

CIVIL SOCIETY

Findings

- During the Commission’s 2023 reporting year, PRC authorities tightened control over civil society, bolstering oversight of legal nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which the Chinese government calls “social organizations” (SOs), and widely cracking down on the activities, expression, and existence of unregistered or “illegal social organizations” (ISOs), including human rights defenders, religious communities, and groups promoting labor rights, women’s rights, and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) persons.
- The Chinese Communist Party and government have pursued and implemented regulatory efforts to “gatekeep” registration for SOs, resulting in the lowest rate of registration of SOs since 2008.
- This year, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee said that it would establish a social affairs work department that aims to improve Party-building in SOs, more firmly entrenching Party control over civil society.
- This past year, the Commission observed efforts to institutionalize an aggressive 2021 campaign that targeted both ISOs and the financial, technological, and administrative infrastructure that enables them to function, taking actions including banning legal organizations from any contact with ISOs.
- The Chinese Communist Party and government continued to incentivize SOs to engage in charity work and service provision in key sectors. Official efforts encouraged philanthropic giving aligned with Party and government goals, using oversight of crowdfunding platforms to both direct funds and exert control over NGOs.
- As of December 8, 2022, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s China Protest Tracker recorded 77 protests across 39 Chinese cities, demonstrating that, while decentralized and ad hoc, White Paper protesters appear to have leveraged existing networks to generate a temporary but sustained nationwide pressure campaign against the PRC’s zero-COVID policy.
- In April 2023, PRC authorities sentenced China Citizens Movement organizers and rights defenders **Xu Zhiyong** and **Ding Jiayi** to 14 and 12 years in prison, respectively, for “subversion of state power,” constituting what one longtime observer of the PRC justice system described as some of the harshest sentences he had seen in over twenty years.
- Chinese government authorities continued to censor and suppress efforts by advocacy groups in the LGBTQ community. In May 2023, the Beijing LGBT Center, one of the largest organizations serving the LGBTQ community, closed, reportedly due to pressure from authorities.
- Although social acceptance of LGBTQ persons and relationships has grown in China in recent years, PRC authorities have continued to tighten control over suspected LGBTQ representation and expression in media and entertainment.

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Recommendations

Members of the U.S. Congress and Administration officials are encouraged to take the following actions:

- Call on the Chinese government to release civil society advocates and staffers, in particular veteran human rights defenders **Xu Zhiyong**, **Ding Jiaxi**, and **Chang Weiping**, feminist and labor rights advocate **Li Qiaochu**, journalist and gender rights advocate **Sophia Huang Xueqin**, labor rights advocate **Wang Jianbing**, and other civil society and rights advocates detained for peacefully exercising their human rights, especially their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Encourage the Chinese government to revise its regulatory framework for civil society organizations, including the PRC Law on the Management of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations' Activities in Mainland China and the PRC Charity Law, to conform with international human rights standards regarding freedom of association, assembly, and expression.
- Urge the Chinese government to abide by its international legal obligations with respect to Chinese citizens' freedom of association, assembly, and expression and cease the unlawful harassment and arbitrary detention of civil society advocates and the closing of civil society organizations and online accounts of advocates.
- Continue to fund, monitor, and support programs globally that promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in mainland China and Hong Kong.
- Facilitate the participation of Chinese civil society advocates and human rights defenders in relevant international forums, to the extent that such participation remains independent of Chinese government control and does not endanger individuals.
- Work with U.S. allies and partners to counter PRC efforts to block civil society groups from obtaining consultative status at the United Nations.
- Support non-profit leadership and advocacy trainings for Chinese, Hong Kong, Tibetan, and Uyghur advocates who are now living outside of China and convene a periodic summit of stakeholders regarding the path forward for Chinese civil society, offline and online.
- Consider shifting support to more fluid models of advocacy, including "loose networks of professionals, friends, affinity groups, students" and other like groupings, recognizing the constricting space for civil society organizations.
- Consistent with commitments made by PRC delegations at various U.N. treaty body reviews, encourage the Chinese government to provide information about measures taken to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, indicating how such legislation will explicitly protect LGBTQ persons, among other groups.

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- Maintain funding, oversight, and evaluation of foreign assistance programs in China that support human rights advocacy as part of civil society programming. To the extent practicable under current conditions, consider boosting funding for programs focused on rights advocacy, capacity building, and leadership training for Chinese lawyers and human rights advocates.
- Continue to arrange events at the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva and at U.N. Headquarters in New York on ongoing human rights violations in China.

