes are required to undergo basic free training in legal literacy, self-defence and first aid before being eligible to participate in joint police activities.

The PRC government system actively supports the involvement of citizens in ensuring public safety and public order through a multi-level system of interaction that combines legal, organisational and technological mechanisms, based on the principle of "social synergy", where individual citizens, public organisations and government agencies jointly participate in maintaining safety and public order.

The concept of "social trust" (社会信用体系) [12] plays a key role in motivating citizens and active participation in committee activities aimed at ensuring public safety is captured in "Social Credit," a citizen rating system. A high social rating improves a family's reputation in the community and provides access to preferential treatment, including increased likelihood of approval for financial loans and loans with simplified terms, rental housing agreements, and priority employment and other benefits. Neighbourhood committees, as a key link between the state and the community, ensure a high level of social mobilisation and contribute to the strengthening of public order.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has made extensive use of party structures on the ground. For example, the Peaceful City Campaign (平安城市) [13] involved more than 10 million citizens in security activities in urban areas.

To encourage people to participate in the activities of neighbourhood committees, the state and local authorities use a range of material and non-material incentives. For example, the committees annually award 200 of the most active citizens the title of "Model Citizen" (模范居

民), which entitles them to privileges on payment of utility bills, out-of-line enrolment of children in kindergartens, and free trips to health resorts.

The system of neighbourhood committees in the People's Republic of China not only provides legal mechanisms for citizen involvement, but also creates social safeguards aimed at building trust in public authorities and improving the quality of life, thus contributing to the prevention of crime. Thus, the Committees hold events, within the framework of the Harmonious Microdistrict (和谐社区) project, courses on socialisation for migrants and improving legal literacy are organised. Since 2018, the Dream Neighbourhood (梦想社区) programme has been in place, which provides residents with 50,000 grants for improvements, including the creation of safe living conditions, including the installation of video surveillance systems. In order to encourage citizens to participate in the police assistant programme, the state provides number of social guarantees, with police assistants protected by law and 辅警 entitled to health insurance and pension contributions, and benefits and compensation in the event of injury or death or property damage in the performance of their duties. For example, police assistants receive a monthly stipend, the amount of which varies from region to region. In Beijing in particular, the average 辅警 salary is 3,000 to 5,000 yuan, which provides them with basic social protection. In addition, participation in the 辅警 programme provides benefits when joining law enforcement agencies, making them more competitive in the labour market. In Guangdong province, for example, 30 per cent of police vacancies are reserved for candidates with 辅警 experience.

Police assistants receive appropriate insignia and certificates that emphasise their status and enhance their credibility in society by promoting a positive image. In some regions, 辅警 families receive additional benefits, such as discounts on utility bills or priority enrolment of children in kindergartens. Also, in order to enhance the prestige of the institution of volunteer police assistants and encourage public participation in law enforcement, Shanghai holds an annual "Best Police Assistant of the Year" award ceremony to honour citizens who have made significant contributions to public safety.

As a result of the measures implemented, citizens who take an active part in initiatives to ensure public safety and the protection of public order make a significant contribution to the formation of a safe, stable social environment.

The 辅警 programme has involved more than 4 million citizens in public order policing [14], roughly about 1.4 per cent of the country's working population, which has significantly reduced the burden on professional police forces, forming a model of "horizontal security" where citizens become active agents in protecting public safety, improving the overall effectiveness of the security system.

Empirical evidence shows the high impact of citizen involvement in public safety. In particular, between 2003 and 2023, the number of crimes prevented by volunteer groups increased by 25 per cent. In addition, every year these groups are involved in apprehending more than 50,000 offenders and preventing more than 150,000 crimes, which confirms their significant role in the system of prevention and response to threats to public security.

According to the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, in regions where "residents' committees" programmes were actively implemented, the crime rate decreased by 15 per cent [15]. In particular, in the city of Guangzhou under the 辅警 programme more than 30 thousand citizens participate in the programme, which helped in solving 14 thousand administrative and 7.6 thousand criminal offences. As a result of the activities of volunteer police assistants, the rate of pickpocketing has decreased by 25 per cent [16]. There are also more than 3.5 thousand volunteer auxiliary police engaged in the "smart patrols" (智慧巡逻) methodology in 16 branches of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau. As a result of their activities, more than 13 thousand criminal offences were solved and more than 15 thousand suspected offenders were detained [17].

