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**INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS, PARADIGMS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AND MECHANISMS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF STATE-SOCIETY INSTITUTIONAL INTERACTION IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERNIZING THE NATIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM**

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**Abstract**

This study is dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of citizen involvement in ensuring public safety in the People's Republic of China (PRC), with an emphasis on theoretical foundations and practical applications of legal regulatory mechanisms. The focus is on key legislative acts that govern the interaction between state institutions and public organizations, including such fundamental documents as the PRC laws "On National Security" and "On Counter-Terrorism." The study examines mechanisms of citizen participation, among which the activities of residents' committees, auxiliary police units, and digital innovations—particularly the social credit system—are evaluated as tools for optimizing public safety. Based on an analysis of statistical data and expert opinions, the functionality and effectiveness of these mechanisms are studied, highlighting their advantages and identifying limitations.

**Keywords:** Public security, People's Republic of China, citizen participation, legal regulation, normative acts, residents' committees, auxiliary police, digital technologies, social credit system, national security, public order, public policy, social stability, comprehensive governance, technological innovations, neighborhood committees, volunteers.

**Introduction**

Ensuring public safety and maintaining public order are fundamental components of state stability, serving as key prerequisites for sustainable development of national socio-economic systems. In the context of the People's Republic of China (PRC), these aspects acquire particular significance due to a combination of specific factors, including demographic characteristics marked by high population density in urbanized megacities, the dynamic development of societal digital transformation, and the strategic orientation of the state toward ensuring social harmony as a foundational element of national identity and resilience. The Chinese government has developed and implemented a unique institutional model for consolidating civilian resources to ensure public safety and maintain public order, based on the integration of legal regulatory mechanisms,



ideological and political instruments of influence, and the implementation of advanced technological solutions, including digital innovations. This creates a synergistic effect in the process of modernizing the national security system.

**Results:**

Citizen participation in processes related to ensuring public safety in the People's Republic of China (PRC) represents an organized model of state-society interaction, enshrined in a set of legal and regulatory acts. These documents define citizens' obligations and integrate them into a multi-level system aimed at preventing threats to public safety and responding to them promptly. In this regard, it is important to note that the interpretation of the term "security" (安全) plays a key role in shaping the philosophy of security, as the semantic content of this concept serves as one of the indicators of the uniqueness of this model [1].

Citizen participation in ensuring public safety is regulated by a set of legal and regulatory acts that form a comprehensive institutional foundation for the interaction of state structures with civil society institutions and individual citizens. The main strategic document defining the concept of ensuring and improving the public safety system is the "14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the PRC and Long-Term Goals for 2035" [2].

In the specified document, it is emphasized that ensuring national security and stability is one of the key tasks within the framework of implementing the current five-year plan and long-term goals for 2035. The strategic goal is to create a solid foundation for the country's comprehensive development, where ensuring security is considered a necessary element of sustainable growth and prosperity.

In the context of public safety, special attention is paid to a comprehensive approach to ensuring stability and protecting national interests. It is noted that enhancing the protection potential of political, military, economic, cultural, and information spheres, as well as strengthening the national security system, serves as the basis for comprehensive public safety assurance (Article 52).

Improving public safety is achieved through risk prevention, emergency response, crime prevention, traffic safety assurance, and infrastructure protection system improvements. In this regard, special attention is paid to the application and implementation of innovative technologies as one of the key factors in ensuring public safety (Article 54). The necessity of maintaining social stability through conflict prevention, social contradiction resolution, and strengthening citizens' trust in state institutions is emphasized (Article 55).

The main legal and regulatory act governing public safety issues is the "Law on National Security" (中华人民共和国国家安全法) [3], which establishes general legal foundations for creating and operating the national security system, involving cooperation between state agencies, enterprises, public organizations, and citizens. Particular attention is given to coordinating actions between central and local authorities, as well as uniting the efforts of civil society in risk prevention and threat response processes (Articles 11, 49). The law obligates state agencies to create mechanisms for involving citizens in ensuring national security, including educational programs, raising awareness about safety, and fostering a culture of security (Article 78), thus enabling the activation of public roles, local self-governance bodies, and citizens in solving tasks related to crime



prevention, emergency prevention, and maintaining social stability, which are integral parts of public safety.