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Introduction

Domestic civil society in the PRC has continued to develop along distinct axes. On the one hand, “social organizations” (*shehui zuzhi*)—the government’s term for civil society organizations—that have registered and operate under Chinese Communist Party and government oversight persist, explicitly appealing to official priorities. On the other, despite the near-complete marginalization of independent civil society, ad hoc and fluid networks have emerged and adapted to an environment that—while highly restricted—remains in flux. Participants in the White Paper protests over coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdowns demonstrated that loose networks of professionals, friends, affinity groups, students, and others were able to develop and maintain connections to mobilize public protest and follow-on actions. Falling between government-sanctioned “social organizations” and diffuse protest movements, some civil society groups continued to occupy a diminished “gray zone,” including foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that maintained a presence in the PRC despite a precarious legal status. Groups serving China’s LGBTQ community have traditionally sought to operate in this “gray zone,”¹ but authorities have exerted increased pressure on the sector in recent years, resulting in diminished space in which to operate. In a development that illustrated the dire situation for civil society, in April 2023, a Chinese court handed down harsh sentences to civic participation advocates **Xu Zhiyong** and **Ding Jiaxi**, shocking many observers and sending a chilling message to Chinese civil society.

Regulations and Policy Pertaining to Civil Society

AUTHORITIES EXPAND CONTROL OVER SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

This reporting year, civil society experts observed efforts to “gatekeep” registration for social organizations (SOs), ensuring that only organizations amenable to Chinese Communist Party control operate with legal protections, a process which has stalled the growth of the sector and rendered groups deemed undesirable increasingly vulnerable.² According to the Blue Book on Social Organizations’ 2022 report,³ the rate of registration for SOs in 2021 reached its lowest point since 2008, likely a result of low approval rates.⁴ In December 2021, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) issued the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Social Organizations, which called on regulators to make registration more difficult and emphasized Party-building and political work within SOs, building on the existing trend toward lower approval rates.⁵ In addition to limiting the number of SOs and ensuring that they reflect the Party line, official guidance has also called for MCA regulators to consider sectoral, regional, and issue area distribution in issuing SO approvals.⁶ For example, the 2023 MCA nationwide conference on social organization and management work stressed that officials should “optimize distribution,” providing additional criteria by which the Party and government might deny registration to social organizations.⁷

Along with gatekeeping measures, this year the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee said that it would establish a new social affairs work department, which will expand the Party's role in civil society.⁸ According to the Party and State Institutional Reform Plan (2023), the social affairs work department will centralize public opinion gathering and petitioning processes and will "improve Party-building" in nongovernmental entities, including SOs.⁹ These reforms will be instituted at the national level by the end of 2023 and at the local level by 2024.¹⁰ One political scientist said that, under the department, "the freedom of civil organizations will be squeezed even further," adding that they "will be turned into organs serving the needs of the [P]arty."¹¹

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS DEEMED "ILLEGAL"

The Chinese government labels social organizations that do not seek to register with the MCA, those that are denied approval, and those that are explicitly banned as "illegal social organizations" (ISOs) and aims to root them out. This past year, the Commission observed efforts to institutionalize an aggressive 2021 campaign that targeted both ISOs and the financial, technological, and administrative infrastructures that enable them to function, including any ties or cooperation with legal social organizations.¹² For example, in November 2022, nearly a year after announcing that it would extend the crackdown measures indefinitely by "regularizing" the campaign, the MCA released a draft of Measures for the Annual Inspection of Social Groups.¹³ The draft measures stated that even holding a function with an ISO would be automatic grounds for a group to fail inspection, undermining a strategy that many unregistered or illegal groups have relied upon in order to survive and access resources: attaching themselves to legal social organizations.¹⁴ The government has also used the public to monitor and report on potential ISOs: through its online platform, the MCA offered a searchable database to determine whether a social organization is legal or not and allows users to report "misbehaving civil society."¹⁵

While authorities have published several tranches of organizations newly designated as illegal over this past year, one 2022 study observed a practice of "strategic opacity around politically sensitive organizations," whereby the government refrains from publicly listing politically sensitive organizations, even when those groups are already known to be banned.¹⁶ For example, the MCA's publicly available lists omit any mention of several prominent feminist and labor rights organizations, whose closures are known and have been well-documented.¹⁷ Scholars Diana Fu and Emile Dirks have posited that the omission of politically sensitive groups from public databases likely reflects the government's desire to limit awareness of such groups and preserve its "... discretionary power to handle threatening groups in a manner unconstrained by formal law or regulations."¹⁸

