COMPILATION OF RESEARCH PAPERS ON SWIFT RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMPLAINTS IN BEIJING

(2026)

BEJING FORUM ON
SWIFT RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMPLAINTS
OCTOBER, 2026 BEIJING, CHINA

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INSTITUTE FOR CAPITAL GOVERNANCE,
CHINESE ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Preface

A city belongs to its people, and the people are the core of a city. The goal of urban governance is to put people first and realize their aspirations for a better life. The mission of a government is to refine governance systems and enhance the quality of life for all.

Guided by the principle that “Cities should be built by the people and for the people”, the reform of Swift Response to Public Complaints (SRPC, hereafter) in Beijing has thoroughly promoted innovative development in urban governance, demonstrated the leadership of party building in the construction of people's cities, and revealed the inherent unity between high-efficiency governance and high-quality development.

Urban governance is a crucial aspect of modernizing the national governance system and capacity, and meanwhile the most challenging theme in urban renewal and governance with the digital and intelligent acceleration in the global scale. In a broader comparative framework, Beijing’s SRPC reform provides an important case through which to examine this emerging logic of responsive government in the 21_{st} century. The exploration of Beijing SRPC has developed into an institutional architecture connecting continuous information collection, administrative coordination, problem-solving, and increasingly AI-assisted governance. It has convincingly elaborated the importance of digital transformation as the accelerators and integrators for urban governance and developmental leaps, as studies from UK, Australia, and South Africa have jointly pointed out. Essays compiled here are committed to explore the direction of digital intelligence empowering urban governance collaboratively and work together to create a better future for human civilization.

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Urban Governance Innovation in China: Beijing's Swift Response to Public Complaints and Responsive Democratic Governance

Alfred Tat-Kei Ho, Zhiguo Wang, and Yan Xu*

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Abstract: Amid the rising concerns about the effectiveness and integrity of electoral democracies in many countries, this study examines the Swift Response to Public Complaints (SRPC) mechanism in Beijing as a viable path toward the ideal of inclusive, participatory, responsive, and results-driven democratic governance. Evolving from the Mayor's Hotline established in 1987, Beijing's SRPC mechanism now provides multiple channels through which residents, visitors, businesses, and consumers can raise concerns and seek government assistance. The study analyzes how the Beijing SRPC mechanism processes tens of millions of requests, coordinates hundreds of departments, enterprises, and public service providers, and mobilizes local residents and community stakeholders to co-create solutions for complex local problems. Its success can be attributed to the political leadership that pushes forward the reform, the people-centric governance principle that motivates change in the bureaucracy, and the comprehensive performance management system that oversees the whole process of "receiving–dispatching–handling–evaluating" citizen complaints and service requests. The paper concludes by suggesting key lessons for policymakers who are seeking ways to advance smart, effective, responsive, and democratic urban

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governance.

Keywords: Responsive democratic governance; Swift Response to Public Complaints; Beijing 12345 Citizen Service Hotline; Citizen participation; E-government; Smart urban governance

The 'Smart' Digital City: A Three-Dimensional Governance Perspective

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ABSTRACT: This paper emphasizes the underlying principles that inform the role of digital city governance, especially in the delivery of public services. Such governance should work at three different levels: improving the experience of individual citizens; making systems work better; and the design of institutions for system coordination at the political and public level. This will include the development of more effective procedures, for example by ombudsmen, with procedures which are increasingly digitalized; the Beijing Hotline is an excellent example. A further challenge is through incorporating citizen views in policy development, digital techniques can be employed in various forms here. Making systems work better, this can occur through better data communication through digitalization, for example in transport coordination, ticketing and interoperability where different enterprises are involved. Markets are often ineffective in performing this role, but so too is central top-down control. Another approach is through the local (but not too local) system of metro-mayors. Examples of successful use of this institution include bus franchising in London and Manchester. Digitalization is important in achieving coordination and mutual accountability whilst permitting flexibility in operations, thereby avoiding the fragmentation effect of markets on the one hand and over-centralization on the other. The special advantages of digital techniques are to offer 'responsive regulation' rather than 'command and control' regulation.

