

CHINA'S SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM

It's been dubbed the most ambitious experiment in digital social control ever undertaken. The Chinese government plans to launch its Social Credit System nationally by 2020.

WHAT'S THE AIM?

The system intends to monitor, rate and regulate the financial, social, moral and, possibly, political behavior of China's citizens – and also the country's companies – via a system of punishments and rewards. The stated aim is to “provide the trustworthy with benefits and discipline the untrustworthy.”

The Chinese government considers the system an important tool to steer China's economy and to govern society. There is still much speculation about how the final system will actually function. Details in this chart are based on pilot schemes and plausible expert expectations.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Each citizen is expected to be given a social credit score that will increase or decrease depending on whether the subject's social behavior is acceptable.

The system is expected to draw on huge amounts of data about each and every individual, gathered from traditional sources – such as financial, criminal and government records and existing data from registry offices or school officials – along with digital sources. The latter include data collected on the Internet, such as the subject's search history, shopping preferences on e-commerce sites and interactions on social media.

Moreover, the system could also rely on information obtained through video surveillance systems with help from facial recognition technology.

Engaging in charity work

Taking care of elderly family members

Positively influencing one's neighborhood

Donating blood

Praising the government on social media

Helping the poor

Having a good financial credit history

Committing a heroic act

Gaining points (Examples)

Losing points (Examples)

A maximum of 1,300 points can be reached.

Traffic offenses, such as drunk driving or jaywalking

“Illegally” protesting against the authorities

Not visiting aging parents regularly

Starting with 1,000 points

Posting anti-government messages on social media

Spreading rumors on the Internet

“Insincere” apologies for crimes committed

Participating in anything deemed to be a cult

Lowest score

Cheating in online games

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

Citizens with high scores get to enjoy special “privileges” while those with low scores ultimately risk getting treated as second-class citizens.

HIGH SCORES CAN LEAD TO

- ★ Priority for school admissions and employment.
- 📄 Easier access to cash loans and consumer credit.
- 🚲 Deposit-free bicycle and car hire.
- 🏊 Free gym facilities.
- 🚌 Cheaper public transport.
- 🏥 Shorter wait times in hospitals.
- 👥 Fast-track promotion at work.
- 👤 Jumping the queue for public housing.
- 💰 Tax breaks.

PUNISHMENTS CAN LEAD TO

- 🚫 Denial of licenses, permits and access to some social services.
- ✈️ Exclusion from booking flights or high-speed train tickets.
- 📄 Less access to credit.
- 🚫 Restricted access to public services.
- 🏢 Ineligibility for government jobs.
- 🏫 No access to private schools.
- 👤 Public shaming: exposure either online or on TV screens in public spaces of the names, photos and ID numbers of blacklisted citizens; phone dial tones mandated by authorities that inform people that they are calling a “dishonest debtor.”