In Guangdong province, the implementation of the Police Eyes and Ears (警察的眼睛和耳朵) programme [18] has demonstrated a significant increase in civic participation in community policing, resulting in a 40 per cent increase in the number of reported offences [19], enabling law enforcement agencies to more quickly detect and deter illegal activities. This approach contributed not only to enhancing the capacity of the police to monitor the crime situation, but also to strengthening preventive response mechanisms through the active involvement of the population in the processes of maintaining public safety.

At the same time, the State is actively introducing digital tools, such as mobile applications and video surveillance systems, which allow citizens to promptly report offences and more effective interaction between citizens and law enforcement agencies.

China's Cybersecurity Law (中华人民共和国网络安全法) [20] establishes comprehensive measures to ensure digital security. The law requires Internet companies to monitor online space, prevent the spread of "harmful" information and report violations to the relevant authorities, thus promoting the formation of a system of "digital people's militias" (数字民兵) in which citizens and organisations are actively involved in cybersecurity [21].

Additionally, this system is strengthened by the National Network Shield Programme (国家 "网络安全盾牌"计划) [22], which aims to create volunteer associations to monitor the digital space. The programme provides training courses to identify cyber threats, extremist and fraudulent content. Trained volunteers are given the opportunity to interact with law enforcement agencies, thereby contributing to the effectiveness of the national security system.

Also established is the Security Network (安全网) [23] platform, which allows citizens to report suspicious activities through mobile applications. More than 1 million reports are sent through this platform each year, 60 per cent of which result in the investigation of offences.

Modern digital technologies have greatly expanded the possibilities of interaction between citizens and government agencies in the field of public safety. In particular, the Xinfang platform [24] is used to collect messages from the public in a centralised manner, providing effective feedback to government agencies.

The development of specialised mobile applications, such as Beijing 110 and Chaoyang Masses, as well as the creation of publicly accessible social media accounts, such as Beijing Xicheng Auntie on WeChat [25], have significantly improved the responsiveness to public

security threats. These digital tools enable citizens involved in public security to record offences and send photos and videos in real time [26].

Community organisations such as the Alliance for Safe Cities (城市安全联盟) play an important role in this area, working with the police to implement facial recognition technology and smart surveillance systems [27] funded by local budgets.

## **DISCUSSION**

The system of neighbourhood committees in the PRC is a specific institutional mechanism of local self-governance that integrates elements of democratic citizen participation with state oversight practices. Despite the existence of a well-developed structure of normative guarantees and incentive tools, the implementation of initiatives aimed at involving citizens in the processes of ensuring public safety and maintaining public order faces a number of problematic issues. In particular, the degree of citizen participation in the functioning of "residents' committees" shows noticeably lower rates in rural regions and among labour migrants. This phenomenon may be due to the relatively limited incomes of these groups compared to the urban population [28], which highlights the need for a differentiated approach to the development and adaptation of relevant programmes. Thus, taking into account regional peculiarities and socio-economic characteristics of different demographic categories becomes a key factor for improving the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

Additionally, a number of researchers [29] point out the lack of certainty of legal mechanisms regulating the responsibility of citizens within this system. This vagueness of the regulatory framework can create prerequisites for abuse on the part of participants in the process.

Active participation of citizens in maintaining public order, on the one hand, contributes to the strengthening of social security, but, on the other hand, creates the risk of turning this mechanism into a means of expanding state control over society, that this duality causes concern among a number of international experts and observers [30].

A key component of this system is the police volunteer assistant programme (辅警), which differs from its Western counterparts [31], which are based on the principle of purely voluntary participation of citizens. In the PRC context, the activities of such assistants are often accompanied by certain obligations to state institutions, which gives this model a specific character. According to the provisions of the regulations, voluntary police assistants are not part of the staff of law enforcement agencies, and their competences are limited to the fulfilment of auxiliary tasks. These functions exclude independent decision-making related to detention, searches, as well as the use of force, firearms or other special means [32].