Foreign NGO Activity in China

During the Commission's 2023 reporting year, foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) maintained a presence in the PRC

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despite occupying a legally precarious position in the country under the PRC Law on the Management of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations' Activities in Mainland China, which is supervised by the Ministry of Public Security.¹⁹ Since the law's implementation in 2017, some experts and others involved with NGO work in China have expressed concern that aspects of the law remained ambiguous and open to varying interpretations.²⁰ In August 2022, ChinaFile's China NGO Project concluded that such ambiguity was "a feature, not a bug, of the system," designed to allow local officials to use "unspoken protocols" to selectively enforce the law.²¹ In December 2022, Tsinghua University's Institute for Philanthropy published an article echoing concerns about inconsistent application of the NGO law but reaffirmed the importance of "strictly controlling" organizations and activities that threaten China's national security.²² Foreign NGOs that have opted to remain in the country have focused on projects related to poverty alleviation, philanthropy and development, disability services and rights, health, children's issues, and education, while industry associations representing a particular industry or professional sector made up 80% of new organizations registering under the law in 2021.²³

Official Support for Charities and Philanthropic Giving

The Chinese Communist Party and government continued to promote social organizations (SOs) focused on charity work and service provision in key sectors and to encourage philanthropic giving aligned with Party and government goals.²⁴ As online crowdfunding platforms have grown increasingly popular, the government has used its oversight of the platforms to funnel resources to charities working on Party and government priorities and to limit which SOs are able to utilize the platforms to conveniently access resources.²⁵ According to a peer-reviewed study by several scholars based at universities in China, by regulating these platforms, "the government [is able to] strengthen its supervision over crowdfunding activities and mitigate its resource shortages."²⁶ Crowdfunding and online philanthropy platforms, predominately run by for-profit Chinese technology companies, have launched initiatives centered on state policy priorities and have used language that echoes official propaganda.²⁷ For example, in 2021, Tencent chose "common prosperity" as the theme for its popular "99 Giving Day,"²⁸ and in 2022, around 60% of donations generated by the event went toward "rural revitalization,"²⁹ a major policy priority under Xi Jinping.³⁰

White Paper Protests

In late November 2022, PRC citizens in locations throughout the country took part in protests against the government's "zero-COVID policy." These protests were precipitated by a fatal fire in Urumqi municipality, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, in which residents were unable to escape the burning building, reportedly because some entries and exits to the building were blocked due to particularly severe zero-COVID restrictions.³¹ Although authorities have worked to dismantle independent civil society and organized expressions of discontent under Xi Jinping,³² the protests

against zero-COVID lockdowns—popularly known as the “blank paper,”³³ White Paper, or “A4” protests³⁴—illustrate that, even in the absence of formally constituted rights groups, “invisible, unorganized, informal networks” came together in what a leading activist has termed “units of resistance.”³⁵ Reuters reported that the protests have been publicized by “tight knit groups of friends” passing information along in a decentralized manner.³⁶ In one instance, a group of young women in Beijing who were criminally detained for attending a November 27, 2022, protest [see Government Suppression of Civil Society in this chapter] shared information about a vigil for Urumqi fire victims on the messaging service WeChat, which the friend group used to keep in touch and organize social events.³⁷ After meeting at vigils and protests, attendees expressed feeling energized by finding that they were not alone in their frustration at the lockdowns.³⁸ As the protests spread, participants used online messaging platforms like WeChat and Telegram to form new, location-specific groups; organize and publicize events; and provide support for protesters navigating law enforcement and possible detention.³⁹ As of December 8, 2022, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s China Protest Tracker recorded 77 protests across 39 Chinese cities, demonstrating that, while the protests were decentralized and ad hoc, protesters appear to have leveraged existing networks to generate a temporary, but sustained, nationwide pressure campaign against zero-COVID.⁴⁰

Authorities then used these existing networks, such as friend groups, alumni and professional networks, and others to identify, monitor, and detain protesters. Protesters and reporters alike claim that public security officials infiltrated WeChat and Telegram groups created to coordinate protest activities.⁴¹ According to multiple accounts, public security officials took into custody a large number of women participants, some of whom were asked during interrogations whether they “were feminists, lesbians, or backed by foreign forces,” likely based on content detainees shared with friends on online platforms.⁴² Activists and observers have pointed out that the Chinese government appears to be scapegoating feminists and members of the LGBTQ community for the protests.⁴³

[For more information about the White Paper protests, see Chapter 1—Freedom of Expression and Chapter 12—Public Health. For more on the government’s handling of the protests, see Chapter 6—Governance. For more on the government’s use of technology to suppress the protests and identify protesters, see Chapter 16—Technology-Enhanced Authoritarianism.]