Attracting citizens to ensure public safety and maintain public order is more thoroughly regulated by a range of normative acts defining the powers and functions of various state entities. One of the key elements of this system is the "Anti-Terrorism Law" (中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法) [4], which establishes the duties of citizens and organizations to report potential terrorist threats, as well as their participation in preventive activities, awareness-raising programs, and the use of digital platforms for timely communication with authorities (Articles 9, 61, 43).

Additionally, the "Law on Administrative Penalties for Violations of Public Order" (中华人民共和国治安管理处罚法) [5] contains provisions regulating citizen participation in maintaining public order and crime prevention. Several articles of the law prescribe responsibility for concealing information about facts that may pose a threat to public safety or public order.

Furthermore, other regulatory documents, programs, and directives aimed at implementing the concept of actively involving citizens in ensuring public safety and maintaining public order are applied in the country. Specifically, the Chinese government implements the concept of "Comprehensive Governance of Public Safety" (社会治安综合治理 – "综治") [6], which serves as the primary system for ensuring public safety.

The main goal of this concept is to create a comprehensive security management system that unites the efforts of various actors: the state, local authorities, law enforcement agencies, public organizations, and citizens. The key principles of "综治" include crime and social conflict prevention, integration of all stakeholders' actions, extensive involvement of citizens and public organizations in addressing security issues, and cooperation at national, regional, and local levels to achieve common goals.

At the central level, coordination is carried out by the Central Committee for Comprehensive Governance of Public Safety (中央社会治安综合治理委员会), which develops strategic goals, directives, and programs. At the regional and local levels, tasks are distributed among local authorities, law enforcement agencies, businesses, public organizations, and citizens (volunteers). One of the key elements of implementing state policies at the local level is local self-governance bodies—the "residents' committees" (also known as neighborhood committees) (居民委员会). They perform a coordinating function, promoting mass citizen involvement in measures to ensure public order, prevent crime, gather information, and effectively interact with law enforcement agencies.

According to the Constitution of the PRC, "urban residents' committees and rural villagers' committees are established based on place of residence and serve as grassroots-level organizations of self-governance... Committees form mediation commissions, public order maintenance commissions, public health commissions, and other commissions that engage in public work and socially beneficial activities, resolve disputes among the population, contribute to maintaining public order, and convey the opinions and demands of the people to local authorities while making proposals" [7].



The activities of residents' committees are regulated by the PRC "Organic Law 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 main tasks of committees is to involve citizens in managing local affairs, including issues related to ensuring public safety.

According to data from the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC, by the end of 2022, over 90% of the urban population was covered under this program, with more than 661,000 residents' committees operational [9], demonstrating the widespread implementation of the system. Additionally, according to research by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, over 70% of urban district residents positively evaluate the work of neighborhood committees, noting their contribution to improving quality of life and resolving local problems [10].

According to the PRC "People's Police Law" (中华人民共和国人民警察法) [11], law enforcement agencies have the authority to involve citizens in areas such as crime prevention, gathering operational information about offenses, and participating in activities to maintain public order (Article 34). One of the main tools for implementing this norm is the "Volunteer Auxiliary Police" program (辅警), which includes patrolling public places jointly with the police, registering and transmitting data on suspicious individuals, and participating in preventive raids aimed at preventing offenses. Participants in these programs undergo mandatory basic training in legal literacy, self-defense, and first aid, after which they receive the right to participate in joint activities with the police.

The state system of the PRC actively supports attracting citizens to ensure public safety and maintain public order through a multi-level system of interaction that combines legal, organizational, and technological mechanisms. It is based on the principle of "social synergy," which implies joint support for safety and public order through the efforts of private individuals, public organizations, and state structures.