Keywords: Digital city governance; Responsive regulation; System coordination

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Where Do Complaints Systems Fit within Public Governance? The Complementary Roles of 'Accountability Outwards' and 'Accountability Upwards'

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ABSTRACT: The paper briefly discusses two concepts of accountability: 'outwards accountability' incorporating such strategies as direct responsiveness to citizens, and traditional 'upwards accountability' framed by the formal institutions of government. Australia's 'accountability upwards' reflects its democratic institutional arrangements first established in 1901. There have been significant reforms to these over the last 40 years aimed at improving performance, through new public management and new public governance. Amongst the improvements, however, has been some backsliding requiring correction. Australia's 'accountability outwards' not only involves complaints systems, but also includes systematic consultation and engagement, and public participation through 'co-design' and 'co-production' arrangements. The success of these developments is mixed, in part because there are difficult trade-offs involved in ensuring the processes are consistent with the public interest. The conclusion emphasizes that 'outwards accountability' to which complaints systems contribute must complement, not displace, 'upwards accountability'. Australia's 'accountability upwards' arrangements have considerable strengths which may provide lessons for others, but getting them right is always work in progress, requiring constant effort and renewal. Where Australia can learn most from China is the building of more comprehensive and swift systems of complaints management exploiting new technology to improve its 'outwards accountability'.

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Keywords: Accountability Outwards; Accountability Upwards; public governance; New Public Governance; New Public Management

The Idea and Practice of Responsive Government: The Case of China

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Abstract: This article develops the concept of responsive government as a distinctive ideal and institutional logic of contemporary governance. While representative government centers on elections, representation, and the authorization of political power, responsive government concerns how governing institutions continuously perceive, interpret, and respond to citizens' needs, grievances, and demands. Drawing on democratic theory and fieldwork on China's 12345 Citizen Service Hotline in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Zhuhai, and Shenzhen, the article examines how responsiveness is institutionalised through continuous information collection, interdepartmental coordination, performance evaluation, citizen satisfaction mechanisms, and digital and AI-assisted technologies. It distinguishes general responsiveness from selective responsiveness, arguing that genuine responsiveness requires broadly equitable access to governmental attention rather than responsiveness concentrated on privileged or highly mobilised groups. The Chinese case demonstrates how large-scale feedback systems can transform citizen complaints into administrative information, problem-solving, accountability, organizational learning, and anticipatory governance. Yet administrative responsiveness should not be equated with democratization or treated as a substitute for representation, political rights, and public contestation. The article concludes that responsive government should complement representative government by addressing the limitations of slow,

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inefficient, and often inadequate governmental responses to citizens' everyday needs and concerns in Western liberal democracies.

Keywords: Responsive government; Representative government; Swift Response to Public Complaints

Governing the Responsiveness-Capacity Paradox: Institutional Boundary Work in Beijing's 12345 Hotline

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Abstract: Integrated complaint platforms can strengthen government responsiveness by lowering barriers to citizen voice and making administrative handling traceable. Yet they may also strain capacity when heterogeneous contacts become performance-accountable cases. This article asks how public organizations manage the tension between consequential responsiveness and bounded administrative capacity and what institutional pathways emerge from their responses. Drawing on a longitudinal qualitative document analysis of Beijing's 12345 Citizen Service Hotline system, the study reconstructs changes in formal rules, performance arrangements, and documented frontline practices. The findings show that case conversion generated classificatory, coordinative, communicative, and evidentiary work. Organizations responded by reconstructing boundaries of scope, jurisdiction, evaluation, and venue. These responses followed divergent pathways: enabling differentiation aligned demands with appropriate authority and problem-solving forums, whereas defensive absorption, procedural evasion, and coercive closure displaced costs onto employees, administrative records, or citizens. Subsequent policy adjustments indicate institutional recalibration, although the evidence does not establish pathway prevalence, net effects, or a complete causal feedback loop. The article contributes by conceptualizing responsiveness as an institutionally consequential process, showing the demands placed on administrative capacity are partly endogenous to the organization of responsiveness, and identifying boundary work as the mechanism connecting capacity pressure to divergent governance

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outcomes. Sustainable responsiveness requires accessible public interfaces supported by differentiated, transparent, contestable, and revisable administrative boundaries.