Harsh Sentencing of China Citizens Movement Organizers

In April 2023, People's Republic of China (PRC) authorities sentenced China Citizens Movement (CCM) organizers and rights defenders **Xu Zhiyong** and **Ding Jiaxi** to 14 and 12 years in prison, respectively, for “subversion of state power,” in connection with a CCM-organized gathering in Xiamen municipality, Fujian province, in 2019.⁴⁴ The CCM focused on cultivating “ordinary” Chinese people’s identity as citizens, encouraging them to exercise the rights and responsibilities guaranteed by China’s Constitution; it regularly held open gatherings and remained loosely constituted in order to bypass official repression.⁴⁵ The Linshu County People’s Court in Linyi municipality, Shandong province, issued the verdicts nearly a year after a secret trial, during which authorities barred family members from attending and prevented their lawyers from speaking under threat of disbarment.⁴⁶ Experts, fellow rights defenders, and family members of the two men expressed shock at the length of the sentences, which many believe were intended to exert a chilling effect on the already-decimated rights defender community.⁴⁷ William Nee of Chinese Human Rights Defenders described the sentences as two of the longest he had seen in over twenty years observing China’s criminal justice system.⁴⁸ In a statement dictated after being denied access to pen and paper, Xu Zhiyong said that he still had a dream of a China that was “truly a country of the people, its government chosen by ballots, not violence.”⁴⁹ Similarly deprived, Ding dictated a statement, saying he believed that, “the megalomania of dictatorship and the eternal one-party state is fast coming to an end, and the social transformation of China is growing closer, day by day.”⁵⁰

Government Suppression of Civil Society

This past year, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) continued to suppress human rights advocacy and civil society activity through arbitrary detention, arrest, surveillance, and other means. Official suppression included the following representative examples:

- In December 2022, Beijing municipality police detained **Cao Zhixin**, **Li Yuanjing**, **Li Siqi**, and **Zhai Dengrui**, members of a group of friends living in Beijing, on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” in connection with their attendance at a November vigil honoring victims of a fatal fire in Urumqi municipality, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.⁵¹ Authorities released the four women on bail in April 2023.⁵²
- Authorities forcibly closed and banned as “illegal social organizations” several prominent unregistered or “house” churches, including Changchun Sunshine Reformed Church in Changchun municipality, Jilin province;⁵³ Linfen Covenant Church in Linfen municipality, Shanxi province;⁵⁴ and Xi’an Church of Abundance in Xi’an municipality, Shaanxi province.⁵⁵ [For more information on suppression of unregistered Protestant churches, see Chapter 3—Freedom of Religion]
- In February 2023, authorities took into custody rights defender **Zhang Hai** for his participation in a protest over cuts to retirees’ medical benefits in Wuhan municipality, Hubei

province.⁵⁶ [For more information about the retirees’ protests, see Chapter 1—Freedom of Expression and Chapter 12—Public Health.]

- In June 2023, the Feng County People’s Court in Baoji municipality, Shaanxi province, sentenced rights lawyer **Chang Weiping** to three years and six months in prison for “subversion of state power,” also in connection with the 2019 China Citizens Movement gathering in Xiamen municipality, Fujian province [See box titled Harsh Sentencing of China Citizens Movement Organizers above].⁵⁷ In 2020, Chang posted a video on YouTube, saying that Baoji authorities had tortured him while holding him in residential surveillance at a designated location, a form of secret detention.⁵⁸