In addition, the practice of 辅警 involves significant risks to their safety. For example, according to the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC, in 2022, 3,470 auxiliary police officers were injured in the line of duty nationwide, and 179 of them died in the course of their assigned duties [33]. These figures emphasise the increased vulnerability of this category of officers compared to regular law enforcement forces.

Despite mandatory training programmes, the level of professional qualifications of police assistants is often insufficient. This contributes to situations in which cases of abuse of authority and violations of citizens' rights are recorded, including the improper use of physical

force [34], non-compliance with traffic regulations, and even deliberate concealment of unlawful acts [35].

The functioning of volunteer police assistants is regulated by regional regulations [36], and their integration into the public order system is seen as central to the concept of "security through participation", a hallmark of the Chinese legal paradigm. Moreover, making ISPs and users responsible for monitoring and reporting illegal content forms a model with a dual nature. On the one hand, this practice enhances the effectiveness of crime prevention measures; on the other hand, it raises legitimate concerns about the potential expansion of state control and the possible infringement of the right to privacy [36].

In order to improve the impact of community engagement, the authorities of the People's Republic of China launched pilot projects aimed at digitalising the neighbourhood committee system in 2023. Among the measures implemented are the introduction of mobile applications such as Smart Neighbourhood (智慧社区). These technological innovations are designed to optimise the functioning of committees, strengthen communication channels between government agencies and society, and encourage greater citizen participation, especially among youth and mobile demographic groups.

Thus, despite the successes achieved and the existence of a comprehensive structure of normative guarantees and motivational mechanisms, further improvement of the public order system in China requires consideration of regional specifics, refinement of the legal framework and consistent application of modern digital solutions. These steps, in turn, can improve the efficiency of governance and strengthen public trust in the institutions of state power.

## **CONCLUSION**

The practice of involving citizens in the processes of ensuring public security in the PRC demonstrates a high level of effectiveness, but there is still a need for further development of legal instruments regulating this sphere. The political aspects of this activity are becoming the subject of academic debate, particularly in the context of finding a balance between the tasks of maintaining public order and ensuring the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

The system of neighbourhood committees is a unique model of local self-governance, combining elements of civic participation and public administration. The legal basis of this system creates extensive opportunities for the involvement of the population in the management of local processes, contributing to the consolidation of society and the formation of mechanisms of horizontal interaction between citizens and state structures. At the same time, the question of the degree of autonomy of such committees remains debatable, since their activities are carried out in the context of a centralised system of public security management.

Empirical evidence shows significant public support for neighbourhood committees, which underlines their important role in strengthening social stability and increasing trust in public institutions. This form of civic participation contributes to the improvement of the quality of life at the community level and the integration of the population into the processes of maintaining public order.

The introduction of digital technologies has had a significant impact on the evolution of civic participation mechanisms. The development of online platforms designed to record and

transmit data on offences and threats to public security has significantly improved the accuracy and speed of law enforcement response. The use of modern technology addresses traditional limitations of threat response systems, such as the lack of sources of information, outdated monitoring methods and limited technological infrastructure.

The digitalisation of interactions between citizens and government agencies has encouraged greater public involvement in public security, while laying the groundwork for a new form of social control in which citizens themselves play a key role. However, despite the clear benefits of such measures, their impact on privacy, civil liberties and the degree of public oversight of state institutions requires further careful analysis.

An analysis of the institutional and technological aspects of civic participation in public safety in the PRC confirms that this system combines effective management practices with a number of structural challenges.

The introduction of digital technologies and online platforms has significantly increased the speed and accuracy of public security monitoring mechanisms. However, the process of digitalisation is accompanied by the challenge of balancing the effectiveness of preventive measures with the protection of citizens' rights. In this context, further development of the system requires a comprehensive approach that includes both technological modernisation and the improvement of legal safeguards aimed at preventing abuse and strengthening public trust in regulatory mechanisms.

Thus, despite its successes, the model of civic participation in public security in China continues to evolve, requiring further analysis and adaptation to the dynamically changing socio-political environment and technological trends.

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