

# Problems and Countermeasures in the Infrastructure of Grass-roots Petition Handling Work

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**Abstract:** At present, there has been significant progress in the infrastructure of the grassroots petition handling work, with not a few exemplary initiatives. Some grassroots petition departments, in addition to performing duties proactively on a regular basis, have addressed diverse public concerns and maintained social stability and harmony through measures such as regular leadership reception sessions, joint petition work coordination mechanisms, leadership-led case visits and follow-ups, monthly petition work reporting systems, “Petition-Free Village (Community)” creation campaigns etc. These efforts are high-quality responses to the questions of era and the people on petition handling work, deepening the bond between the people and the Party and the state. However, despite these substantial achievements, some unavoidable challenges still can be found in the infrastructure of the grassroots petition handling work.

**Keywords:** Grassroots petition handling work, infrastructure, legalization construction.

## 1. Problems in the Infrastructure of the Grassroots Petition Handling Work

### 1.1. Relatively Weak Infrastructure of the Petition Handling Work

The infrastructure of petition-handling offices is still thin: space, equipment, staff and budgets are often scarce, patchy or unevenly spread, which leaves the system ill-equipped to cope with the growing complexity of petition cases.

#### 1.1.1. Hysteretic Informatization Construction

Digitising the petition process offers a fulcrum for easing citizens’ filing difficulties. At present only economically advanced cities have rolled out end-to-end petition platforms. There the “five essentials” are in place—leadership, office space, staff, equipment and publicity—and dedicated online teams work around the clock, so every electronic submission is handled without delay. Elsewhere the same level is absent; lagging digital capacity leaves varied petition demands unmet.

#### 1.1.2. Scarce Professional Staff

Grass-roots petition offices still need to shore up their teams, particularly in headcount, age mix, education level and length of petition experience. The first problem is workload: the tasks are growing, yet few local staff work on petitions full-time. [1] Without dedicated personnel—and with limited legal knowledge—the offices can only respond to complaints instead of heading them off. Second, turnover is high. Most officials see petition duty as a poisoned chalice and try to avoid it, so seasoned veterans are scarce. Finally, some bureaus have left posts vacant for years because they cannot recruit, while reception desks often run on just two or three employees.

#### 1.1.3. Insufficient Funding for Work Expenses

The main reason infrastructure lags behind the rising volume of petition work are chronic underfunding. Budgets approved for petition offices rarely match the real workload. At county level these offices must coordinate in two directions: up and down the administrative hierarchy to share information, enforce standards and supervise implementation, and sideways with the data systems of other key agencies. Yet

money is too tight to roll out the necessary information platforms.

### 1.2. Polarization in the Intertwining of Old and New Issues in Public Petitions

Petitioning tactics keep shifting and are turning more radical. As the rule of law tightens its grip on society, government agencies have standardized their administrative routines, and a climate that favors law-based decisions now prevails inside public bodies. Yet the public’s democratic sensitivity has outpaced its legal literacy: people are quicker to claim rights than to recognize duties. The result is a surge in petitions that ignore procedural rules, mass appeals, high rates of repeat complaints, and frequent bypassing of proper channels. These actions are also becoming better organized and more confrontational, disrupting day-to-day governance and eroding social stability.

Repeat petitioners still account for a sizeable share of the caseload. A subset of them pursue private ends through persistent disruptive tactics, pressing demands that go well beyond what policy or the law allows. To keep the peace, some agencies hurriedly pool money and settle the grievance, unintentionally signalling that disruption pays. The practice spreads as others copy the model, treating petitions as bargaining chips to squeeze concessions from local governments. The result is a steady drumbeat of re-filings that bogs down resolution work and complicates stability maintenance.

It is challenging to resolve long-standing petition cases, with historical issues difficult to address. Certain outstanding petition cases concerning policy issues involve broad domains, present significant resolution challenges, and span extended timeframes, often lacking clear policy precedents. These cases typically involve large numbers of affected individuals, carry high sensitivity, and frequently encounter difficulties in establishing policy grounds or reconstructing factual circumstances. Due to historical legacies and certain objective factors, some petitioners’ concerns have not been satisfactorily addressed, leading to persistent, multi-level petitioning and the emergence of “long-standing petitioners.”

Group petitions are increasingly orchestrated. In the past

few years, disputes over urban redevelopment, property projects and land acquisition for environmental clean-ups—often sparked by shifting policies or uneven standards—have multiplied. Problems linked to private lending, ex-military circles and enterprise reform also keep emerging. [2] Each issue touches on daily subsistence and affects large numbers of residents, so a single spark can draw a crowd. A review of collective petitions processed in our district shows that interested parties now coordinate and plan their actions well in advance.

Certain petitioners leave so little trace of illegality that proof is hard to come by. Some have seen their main grievances settled yet refuse to drop the case; others insist on demands that exceed what can be granted at once. They then shuttle between offices, petitioning out of turn and bypassing every proper level. The departments in charge rarely move early to gather and preserve evidence, leaving the legal route blocked.