Status of LGBTQ Persons
<p>Chinese government authorities continued to censor and suppress advocacy groups in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) community,⁵⁹ yet claimed in international fora that all citizens enjoy access to rights protections.⁶⁰ During the third review of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) held in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 15-16, 2023, and in its submissions in advance of the review, the PRC delegation addressed concerns about the status of LGBTQ persons, stating that “Chinese citizens have equal access to all the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law. Our existing legal system does not contain the concept of LGBT.”⁶¹ Similarly, PRC delegates claimed during the May 2023 review of China by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that “The Constitution and laws of China do not discriminate against [LGBTQ], they are viewed as normal people and there is no special accommodation for them” and that the law protects women from sexual- and gender-based violence.⁶² Members of the LGBTQ community in China, nevertheless, reportedly continue to face violence, including domestic violence.⁶³ Moreover, “individuals and organizations working on LGBTQ matters reported discrimination and harassment from authorities” according to the State Department.⁶⁴ In response to the U.N. Human Rights Council Working Group’s non-binding recommendation that China “adopt legislation within one year [of their 2018 Universal Periodic Review] prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in all public and private sectors and provide for positive duties on the part of government to promote equality on these grounds,” PRC delegates claimed that they had “accepted and already implemented” the recommendation although the Commission could not find evidence that they had done so.⁶⁵ The Economist reported that Chinese domestic coverage of the treaty body reviews omitted mention of LGBTQ issues, including Chinese delegates’ claims that the PRC did not discriminate against LGBTQ persons.⁶⁶</p>

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Status of LGBTQ Persons—Continued

Although social acceptance of LGBTQ persons and relationships seemed to be growing in recent years, rhetoric in Party and state-controlled media may indicate decreased official tolerance for LGBTQ speech, association, and popular representation.⁶⁷ One LGBTQ rights advocate who writes under the penname “Comrade A Qiang” observed a marked decrease in state-owned media acknowledging LGBTQ identity or encouraging tolerance of LGBTQ-identified persons, especially since 2022.⁶⁸ In one case from March 2023, after the California-based Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded the movie “Everything Everywhere All at Once” the Oscar for Best Picture, official Party news media outlet People’s Daily reprinted an article using the euphemistic term “Westernized lifestyle” instead of identifying a character as LGBTQ, implying that such an identity or relationship is inherently “Western,” and therefore problematic.⁶⁹ Some experts believe that this view has been encouraged under Xi Jinping as part of a nationalist agenda and amid concerns about demographic decline.⁷⁰

Closure of Beijing LGBT Center

In May 2023, the Beijing LGBT Center, one of China’s largest NGOs serving the LGBTQ community, announced its immediate closure.⁷¹ While the organization did not explicitly state that it was forcibly closed by the government, advocates and observers say that the Center had been under ongoing and significant pressure.⁷² The Center’s announcement attributed the closure to “force majeure,” which a reporter described as “a common euphemism for government action.”⁷³ According to an expert on LGBTQ issues in China, the organization had been subject to multiple crackdowns, including police raids and social media bans.⁷⁴ In May 2023, members of the LGBTQ community connected with the Center described being questioned by the police for participating in LGBTQ-related events.⁷⁵ Prior to the Center’s May 2023 closure, authorities had reportedly constrained the Center from operating, yet prevented it from closing down altogether for fear of drawing international censure.⁷⁶ The Beijing LGBT Center is the most recent of several major groups in China focused on LGBTQ persons to close since 2020.⁷⁷ Scholar and LGBTQ rights advocate Stephanie Yingyi Wang observed that the closure of the Beijing LGBT Center signals a “new era” for the LGBTQ movement and LGBTQ persons in China, who have been increasingly relegated to online-only spaces for community building as physical community spaces like Beijing LGBT Center are shuttered.⁷⁸

Status of LGBTQ Persons—Continued

Prominent Cases

This past year, though the court system remains open to hearing grievances, several Chinese court cases illustrate the difficulties members of the LGBTQ community faced when seeking redress for discrimination and legal protection for LGBTQ expression. These include:

- In January 2023, China-based LGBTQ advocacy and community services group Tongyu reported on a discrimination case that gay flight attendant Chai Cheng brought against his employer, state-owned enterprise China Southern, saying that he had lost his job after being publicly outed as a gay man.⁷⁹ According to a recording Chai made after the incident, his supervisor asked if he was a member of any “gay social organizations,” cautioned that such organizations “should not be allowed to gain leverage over our state-owned enterprise,” and expressed concern that Chai’s behavior was inconsistent with the increased emphasis on morality in official propaganda around “socialist core values.”⁸⁰ The Shenzhen municipality, Guangdong province, court dismissed Chai’s discrimination lawsuit, saying that China Southern had not violated the law by grounding Chai for six months without pay before firing him, which Tongyu pointed out reflects China’s failure to enact anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQ persons.⁸¹
- In February 2023, two students at Tsinghua University filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Education with an intermediate court in Beijing, seeking to overturn disciplinary actions the university took against them for passing out rainbow flags on campus.⁸² The two have appealed through university, municipal, and national-level bureaucracies, which have to date upheld Tsinghua’s decision.⁸³ They also filed a lawsuit, which the court has not heard, arguing that the Ministry of Education was required to hear the case and asserting that their educational rights had been violated.⁸⁴