The concept of "social trust" (社会信用体系) [12] plays an important role in stimulating active citizen participation in committee activities aimed at ensuring public safety. Citizens' activities are assessed within the social credit system. A high social rating improves a family's reputation in society and provides benefits such as increased likelihood of obtaining financial loans and credits on favorable terms, lease agreements, priority employment, and other privileges. Neighborhood committees, acting as a key link in state-society interaction, ensure a high level of social mobilization and contribute to strengthening public order.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) actively uses local party structures to implement its initiatives. For example, as part of the "Safe City" campaign (平安城市) [13], over 10 million citizens were involved in activities to ensure safety in urban areas.

To stimulate citizen participation in neighborhood committees, the state and local authorities apply a complex of material and non-material incentives. For instance, committees annually award the title of "Model Citizen" (模范居民) to 200 most active citizens, providing them with benefits such as utility bill discounts, priority enrollment of children in kindergartens, and free sanatorium vouchers. The neighborhood committee system in the PRC not only ensures legal mechanisms for citizen involvement but also forms social guarantees aimed at strengthening trust in state authorities and improving quality of life, thereby contributing to crime prevention. For example,



committees organize courses on migrant socialization and legal literacy enhancement within the "Harmonious Community" project (和谐社区). Since 2018, the "Dream Community" program (梦想社区) has been active, under which 50,000 grants are allocated for resident improvement projects, including the installation of surveillance systems to create safe living conditions.

To attract citizens to the auxiliary police program (辅警), the state provides a range of social guarantees. The activities of auxiliary police officers are protected by law; they have the right to medical insurance and pension contributions, and in cases of injury, death, or material damage incurred during duty, compensation and benefits are provided. For example, auxiliary police officers receive a monthly monetary bonus, which varies depending on the region. Specifically, the average salary of 辅警 in Beijing ranges from 3,000 to 5,000 yuan, providing them with basic social protection. Moreover, participation in the 辅警 program offers advantages when seeking employment in law enforcement agencies, making them competitive in the job market. For instance, in Guangdong Province, 30% of police vacancies are reserved for candidates with experience in the 辅警 program.

Auxiliary police officers receive corresponding identification and badges that emphasize their status and enhance their prestige in society, contributing to forming a positive image. In some regions, 辅警 families receive additional benefits, such as utility bill discounts or priority kindergarten enrollment for their children. Additionally, to enhance the prestige of the voluntary auxiliary police institution and encourage public participation in law enforcement activities, Shanghai annually holds the "Volunteer of the Year Among Auxiliary Police Officers" award ceremony, aimed at recognizing citizens who have made significant contributions to ensuring public safety.

Thanks to the implemented measures, citizens actively participating in initiatives to ensure public safety and maintain public order make a substantial contribution to creating a safe and stable social environment.

Within the framework of the auxiliary police program (辅警), over 4 million citizens [14] have been involved in maintaining public order, accounting for approximately 1.4% of the working-age population of the country. This significantly reduced the workload on professional police forces and contributed to the formation of a "horizontal security" model, where citizens act as active subjects in protecting public safety, increasing the overall efficiency of the security system.

Empirical data demonstrate the high effectiveness of attracting citizens to ensure public safety. In particular, from 2003 to 2023, the number of crimes prevented with the participation of volunteer formations increased by 25%. Furthermore, these structures annually participate in detaining over 50,000 offenders and preventing more than 150,000 crimes, confirming their important role in the system of preventing public safety threats and responding to them.

According to data from the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC, in regions where residents' committee programs are actively implemented, the crime rate decreased by 15% [15]. For example, in Guangzhou city, over 30,000 citizens participate in the 辅警 program, which contributed to solving 14,000 administrative and 7,600 criminal offenses. Thanks to the activities



of voluntary auxiliary police officers, the level of pickpocketing decreased by 25% [16]. Also, in 16 divisions of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau, over 3,500 voluntary auxiliary police officers operate using the "smart patrol" method (智慧巡逻). As a result of their activities, over 13,000 criminal offenses were solved, and more than 15,000 suspects were detained [17].

