

**HOW CHINA MONITORS
PUBLIC OPINION ON
THE INTERNET**

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Executive Summary

1. China's internet population, already the world's largest, had ballooned to 772 million as of December 2017. The huge online population has inevitably given rise to public uproars that have manifested themselves in virtual forms called 'internet public opinion incidents' (网络舆情事件).
2. These public uproars take place in huge online communities in response to hot button issues, making them one of the "biggest variables" influencing China's political, social and economic stability.
3. Unlike his predecessors, President Xi Jinping has held a tighter grip on public opinion with the reinforcing of internet regulation and online censorship. In his public speeches, Xi has stressed the need for party-controlled mainstream media to guide public opinion and adapt to the changing media landscape.
4. An extensive internet public opinion monitoring system has emerged within China, with vertical and horizontal flows of information between the various entities. In general, there are four types of public monitoring players, comprising a mixture of public, private and academic entities.
5. Many internet public opinion monitoring agencies use Knowlesys software to acquire, analyse and present information about public sentiments on the internet. Using the information gathered, analysts write comprehensive reports of internet public sentiment.
6. Two examples of such reports are a 2016 analytical report produced by the *People's Daily* and a 2015 journal paper produced by an academic from Jiangxi Normal University. In these reports, information has been pooled from different sources, both private and public, to produce the big picture for government officials and other key stakeholders.

7. The 2016 report, for example, highlighted the top hot button issues of the year that are ranked according to attention given by netizens. The 2015 report tracked the changing concerns of the people over an extended period from 2007 to 2014.
8. Both reports show that common concerns are public safety, corruption, conduct of public officials, environmental pollution and international developments such as the South China Sea disputes, the G20 gathering in Hangzhou and the 2016 United States presidential elections.
9. As the Chinese internet population grows, the internet public opinion monitoring system will become more sophisticated. Although analyses of internet public opinion and monitoring technologies help Chinese policymakers stay rooted to the masses, these abilities and technologies could be misused for political, commercial and personal purposes.
10. The Cybersecurity Law, effective since 1 June 2017, contains several provisions that could help to mitigate these dangers. Articles 40, 41 and 42 have been included to protect netizens from the malicious collection, tampering and exploitation of personal data.