

**INTERNET DEVELOPMENT AND ITS
INFLUENCES ON LEGAL REFORM
IN CHINA**

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EAI Background Brief No. 738

Date of Publication: 20 July 2012

Executive Summary

1. China's Internet use witnessed an explosive growth in the last two decades, with Internet users hitting 513 million (38.3% of China's total population) in December 2012.
2. The use of Internet technology has gradually but steadily transformed the daily lives of many Chinese, especially among the young and the educated as they compose the largest groups of Internet users.
3. Since the late 1990s, the Chinese government has kicked off its E-government project to reach key goals such as increasing government transparency and organizational efficiency, strengthening official propaganda, reestablishing legitimacy of the Communist Party, eradicating more pressing political problems, and gaining better control of lower-level and/or local cadres.
4. In vertical relations with the public, China's legal branches use the Internet based on a 'top-down' approach to increase transparency, provide public services, disseminate official information, and facilitate communication with the public and public supervision. Internet technology is also used to strengthen their horizontal relations with other governmental agencies.
5. Unlike official Internet use, public involvement via Internet technology in China's legal reform proceeds in both expected and unexpected ways. Though both follow a 'bottom-up' approach, the expected public participation is rather responsive to initiatives from the government, while the unexpected public participation is self-initiated and proactive.
6. In recent years, it is the latter that has carried greater weight in China's Internet politics. Though such public participation, spontaneous and often driven by social incidents, events, and/or cases, is sudden and unpredictable in nature, it has cultivated a unique form of public civic participation.

7. With the boom in the number of Chinese netizens and their use of Internet technology and resources, how to maintain information control and censorship while utilizing Internet technology as an effective tool to carry out its planned reforms are likely to present a series of challenges to the Chinese government in the near future.