Special Topic: Migrant Neighborhoods a Target of Anti-Crime and Vice Campaign

Findings

- An anti-crime campaign launched by central authorities in 2018 is being used to target marginalized groups in China. Called the “Specialized Struggle to Sweep Away Organized Crime and Eliminate Vice,” the stated aims of the three-year campaign include guaranteeing China’s lasting political stability and consolidating the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party’s authoritative power.
- The Commission observed reports of local governments invoking this anti-crime campaign to target groups of people including petitioners (individuals who seek redress from the government), religious believers, village election candidates, lawyers, and internal migrants.
- Municipal governments carried out large-scale evictions and demolitions of internal migrant neighborhoods in the name of the anti-crime campaign. These localities appear to be using the campaign to achieve the goals of a central government plan to “renovate” urban villages across China by 2020. Urban villages are municipal neighborhoods that are categorized as rural under China’s household registration (hukou) system. Registered residents of these urban villages often rent to internal migrants, who have hukou from other localities and face discrimination in housing, education, and the provision of government services.
- In addition to evictions and demolitions of internal migrant neighborhoods, local governments have also invoked the anti-crime campaign to justify increasing monitoring and surveillance of internal migrant neighborhoods. For example, in Xi’an municipality, public security officers investigated over 800 internal migrant communities and over 400 urban villages under the local “2019 Thunder Strike and Iron Fist Anti-Crime and Vice Operation.”

Recommendations

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

- Call on Chinese authorities to end forced evictions, demolitions, and heightened surveillance of internal migrant communities across China, and to follow both international and Chinese law in providing adequate notice, compensation, and assistance to residents when public safety requires demolishing dangerous structures.
- Encourage the Chinese government to expand both the rights of migrant workers in China, and the space for civil society organizations that provide social services and legal assistance to internal migrants. Note that improving the rights of internal migrants and expanding their access to social services would likely lower the chances of spontaneous, large-scale protests, while large-scale forced evictions, demolitions, and surveillance could increase the likelihood of such protests.
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- Call on Chinese authorities to accelerate reforms to the hukou system, including lowering restrictions on migration to major cities and centers of economic opportunity; equalizing the level and quality of public benefits and services tied to local hukou and residence permits; and implementing laws and regulations to provide equal treatment for all Chinese citizens, regardless of place of birth, residence, or hukou status.
- Support programs, organizations, and exchanges with Chinese policymakers and academic institutions engaged in research and outreach to migrants, in order to advance legal and anti-discrimination assistance for migrants and their families, and to encourage policy debates aimed at eliminating inequality and discrimination connected to residence policies, including the hukou system.
SPECIAL TOPIC: MIGRANT NEIGHBORHOODS A TARGET OF ANTI-CRIME AND VICE CAMPAIGN

Introduction

This past year, the Commission observed reports of local authorities in jurisdictions across China targeting internal migrants, petitioners, religious groups, and others with increased monitoring and other forms of repression. In many cases, local authorities tied these actions to a central-level Chinese Communist Party and government campaign called the “Specialized Struggle to Sweep Away Organized Crime and Eliminate Vice” (Saohei Chu’e Zhuanxiang Douzheng, or the “anti-crime and vice campaign”). This section will examine the origins and broad application of this campaign, with a special focus on how lower-level Party and government officials used the campaign to justify increased monitoring of internal migrants and large-scale evictions and demolitions of migrant neighborhoods.

On January 23, 2018, the Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council announced the commencement of a three-year national anti-crime and vice campaign in the form of a centrally issued circular. Authorities did not make the circular publicly available, but the central government news agency Xinhua provided a summary of the circular. According to that summary, the four stated aims of the campaign are:

• guaranteeing the people’s contentment in life and work,
• social stability and orderliness,
• China’s lasting political stability; and
• further consolidating the foundation of Communist Party rule.

A Chinese academic observed that the campaign is intended to bring greater legitimacy to the Party’s governance by increasing central Party and government officials’ control over local government, which is often otherwise dominated by “grass-roots leaders” of villages and enterprises. A Party official announced that by the end of March 2019, authorities had prosecuted 79,018 people as part of the campaign.