In Guangdong Province, the implementation of the "Eyes and Ears of the Police" program (警察的眼睛和耳朵) [18] significantly increased the level of citizen participation in maintaining public order. As a result, the number of reports on offenses increased by 40% [19], allowing law enforcement agencies to detect and suppress illegal actions more quickly. This approach not only expanded the police's ability to monitor the crime situation but also strengthened preventive response mechanisms by actively involving the population in supporting public safety processes. Additionally, the state actively introduces digital tools, such as mobile applications and surveillance systems, that allow citizens to promptly report offenses and interact more effectively with law enforcement agencies.

The PRC "Cybersecurity Law" (中华人民共和国网络安全法) [20] provides a set of measures to ensure digital security. According to the law, internet companies are obligated to monitor online spaces, prevent the spread of "malicious" information, and transmit data on violations to relevant authorities. This contributes to forming a "digital militia" system (数字民兵), where citizens and organizations actively participate in ensuring cybersecurity processes [21].

This system is enhanced by the national "Cybersecurity Shield" program (国家“网络安全盾牌”计划) [22], within which training courses on identifying cyber threats, extremist and illegal content are conducted. After completing the training, volunteers gain the opportunity to interact with law enforcement agencies, which enhances the effectiveness of the national security system. Additionally, the "Safe Network" platform (安全网) [23] was created, allowing citizens to report suspicious activities through mobile applications. Annually, over 1 million messages are transmitted through this platform, 60% of which are used for investigating offenses.

Modern digital technologies have significantly expanded the possibilities of interaction between citizens and state structures in the field of public safety. In particular, the Xinfang platform [24] applies centralized collection of messages from the population and ensures effective feedback with state agencies.

The development of specialized mobile applications, such as Beijing 110 and Chaoyang Masses, as well as the creation of publicly accessible accounts on social networks, such as Beijing Xicheng Auntie on WeChat [25], significantly increased the responsiveness to public safety threats. These digital tools enable citizens participating in ensuring public safety to register offenses and send photo and video materials in real time [26]. In this direction, public organizations such as the "Urban Safety Alliance" (城市安全联盟) play an important role, collaborating with the police to implement facial recognition technologies and "smart surveillance" systems [27], funded through local budgets.

**Discussion:**

The neighborhood committee system in the PRC represents a unique institutional mechanism of local self-governance that combines elements of democratic citizen participation with state oversight. Despite a well-developed structure of normative guarantees and incentive mechanisms, the implementation of initiatives aimed at attracting citizens to ensure public safety and maintain public order faces several problematic issues. In particular, the level of citizen participation in the work of "residents' committees" is significantly lower in rural areas and among labor migrants. This phenomenon may be related to relatively limited incomes of these groups compared to the urban population [28], indicating the need to develop and adapt relevant programs considering a differentiated approach. Thus, taking into account regional characteristics and socio-economic characteristics of different demographic categories becomes a key factor in improving the effectiveness of the mechanisms under consideration.

Moreover, some researchers [29] note the insufficient clarity of legal mechanisms regulating citizens' responsibilities within this system. This ambiguity in the regulatory framework may create conditions for abuse by participants in the process.

On the one hand, active citizen participation in maintaining public order contributes to strengthening social security, but on the other hand, there is a risk of transforming this mechanism into a tool for expanding state control over society, which raises concerns among international experts and observers [30].

A key component of the system under consideration is the auxiliary police program (辅警), which differs from Western analogs based on the principle of voluntary participation [31]. In the context of the PRC, the activities of such assistants are often accompanied by certain obligations to state institutions, giving this model a special character. According to the provisions of regulatory acts, auxiliary police officers are not part of the staff of law enforcement agencies, and their powers are limited to performing auxiliary tasks. These functions do not include making independent decisions related to detention, interrogation, use of force, firearms, or other special means [32].