### **1.3. Structural Constraints due to Complex Operational Environment of Petition Handling Work**

Petitioning never unfolds in a vacuum; it is woven into the political, social, economic, cultural, and regulatory fabric that simultaneously shapes its structure. Once these economic, political, and cultural strands begin to twist together, the petitioning process turns volatile and hard to steer.

When administrative power is exercised irregularly or improperly, social friction intensifies and petitions multiply. Regional petition returns show that disputes over how agencies wield authority form the single largest group, exceeding half of all filings. Most conflicts can be traced to poor performance, slow or neglected duties, opaque information, unfulfilled responsibilities, or biased law enforcement and adjudication. Demolition and land requisition in shantytown renewal, benefits for demobilized soldiers, resettlement arrangements, and the use or lease of collective-land proceeds all figure prominently. These flashpoints stem less from the policies themselves than from inconsistent, unfair implementation. The evidence points to irregular administrative action as a major driver of social conflict.

The progress in legalizing petitioning is slow, with the mindset of “trusting petitions over the law” has led to excessive reliance on administrative measures for resolving social conflicts, neglecting legal avenues. Many petitioners operate under the mindset of “trusting petitions over the law, trusting higher authorities over lower ones, trusting power over the law.” When resolving disputes, they bypass courts, administrative review bodies, and arbitration institutions, instead turning to Party and government agencies through petitioning channels. This excessive reliance on administrative methods—such as large-scale reception and interception of petitioners—overshadows legal avenues and formal, diverse legal channels. If this continues, these social conflicts will inevitably undermine the rule of law [3].

Grid-based management remains incomplete. Fieldwork shows that village- and community-level dispute channels are largely inactive: many conflicts and petitions surface too late to be reported, let alone settled. Grass-roots cadres, moreover, are often psychologically and ideologically unprepared for petitions that are at once pervasive, acute and tangled; they rarely read early signals or project how a minor grievance might snowball. As a result, small problems are left to swell

until they become major incidents, and low-level frictions are addressed only after they turn into formal petitions. Building organizations that can detect and defuse conflict at the grass roots is therefore an urgent and unavoidable task.

Legal channels for handling legitimate grievances lack effective guidance. Some complaints clearly fall within judicial jurisdiction, yet without a referral system petitioners stay trapped in the administrative loop and soon turn into repeat or confrontational visitors. Once a higher-level petition office registers and forwards their case, they assume the lower-level office must deliver a solution; if nothing happens, they label it foot-dragging and retaliate with poor ratings. The lesson they draw is loud: the more noise they make, the better the outcome—silence earns little, and no protest earns nothing.

## **2. Policy Recommendations for Strengthening the Infrastructure of Grassroots Petition Handling Work**

The defects in grass-roots petition-handling infrastructure must be tackled without delay. To do so, construction should proceed along several tracks: diversified and specialised operating mechanisms need to be set up, and the petition environment must be shaped by rigorous law enforcement, impartial adjudication and broad legal compliance.

### **2.1. Strengthening the Infrastructure for Handling Public Petitions through Multiple Dimensions**

First, officials must become more conscious of the need to shore up the infrastructure for handling grassroots petitions. Sound infrastructure protects people’s lawful rights and keeps society stable, so the matter demands heightened political awareness. [4] Petition offices and their staff should translate that awareness into action: raise their political acumen, sharpen petition-handling skills, refresh working methods, and draw on every institutional resource to solve the problems citizens bring forward. Party committees and governments, for their part, must treat grassroots petition work as a priority, back the offices with solid support, and tilt personnel, funding and other resources in their favor.

Second, cultivate a stronger petition workforce. Ensure the petition bureau is properly staffed with a balanced structure, assign dedicated petition supervisors as required by higher authorities, and give township-level offices the personnel they need. Tighten frontline management so that petition duties are discharged where citizens’ grievances first surface. Cut petition cases rooted in unfair or improper practice, raise the capacity for law-based petition handling, and publicly commend “Most Outstanding Petition Cadres”. Finally, bring the Central Petition Coordination Office’s campaign against repeat and long-standing petitions to a high-quality close.

Third, petition work should accelerate its shift toward digital and intelligent operation. An AI-assisted petition platform can tighten and widen the channels for citizens to air grievances, standardize how petitions are received and processed, invite public scrutiny, push responsible units to act, and keep petitioning orderly. [5] By knitting together the online petition information system with mobile clients, WeChat official accounts, apps and microblogs, complaint routes can be expanded into a single web-based portal that lets users file, track, supervise and rate petitions in one place.

## 2.2. Establishing a Diversified and Specialized Working Mechanism

Petition work sits at the intersection of government and citizen: it must balance competing interests, untangle individual grievances and respond to shifting public expectations. To keep pace with cases that grow more tangled each year, agencies and officials at every level have to rethink their procedures and refine their tools.