According to state-run media outlet Xinhua, the Party has directed the campaign to focus on “key areas, key industries, and key sectors with prominent problems of crime and vice,” and the Ministry of Public Security emphasized that the campaign must include the “modernization of social management at the grassroots level to eradicate the breeding grounds of crime and vice” (chanchu hei’e shili zisheng turang). This broad mandate has provided local authorities with large discretion to target various types of groups and conduct, leading international media as well as the Central Commission for Discipline and Inspection to openly criticize the broad application of the campaign at the local level.

Local authorities across China have invoked the campaign to restrict the freedoms of a wide range of marginalized groups. For example, a number of local governments have specifically named petitioners—individuals with grievances seeking redress from the government—as targets of the campaign. Some local governments reportedly increased monitoring and suppression of religious groups
in the name of the anti-crime and vice campaign, with officials asking residents to report on members of religious groups that are not officially registered. Authorities excluded 51,000 individuals from running in village elections as part of the anti-crime and vice campaign, claiming some of these individuals had suspected ties to organized crime or “did not meet criteria” such as “excellent political quality.” Authorities have also used the campaign to suppress ethnic minority groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Tibet Autonomous Region. [For more information on how government officials have used this campaign against religious believers, ethnic minority groups, petitioners, and other groups, see Section II—Freedom of Religion, Section IV—Xinjiang, and Section V—Tibet.]

Also as part of the campaign, some local governments increased monitoring of “urban villages” (chengzhong cun) that are often areas with large populations of internal migrants. Local municipal governments have sought to demolish these urban villages, sometimes referred to as “slums” (penghu qu) by government sources, as part of a national plan to “renovate” (gaizao) all urban villages by 2020. Some local government documents specifically point to urban villages and neighborhoods with large numbers of migrant workers as areas with “crime and vice forces” (hei e shili). One example of increased monitoring of migrant communities this past year as part of the anti-crime and vice campaign is Xi’an’s “2019 Thunder Strike and Iron Fist Anti-Crime and Vice Operation” (lei ting tie wan soohi chu’e xingdong) that involved public security officers investigating over 800 internal migrant communities and over 400 urban villages.

### Urban Village Eviction, Demolition, and Surveillance under the Anti-Crime and Vice Campaign: Yuhuazhai in Xi’an

In October 2018, local officials of the Xi’an Hi-Tech Industries Development Zone (Xi’an Hi-Tech Zone), Xi’an municipality, Shaanxi province, initiated an eviction and demolition campaign followed by a large-scale inspection and registration of remaining businesses and residents as part of local implementation of the national “anti-crime and vice campaign” in February 2019. The campaign targeted Yuhuazhai village in Yanta district, Xi’an, itself a collection of eight urban villages with a local official reporting more than 100,000 internal migrant residents compared with 9,000 residents with local residence permits—leading to numerous rights abuses and several deaths. The campaign was led by the Xi’an Hi-Tech Zone Management Committee and largely state-owned education technology company China Hi-Tech Group acting jointly with over 20 government agencies to “thoroughly renovate, evict, and demolish” residences and local enterprises within the village. China Business News reporters observed that in October 2018, the Xi’an Hi-Tech Zone Management Committee reportedly held a competition among ten districts and townships over the acquisition of more than 33 square kilometers of land, scoring them on categories including whole-village demolition, barrier removal, and pollution reduction.
Urban Village Eviction, Demolition, and Surveillance under the Anti-Crime and Vice Campaign: Yuhuazhai in Xi’an—Continued

Local officials reportedly hired several thousand people—some allegedly members of criminal syndicates—to harass and assault residents, resulting in at least one death, as well as to demolish commercial establishments in October. Officials gave businesses and residents notice on the same day of the demolition, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to seek judicial or administrative review and denying entrance to those without residence permits so that many were unable to recover their personal property. In November, residents reportedly protested continued demolitions and faced violence from people in local security uniforms. Demolition campaigns reportedly were also planned for 116 villages in and around Xi’an, with 62 scheduled to begin within 2019.