However, the practical activities of 辅警 are associated with significant risks to their safety. For example, according to data from the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC, in 2022, during the performance of official duties across the country, 3,470 auxiliary police officers were injured, of which 179 died while carrying out their assigned tasks [33]. These figures indicate the high vulnerability of this category of employees compared to regular law enforcement forces.

Despite mandatory training programs, the professional competence of auxiliary police officers often remains insufficient. This situation contributes to cases of abuse of power and violation of citizens' rights, including the illegal use of physical force [34], non-compliance with traffic rules, and instances of intentional concealment of criminal actions.

The activities of voluntary auxiliary police officers are regulated by regional regulatory acts, and their integration into the public order system is considered a central element of the concept of "security through participation," which is a distinctive feature of the Chinese legal paradigm. Additionally, imposing responsibility on internet providers and users for monitoring and reporting illegal content forms a dualistic model. On the one hand, such practices increase the effectiveness of crime prevention measures; on the other hand, they raise justified concerns about the possible expansion of state control and violation of the right to privacy.



To improve the effectiveness of interaction with the population in 2023, the authorities of the People's Republic of China launched experimental projects to digitize the neighborhood committee system. Within the framework of the implemented measures, mobile applications such as "Smart Community" (智慧社区) are being introduced. These technological innovations aim to optimize the work of committees, strengthen communication channels between state agencies and society, and stimulate active citizen participation, especially among youth and mobile demographic groups. Thus, despite the achievements and the existence of a comprehensive structure of normative guarantees and incentive mechanisms, further improvement of the public order system in China requires taking into account regional characteristics, improving the legal framework, and consistently applying modern digital solutions. These steps, in turn, can enhance the effectiveness of governance and strengthen public trust in state institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of involving citizens in processes to ensure public safety in the PRC demonstrates a high level of effectiveness, but there remains a need for further development of legal instruments regulating this area. The political aspects of this activity become the subject of scientific discussions, especially in the context of finding a balance between maintaining public order and protecting individual rights and freedoms.

The neighborhood committee system represents a unique model of local self-governance that combines elements of citizen participation with state management. The legal foundation of this system provides broad opportunities for involving citizens in managing local processes, contributes to societal consolidation, and fosters horizontal mechanisms of interaction between citizens and state structures. Nevertheless, the issue of the degree of autonomy of these committees remains debatable, as their activities are carried out within the framework of a centralized public safety management system.

Empirical data confirm a high level of public support for neighborhood committees, underscoring their important role in strengthening social stability and enhancing trust in state institutions. This form of citizen participation contributes to improving the quality of life at the local community level and integrating the population into processes of maintaining public order.

The introduction of digital technologies significantly impacts the evolution of citizen participation mechanisms. The development of online platforms for registering and transmitting data on offenses and public safety threats has substantially increased the accuracy and responsiveness of law enforcement agencies. The use of modern technologies eliminates traditional limitations of response systems, such as a lack of information sources, outdated monitoring methods, and limited technological infrastructure.

The digitization of interaction between citizens and state agencies promotes broad citizen involvement in the public safety system and lays the groundwork for forming a new form of social control, in which a key role is assigned to citizens themselves. However, despite the obvious advantages of such measures, their impact on privacy, civil liberties, and the degree of public control over state institutions requires further thorough analysis.

An analysis of institutional and technological aspects of citizen participation in ensuring public safety in the PRC confirms that this system combines effective governance practices with a number of structural challenges. The introduction of digital technologies and online platforms has





significantly increased the responsiveness and accuracy of public safety monitoring mechanisms. Nevertheless, the digital transformation process is accompanied by questions about maintaining a balance between the effectiveness of preventive measures and the protection of citizens' rights. In this context, the further development of the system requires a comprehensive approach, including improving legal guarantees aimed at preventing abuses and strengthening public trust in regulatory mechanisms, as well as implementing technological updates.

Thus, despite the achievements, the model of citizen participation in ensuring public safety in China continues to evolve, requiring analysis and adaptation to dynamic changes in the socio-political environment and technological trends.

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