Entertainment Guidelines

PRC authorities have continued to tighten control over suspected LGBTQ representation and expression in media and entertainment. In July 2022, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) held a symposium on the production of television series, with NRTA deputy director Zhu Yonglei reiterating previous guidance that media producers “firmly resist ‘sissy man’ aesthetics.”⁸⁵ In a January 2023 report, the U.S.-based research group Internet Protocol Video Market found that Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, censors pro-LGBTQ viewpoints and prohibits “unhealthy and non-mainstream views on marriage and love,” conforming with content guidelines mandated by the PRC government.⁸⁶

Notes to Chapter 2—Civil Society

¹For a discussion of LGBTQ groups' efforts to operate in the diminished "gray zone" for civil society in China by rebranding and refocusing, and by using China's courts to challenge discrimination against the LGBTQ community, see Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *2022 Annual Report* (Washington: November 16, 2022), 84–87.

²Holly Snape, "Cultivate Aridity and Deprive Them of Air: Altering the Approach to Non-State-Approved Social Organisations," *Made in China Journal* 6, no. 1 (January–April 2021): 55; Council on Foundations, "Nonprofit Law in China," updated August 2022, accessed September 12, 2023; Can Cui and Jie Wu, "Alternative to Civil Society Governance: Platform Control over the Third Sector in China," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* (August 25, 2022): 5; Emile Dirks and Diana Fu, "Governing 'Untrustworthy' Civil Society in China," *China Journal* 89, no. 1 (January 2023): 15. Social organizations must register with the Ministry of Civil Affairs in order to operate legally, register for charitable status, or raise funds, so groups that are unable to register will likely face difficulty operating and are vulnerable to legal sanctions. Furthermore, Emile Dirks and Diana Fu found that, in cases where they were able to determine the reason for a ban, failure to register was the most common reason for which authorities banned social organizations, rendering the organization "illegal" and subject to government crackdown.

³The Blue Book on Social Organizations is published yearly by the Social Sciences Academic Press (China), an imprint of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and provides analysis of the sector over the previous year. Social Sciences Academic Press (China), "Guanyu women" [About us], accessed June 28, 2023; Social Sciences Academic Press (China), "Shehui zuzhi lanpishu—tushu" [Blue book on social organizations—library], accessed June 28, 2023.

⁴"Fabu: 'Zhongguo Shehui Zuzhi Baogao (2022)': Zongliang baochi zengzhang dan zengsu wei 2008 nian yilai zui di" [Released "China Social Organizations Report (2022)": Overall growth maintained, but rate of growth is the lowest since 2008], *NGO Watch*, China Development Brief, November 15, 2022.

⁵Ministry of Civil Affairs, "'Shisi Wu' Shehui Zuzhi Fazhan Guihua" ["14th Five-Year" Plan for the Development of Social Organizations], issued October 8, 2021, secs. 3(1), 3(3); Shawn Shieh, "The 14th Five Year Plan for Social Organizations and the Future of Civil Society in China," *NGOs in China* (blog), January 4, 2022. For detailed coverage of the 14th Five-Year Plan for Social Organizations, see Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *2022 Annual Report* (Washington: November 16, 2022), 79–81.

⁶Zhongguo Shehui Zuzhi Dongtai (@chinanpogov), "Minzhengbu zhaokai 2023 nian quanguo shehui zhuzhi dengji guanli gongzuo huiyi" [Ministry of Civil Affairs convenes 2023 Nationwide Conference on Social Organization Registration and Management Work], WeChat post, January 6, 2023, 4:18 a.m.; Ministry of Civil Affairs, "'Shisi Wu' Shehui Zuzhi Fazhan Guihua" ["14th Five-Year" Plan for the Development of Social Organizations], issued October 8, 2021, sec. 3(3). The concept of "optimiz[ing] distribution" is explained as balancing the number and type of organizations working in a region or on a particular issue area in section 3(3) of the 14th Five-Year Plan.