Vulnerability of Internal Migrants and Household Registration Policies

Chinese authorities have a history of carrying out forced evictions that affect migrant workers in particular. International rights organizations documented widespread forced evictions prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Expo 2010 in Shanghai municipality. In late 2017 and early 2018, in response to two fatal fires in migrant neighborhoods, authorities in Beijing municipality and the surrounding areas launched a campaign of large-scale forced evictions and demolitions in migrant neighborhoods across the region. Residents reportedly were given days or hours to leave.

Chinese migrant workers continued to be marginalized because of their residency status under the household registration (hukou) system. The hukou system, established in 1958, classified Chinese citizens as being urban or rural and effectively tied them to a locality. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2018, 286 million people in China did not live in their hukou location. Yet provision of certain government services, such as education, remains tied to one’s hukou location, which is, in general, inherited from one’s parents. The hukou system reportedly also exacerbates these migrants’ vulnerability to exploitation in China’s workforce. [For more information on forced labor, see Section II—Human Trafficking.]

In 2014, the government began to reform the hukou system to gradually eliminate the urban-rural distinction and allow some migrants to obtain hukou in smaller cities. In April 2019, the National Development and Reform Commission required cities with populations of 1 to 3 million to eliminate all restrictions on obtaining hukou, yet restrictions remained in cities with populations above 3 million, such as Xi’an and Beijing, and the government continues to use the hukou system to restrict internal migration.

In 2014, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights urged China “to ensure that any relocation necessary for city renewal is carried out after prior consultation with the affected individuals . . . .” In 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was concerned by reports that changes to the hukou system “have not made substantial positive changes for many rural migrants, including ethnic minorities.”
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Actions taken by Chinese government officials enforcing the eviction campaign throughout China contravene both international standards and Chinese law. Restrictions on movement and discrimination arising from the hukou system contravene international human rights standards guaranteeing freedom of residence.
Notes to Section II—Special Topic: Migrant Neighborhoods a Target of Anti-Crime and Vice Campaign


2. These three concepts originally appeared in Xi Jinping’s inaugural address to the study session of the Communist Party Central Committee Political Bureau at the 18th Party Congress’s in 2012. Xi Jinping, “Jinqu weiriao jianchi he fazhan Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyu xuexi xinculture guanche Dang de Shiba Da jingshen” [Focus on upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics; study, disseminate, and implement the spirit of the 18th Party Congress], November 17, 2012, reprinted in People’s Daily, November 19, 2012; Zhonggong Zhongyang, Guowuyuan fachu ‘Guanyu Zhankai Saohei Chu’e Zhanxiang Douzheng De Tongzhi’ [Party Central Committee and State Council issue “Circular Regarding the Launch of the Specialized Struggle to Sweep Away Organized Crime and Eliminate Vice”], Xinhua, January 24, 2018.


5. “Saohei ban: jiezi sanyue di quanguo qisu shehei she’e fanzui an 14226 jian” [Crime and vice office: number of suspected crime and vice cases prosecuted nationwide reaches 14,226 by end of March], Xinhua, April 9, 2019.


12. “ ‘Saohei chu’e wuzhuo shouhuu tian lang qi qing”’ [Eliminate the filth of crime and vice, protect clear skies and fresh air], People’s Daily, February 26, 2019.

13. “Saohei chu’e” ru jiang shaoshu minzu bei ‘hei’? [“Anti-Crime and Vice” comes to Xinjiang, have ethnic minorities become ’criminalized’?], Radio Free Asia, April 16, 2019; “China Is Waging a Nationwide Campaign against Gang Crime,” Economist, February 28, 2018; See also “Hei shi gougou Dalai Lama Xizang saohei mingque qingli mubiao” [Organized crime forces collude with the Dalai Lama, Tibetan makes clear its goal of cleansing], Duowei, February 10, 2018.

14. Ma Li, “ ‘Why China’s Migrants Can’t Just Leave Poverty Behind’” Sixth Tone, September 1, 2018; “Saohei chu’e zhanxiang douzheng youguan wenti” [Questions regarding the special­ized struggle to sweep away organized crime and eliminate vice], Yong’an Municipal People’s Government, November 16, 2018; “Saohei chu’e zhanxiang douzheng youguan wenti” [Questions you need to know about the anti-crime and vice campaign!], Guizhou Finance Bureau, March 13, 2019.


