

**COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERISM AND
ACTIVISM IN CHINA: THE STATE
ACTORS, COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS**

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Executive Summary

1. In China, the community is one of the most active platforms for volunteer work. In the 2020s, the pandemic accelerated the pace and scope of volunteerism and community activism.
2. Digital technologies like the internet enable more cross-regional, cross-field, cross-departmental and cross-professional volunteering, where volunteers collectively engage in social innovations and implementation to establish a strong community.
3. China currently can mobilise 230 million volunteers and 1.34 million volunteer groups for major international events, national/regional emergencies, rescue operations and community work.
4. In the 2020s in China, more than 80% of voluntary service organisations continue to be community groups without any corporate bodies, implementing public welfare services under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party and government organs.
5. The trend towards volunteerism appears to enjoy support from the highest echelons of the leadership. Chinese President Xi Jinping has focused on trash classification and recycling, and promulgated multiple instructions in this area.
6. According to the guidelines released in 2022 by the Chinese Young Volunteers Association, volunteers are encouraged to place emphasis on the needs of children, the elderly and people with special needs in community services, engage in epidemic prevention and environmental protection, and creating public awareness of Chinese laws.
7. As a kind of street-level bureaucracy, residents' committee is defined as a "self-governing grassroots organisation" voted in by residents every three years and not part of the administrative hierarchy, a kind of "ambiguous professionalisation" or "participative bureaucratisation".

8. From 2004, the social harmony discourse has taken root in the neighbourhood communities' local policies with an accent on providing social services to the “weak and vulnerable groups” (*ruoshi qunti*).
9. With more than 1.4 billion people scattered over 9.6 million square kilometres, China's community-level self-governance emphasises villager autonomy in rural areas.
10. There are strong inclinations towards greater professionalisation of residents' committees in China, moving from laissez faire organic mobilisation of local community volunteers to tapping into more qualified human resources and even salaried committee members.