Keywords: government responsiveness; administrative capacity; institutional boundary work; performance management; digital governance; public complaint systems

From Institutional Lag to Digital Leapfrogging: Reframing People-Centered Urban Governance in the Global South through South Africa as a Case Study

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Abstract: The 2026 Beijing Forum on Swift Response to Public Complaints convenes under the theme of the digital intelligence era and people's city. This paper argues that realizing people-centered urbanism in the Global South requires confronting a historical condition in which cities are structured as colonial outposts that serve a privileged minority with urban services, spatial opportunity and civic life. The governance deficits, weak planning and execution capacity, political contestation and rapid urban migration are rooted in the structured legacy designed for exclusion. The paper advances three arguments: that digital technologies operate not only as governance tools but as structural scaffolds, accelerators and integrators of developmental leaps; that the transition from fragmented complaint systems to integrated digital platforms represents a repository of institutional learning accumulated through complex transitional phases and structured South-South city partnerships; and that the economic and social vitality of South African cities, sustained by a large informal sector, reflects adaptive urban intelligence. The paper positions digital transformation not as a technical overlay but as a structural intervention and identifies South-South cooperation as a generative frontier for advancing inclusive, responsive and contextually grounded urban governance across the Global South.

Keywords: Colonial urbanism; Digital transformation; Institutional learning; South-South cooperation; People-centred cities

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From SRPC to SRCD: A Theoretical Framework for Democratic Regional Governance

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Abstract: This article explores a new democratic frontier in regional governance by examining a possible transition from Swift Response to Public Complaints (SRPC) to Swift Response to Common Dreams (SRCD). The study consists broadly of three parts. The first is primarily empirical and examines the significance and major achievements of Beijing's experiment with SRPC. The second is theoretical and brings together Michel Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and deliberation. The purpose is to develop a triple hermeneutic framework capable of illuminating the sequential movement from SRPC toward SRCD. The third part examines selected Chinese scholarship on SRPC and interprets its significance through this framework. The central argument is that citizens express not only complaints arising from everyday life but also, implicitly and explicitly, aspirations for a desirable community. AI can assist in identifying, connecting, and clarifying these aspirations, but it should not determine their meaning or priority. Citizens themselves must remain the democratic subjects who interpret, deliberate upon, and transform such aspirations into shared projects. By combining Foucauldian archaeological reflexivity with Habermasian communicative rationality, the paper seeks to enhance the reflexive potential of SRPC and to open a possible new democratic space for regional governance.

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Keywords: Swift Response to Public Complaints; Swift Response to Common Dreams; Triple Hermeneutic Framework

Model of People-Oriented City: A Comparative Analysis of Beijing and Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT: In modern urban governance, the concept of a people-oriented city has gained prominence as a paradigm shift from purely economically driven urbanization toward holistic, human-centered development. People-oriented cities aim to balance economic growth, social equity, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. They are grounded in the principle that urban development should prioritize citizens' welfare, engagement, and quality of life over mere infrastructure expansion or GDP growth metrics. Within the framework of China's modernization plan and the broader people-centered philosophy of development, Beijing, the country's capital, has implemented significant people-centered urban governance reforms focused on public services, smart governance, environmental protection, and citizen well-being. These reforms reflect decades of iterative policymaking, substantial public investment, and institutional innovation.The study offers policy recommendations to improve urban governance in Sierra Leone and contributes to the expanding conversation on sustainable urbanization in the Global South, emphasizing that knowledge transfer must be contextual rather than mechanical.

Keywords: People-oriented city; urban governance; Beijing; Sierra Leone; Sustainable development; Human-centered development; Comparative governance; Urban planning; Smart city; Environmental sustainability; Global South urbanization

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The Hui-Tian Initiative: Beijing's Experience in Policy Innovation for Mega-Community Governance

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Abstract: This paper focuses on mega-community governance practices in the Hui-Tian area of Changping District, Beijing, and explores the mechanisms whereby big data on public sentiment and demands drives policy innovation in megacity governance under the framework of the Swift Response to Public Complaints reform. As a government-led policy innovation in regional governance,, the Hui-Tian Initiative constitutes a typical case of systematic governance for large-scale residential settlements on urban peripheries. This initiative fosters a new community form featuring livability-and-industry compatibility and jobs-housing balance through four major approaches: scaling up investment in basic public-service resources, connecting multi-dimensional transport networks, leveraging the diffusion of high-tech industries, and absorbing residents into community-level deliberations. Citizen complaints drive policy agendas in the governance of mega-communities in the Hui-Tian area. Government strategic planning and multi-actor participation jointly deliver policy coordination and policy deliberation. It fully demonstrates a new cyclic policy process characterized by Party Building leadership driven by demands of local citizens, as well as two-way interaction between top-down mobilization and bottom-up feedback. Adhering to the people-centered orientation, it balances

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efficiency-driven allocation of urban public resources and public-service provision, and embodies the urban values of justice and democracy.

Keywords: Mega-community governance; Hui-Tian Initiative; Policy innovation; Urban regeneration