16. Zhi quan gu guandu renmin quanzhong guanyu saohei chu’e zhanxiang douzheng de gongcheng xia” [Open letter to the people of the district regarding the specialized struggle to sweep away organized crime and eliminate vice], Guangdong District People’s Government, March 4,
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2019; “Saohui chu'e zhexie shi yao zhidao!” [Things you need to know about the anti-crime and evil campaign!], Guizhou Finance Bureau, March 15, 2019; Wang Ruolin, “Woshi hangyue lingyu zhengzhi qude jieduanning changxing” [Shenzhen business management achieving results in phases], Shenzhen News, April 9, 2019; “Saohui chu'e zhuanxing douzheng youquan wenti [Questions regarding the specialized struggle to sweep away organized crime and eliminate vice], Yong'an Municipal People's Government, November 16, 2018.


20Li Jing, Zhao Bin, and Zhang Pengkang, “Yuhuazhai yuecheng chaqian? gongye yuanqu wei qi’er xian” [Yuhuazhai to be demolished at the end of the month? industrial park district begins demolition, village demolition yet to begin], China Business News, October 22, 2018. See also Li Yunfeng, “Xi'an Yuhuazhai tujin zhengcun chaqian, bainian changzhong fang’an” [Xi'an, advances with demolition of entire village, hundred-year-old urban village gets a facelift], Phoenix New Media, December 4, 2018; Xiong Bin and Chen Jie, “Xi'an Yuhuazhai cumin kangyi qiangsu zao zhenya” [Villagers in Yuhuazhai, Xi'an, protesting forced demolition are oppressed], New Tang Dynasty Television, December 6, 2018.


22Li Yunfeng, “Xi'an Yuhuazhai tujin zhengcun chaqian, bainian changzhong cun jiu mao huan xin yan” [Yuhuazhai, Xi'an, advances with demolition of entire village, hundred-year-old urban village gets a facelift], Phoenix New Media, December 4, 2018.


24“Xi'an yu qian cumin kangyi qiangchai zao zhenya” [Xi'an represses more than a thousand villagers protesting forced demolitions], Radio Free Asia, December 5, 2018.

25“Xiong Bin and Chen Jie, “Xi'an Yuhuazhai cumin kangyi qiangsu zao zhenya” [Villagers in Yuhuazhai, Xi'an, protesting forced demolition are oppressed], New Tang Dynasty Television, December 6, 2018.

26Ibid.

27“Feifa chaqian yan de minxin yifa zhiquo zhongyu minsheng” [How can illegal demolition gain the people's support, when rule of law is prioritized over people's livelihood], China Guangdong Web, November 12, 2018.

28Feifa chaqian yan de minxin yifa zhiquo zhongyu minsheng” [How can illegal demolition gain the people's support, when rule of law is prioritized over people's livelihood], China Guandong Web, November 12, 2018; “Xi'an yu qian cumin kangyi qiangchai zao zhenya” [Xi'an represses more than a thousand villagers protesting forced demolitions], Radio Free Asia, December 5, 2018.


32Beijing Municipality Administration of Work Safety Committee, Beijing Shi Anquan Shengchan Wenyuanhui Guanyu Kazhan Anquan Yuanhuan Da Puisha Da Qingsi Da Zhengzhi Zhihuazhang Xingdong De Tongzhi [Circular on Launch of Special Campaign of Major Investigations, Major Cleanup, and Major Rectification of Safety Risks], issued November 19, 2017, sec.
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35 National People’s Congress Standing Committee, Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Hukou Dengji Tiaoli (PRC Regulations on Household Registration), issued and effective January 9, 1958.


37 National Bureau of Statistics of China, “2018 nian jinshu xinji xinjia zai hebei di’er renkou zhaode renkou” [The economy moved within a reasonable range in 2018, main expected development targets are accomplished well], January 21, 2019.


46 Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xingzheng Qiangzhi Fa [PRC Administrative Enforcement Law], passed June 30, 2011, effective January 1, 2012, arts. 43–44. For analyses of the legality of this law in Beijing under Chinese law, see “Jiang Ping, He Wei,” and “Jiang Ping, He Wei,” See also scholars and lawyers to the National People’s Congress Standing Committee for a review of the constitutionality of the Beijing government’s campaign
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