First, keep expanding the ‘Major Inspection, Major Reception, Major Research’ drive, steadily pruning and standardising the channels through which the public can voice grievances and defend their rights. It is to improve the full-cycle mechanism for the diversified mediation and settlement of social conflicts and disputes, so that petition-related problems can be prevented and defused at the source; continue to refine the ways in which leaders take charge of cases and receive or visit complainants on site, locking in responsibility for resolution and tightening oversight and follow-up; build step by step a system that collects, compiles, sorts and analyses public sentiment and opinion; and enhance risk prevention and early-warning for petition issues in sectors such as construction, finance and military affairs, supplying reference materials for Party-committee and government decision-making.

Second, keep the principal-leader reception routine. Adhere to the Tuesday weekly schedule and the dual-track petition system; face disputes directly, monitor progress, and settle every reasonable case without triggering knock-on effects. The petition office must compile the reception results and submit them without delay to the top Party and government leaders, ensuring both the system runs and problems are solved. [6] At the same time, leading cadres must carry out case visits and follow-ups. Guided by the idea that officials should take more steps so citizens take fewer, a new model blends online petitions handled by the department, WeChat reception by the bureau chief, and targeted field visits. This online-offline mix creates a green channel for public grievances, cuts petitioning costs, and lifts both the quality and speed of petition work.

Third, activate the joint conference mechanism for petition work. This entails reinforcing the Party’s overall leadership by holding regular joint and thematic meetings to review the petition landscape in a comprehensive and evidence-based manner, report progress and bottlenecks, and ensure that primary responsibility for case resolution is fully assumed. Keep the mechanism alive: convene sessions whenever circumstances require, share updates, assign tasks, and carry out focused investigations and collective solutions for outstanding cases. A monthly reporting system is in place: township- and department-level petition statistics, together with petitions filed in Beijing, are released every month. These reports push responsible units to perform their duties, speed up case closure, and oblige top officials to track listed problems and arrange follow-ups, turning the reporting system into an engine that drives petition work forward.

Fourth, the county rolled out the region’s first “Petition-Free Village (Community)” scheme, anchoring petition work at the grassroots. A monthly screening and quarterly review cycle spots disputes early; township mediation hubs and joint petition meetings coordinate settlements; leading cadres keep regular reception, appointment and field-visit hours; the national model-county drive is deepened so that conflicts are solved locally, procedures standardised and risks cut at source.

Villages (communities) and their township (sub-district) that record zero petitions receive cash awards, sharpening rural cadres’ focus and fixing a durable incentive system.

## 2.3. Creating a Petition Environment of Strict Law Enforcement, Impartial Administration of Justice, and Universal Observance of the Law

First, relevant government departments should uphold strict law enforcement to effectively reduce petition cases arising from non-standard enforcement practices. (1) Through fair legislation and institutional frameworks, standardized decision-making, and rigorous law enforcement, fundamentally reduce various social conflicts at their source, improve rules for major administrative decisions, promote scientific, democratic, and law-based administrative decision-making, enforce laws strictly and impartially, establish a comprehensive set of enforcement procedures, constrain and standardize all types of law enforcement activities, and ensure the strict implementation of laws. (2) For all matters involving overarching work and major policy decisions, conduct thorough investigation and scientific decision-making. All regulatory documents and policies must be based on sufficient grounds and aligned with practical realities. Prior to implementing major projects, thorough preparatory work must be completed, particularly conducting social stability risk assessments and developing contingency plans to ensure preparedness. (3) Administrative bodies at all levels and departments must perform their duties in accordance with the requirements of law-based administration. Functional departments, in particular, must start with themselves, every task, and every step to conscientiously fulfill their responsibilities, strictly enforce laws, and eliminate illegal activities, arbitrary administrative actions, and inaction. This fundamentally prevents and reduces incidents that harm public interests, addressing problems at their source [7].

Second, governance should begin at the source. By putting public interests first, the number of petitions can be reduced before they even arise. At county level, leading officials need to keep receiving citizens in person and actively expand online petition portals. Townships and departments must enforce two parallel routines: designated leaders handling visitors and cadres going door-to-door, while clerks from local judicial offices and police stations are encouraged to take part. In villages and communities, grid workers are expected to spot grievances early and relay public sentiment without delay. Easier access gives people somewhere to complain, ask questions and seek solutions, so small matters are settled on the spot and larger ones are defused before they escalate. Rule-of-law thinking rests on fairness and justice—core values of socialist legality—and protects the fundamental interests of the majority. Channeling petitions through legal procedures ensures that reasonable, lawful claims receive fair, lawful answers. As China advances law-based governance and its legal system matures, the government’s capacity to settle social conflict in accordance with the law will keep growing, offering a solid safeguard for social harmony and stability.

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