⁷Zhongguo Shehui Zuzhi Dongtai (@chinanpogov), "Minzhengbu zhaokai 2023 nian quanguo shehui zhuzhi dengji guanli gongzuo huiyi" [Ministry of Civil Affairs convenes 2023 Nationwide Conference on Social Organization Registration and Management Work], WeChat post, January 6, 2023, 4:18 a.m.

⁸"Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan yinfa 'Dang he Guojia Jigou Gaige Fang'an' [Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and State Council release "Party and State Institutional Reform Plan"], *Xinhua*, March 16, 2023; Jane Cai, "China Seeks to Tighten Grip with New Social Work Department," *South China Morning Post*, March 17, 2023.

⁹"Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan yinfa 'Dang he Guojia Jigou Gaige Fang'an'" [Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and State Council release "Party and State Institutional Reform Plan"], *Xinhua*, March 16, 2023; Jane Cai, "China Seeks to Tighten Grip with New Social Work Department," *South China Morning Post*, March 17, 2023.

¹⁰"Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan yinfa 'Dang he Guojia Jigou Gaige Fang'an'" [Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and State Council release "Party and State Institutional Reform Plan"], *Xinhua*, March 16, 2023; Jane Cai, "China Seeks to Tighten Grip with New Social Work Department," *South China Morning Post*, March 17, 2023.

¹¹Jane Cai, "China Seeks to Tighten Grip with New Social Work Department," *South China Morning Post*, March 17, 2023.

¹²Minzhengbu: Daji zhengzhi feifa shehui zuzhi zhuanxiang xingdong zhuanru changtaihua zhengzhi jucuo lidu bu jian, biao zhun bu jiang" [Ministry of Civil Affairs: The special operation to crackdown on and rectify illegal social organizations has been regularized; regulatory measures will not be weakened, standards will not be dropped], *People's Daily*, January 26, 2022. The initial campaign was laid out in the 2021 "Circular on eliminating the breeding grounds for illegal social organizations." Ministry of Civil Affairs, Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, Central Organization Department, et al., "Guanyu chanchu feifa shehui zuzhi zisheng turang jinghua shehui zuzhi shengtai kongjian de tongzhi" [Circular on eliminating the breeding grounds for illegal social organizations and cleansing the ecological space for social organizations], March 22, 2021; Holly Snape, "Cultivate Aridity and Deprive Them of Air: Altering the Approach to Non-State-Approved Social Organisations," *Made in China Journal* 6, no. 1 (January–April 2021): 57–58. For prior coverage of the Circular, see Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *2021 Annual Report* (Washington: March 21, 2022), 231.

¹³Minzhengbu: Daji zhengzhi feifa shehui zuzhi zhuanxiang xingdong zhuanru changtaihua zhengzhi jucuo lidu bu jian, biao zhun bu jiang" [Ministry of Civil Affairs: The special operation to crackdown on and rectify illegal social organizations has been regularized; regulatory measures will not be weakened, standards will not be dropped], *People's Daily*, January 26, 2022; Ministry of Civil Affairs, "Minzhengbu guanyu 'Shehui Tuanti Niandu Jiancha Banfa (zhengqiu yijian gao)' gongkai zhengqiu yijian de tongzhi" [Ministry of Civil Affairs circular on soliciting

public comment regarding the “Measures for the Annual Inspection of Social Groups (draft for the solicitation of public comment)”, issued November 11, 2022, art. 12(5).

¹⁴“Minzhengbu: Daji zhengzhi feifa shehui zuzhi zhuanxiang xingdong zhuanru changtaihua zhengzhi jucuo lidu bu jian, biao zhun bu jiang” [Ministry of Civil Affairs: The special operation to crackdown on and rectify illegal social organizations has been regularized; regulatory measures will not be weakened, standards will not be dropped], *People’s Daily*, January 26, 2022; Ministry of Civil Affairs, “Minzhengbu guanyu ‘Shehui Tuanti Niandu Jiancha Banfa (zhengqiu yijian gao)’ gongkai zhengqiu yijian de tongzhi” [Ministry of Civil Affairs circular on soliciting public comment regarding the “Measures for the Annual Inspection of Social Groups (draft for the solicitation of public comment)”, issued November 11, 2022, art. 12(5); Holly Snape, “Cultivate Aridity and Deprive Them of Air: Altering the Approach to Non-State-Approved Social Organisations,” *Made in China Journal* 6, no. 1 (January–April 2021): 55, 58.

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