

Research on Risk Governance of Animal Abuse in the Context of Public Security Modernization

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Abstract

Animal abuse governance has emerged as a critical social issue demanding urgent resolution in contemporary China, confronting a triple challenge of ambiguous legal applicability, widespread dissemination of harmful online content, and increasingly younger offenders. The Animal Abuse Registry (AAR) in the United States, as a social governance initiative, has demonstrated effectiveness in crime prevention and social stability maintenance. Empirical analysis of this system provides institutional insights for China. Guided by risk governance theory, China should establish a three-tiered risk prevention framework integrating theoretical foundations, technological applications, and institutional safeguards—requiring development of a tripartite risk identification model, creation of a national animal abuse behavior database, and refinement of legal regulations with evaluation mechanisms to formulate a scientific governance solution.

Keywords

Animal Abuse; Public Security Governance; Risk Prevention; Registry System



1 Introduction: New Dimensions of Animal Protection in Public Security Governance Modernization

Entering the third decade of the 21st century, animal abuse has transcended traditional ethical boundaries to evolve into a societal issue with significant public security implications. The 2021 exposure of South Korea's "Animal Torture Ring" (analogous to the "Nth Room" cybercrime case) revealed an underground industry trading animal cruelty videos. With advancing digital technologies, such illicit activities now incorporate blockchain payments and virtual reality (VR) technologies, posing unprecedented challenges to conventional public security oversight frameworks. Critically, animal abuse often correlates with the criminological concept of "violence graduation" – a long-standing concern in security studies. Empirical analysis of the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) demonstrates that intentional animal abuse occurs in 84.6% of intimate partner violence cases and 84.4% of domestic violence incidents. This progression from animal abuse to human-directed violence constitutes a critical societal risk, amplifying threats to public safety.

In China, recent years have witnessed escalating incidents of animal abuse, including university students torturing cats and live-streamed animal killings soliciting viewer rewards. These acts not only harbor risks of potential "violence graduation" but also frequently trigger online vigilantism through viral dissemination, exhibiting irrational, extremist, and polarized tendencies that violate individual rights while severely threatening public safety and disrupting social order. Such phenomena fundamentally contradict China's objectives for public security governance modernization, which aims to "achieve modernized governance through establishing sound social order, maintaining societal stability and citizen security, and safeguarding holistic social development within modernization processes." Within this framework, strengthening and innovating animal abuse governance is an imperative practical undertaking to anchor social development and stability while addressing public aspirations for enhanced quality of life.

Recent scholarship and practical efforts have intensified focus on combating animal abuse. Jurisprudential research centers on animal protection philosophies and ethical foundations, including human-animal relationships, animal welfare, animal rights, and care ethics. Legislative studies initially explored the necessity and feasibility of anti-cruelty legislation, with subsequent analyses examining criminal and administrative regulations targeting abusive acts. Practical initiatives include legal scholars' 2010 proposal for an Anti-Animal Abuse Law with an expert draft, repeated National People's Congress proposals since 2015, and regional anti-abuse measures embedded in companion animal regulations (e.g., dog management bylaws). Judicial practices have addressed such acts through convictions for intentional property destruction and administrative penalties for disorderly conduct. While these contributions lay essential groundwork, they exhibit notable limitations: legal scholarship disproportionately emphasizes post-facto punishment over developing effective preventive frameworks.

This study transcends the traditional jurisprudential analytical framework in animal protection research by focusing on the dilemmas of public security governance concerning animal cruelty in China. Using the U.S. Animal Abuse Registry System as a reference model, it provides new empirical support for risk governance

theory within public security studies. At the practical level, this research concentrates on three governance breakthroughs to establish an innovative risk prevention and control system: first, constructing a "Tripartite Risk Identification Model" at the fundamental theoretical level with a "Red-Orange-Yellow" three-tier early warning mechanism; second, creating an Animal Cruelty Behavior Database at the technological application level to promote the implementation of intelligence-led policing in animal protection; third, improving legal regulations and evaluation systems at the institutional safeguard level to provide legal basis for the appropriate disposition of animal cruelty acts.

2 Analysis of Dilemmas and Causes in China's Public Security Governance Concerning Animal Cruelty

2.1 Dilemmas in China's Public Security Governance Concerning Animal Cruelty

2.1.1 Uncertainty in Legal Application

Regarding cases of animal cruelty handled by public security organs that have attracted widespread attention online, most perpetrators in such cases are subjected to administrative penalties for violating the Public Security Administration Punishment Law. However, the application of provisions concerning «picking quarrels and provoking troubles» or other offenses that disrupt public order or endanger public safety lacks specificity, and enforcement standards vary across regions as shown in Table 1. Consequently, the contradiction between the practical need to address animal cruelty cases and the absence of specialized legislation has become one of the primary dilemmas.

Table 1 Administrative Penalty Measures in Animal Cruelty Cases

Case	Administrative Penalty Measures
2020 Taiyuan Animal Cruelty Case	Warning, Written Statement of Guarantee
2021 Shangqiu Animal Cruelty Case	Criticism-education, 5-day Detention
2023 Fuyang "Jack Latiao" Cat Abuse Case	Administrative Detention, Public Apology
2023 Nanyang Institute of Technology Student Cat Abuse Case	7-day Detention

2.1.2 Hazards Amplification through Online Dissemination

The propagation of animal cruelty content through online channels has exponentially expanded its harmful impact. Primarily, the dissemination of animal abuse videos infringes upon the rights of unspecified individuals. Legal case retrievals from China Judgments Online demonstrate disputes over rights to life, health, and bodily integrity arising from viewing such materials. For instance, plaintiffs who watched cat abuse videos and images reported recurrent nightmares of feline suffering, accompanied by chest tightness, palpitations, insomnia, nocturnal awakenings, and even clinical depression. These cases corroborate that the circulation of animal torture footage causes substantial psychological and physiological harm to the public, violating the tripartite rights to life, health, and bodily integrity of indeterminate populations. Yet such infringed legal interests rarely receive judicial remedy. Concurrently, online dissemination triggers imi-



tation effects and value distortion. Although major platforms block search results for explicit animal cruelty keywords, content remains accessible through notorious perpetrator aliases. Furthermore, the evolution of live-streaming technologies enables real-time co-streaming (连麦) of such acts, creating covert distribution modes. This simultaneously attracts audiences with morbid curiosity while serving as a traffic-generation tool for unregulated streamers, manifesting the transboundary hazards of digital propagation.

2.1.3 Declining Age of Perpetrators

Animal cruelty perpetrators demonstrate a notably younger demographic profile. Statistical data reveals that during the brief period from October to December 2021 alone, 12 reported cases of student-perpetrated animal abuse and killing emerged online, involving learners across elementary, junior high, senior high, and university levels. Among 18 exposed animal cruelty QQ groups aggregating 6,690 members, 2,231 belonged to Generation Z (born 2000-2010). Survey findings indicate 91% of students possess awareness of animal abuse incidents, 36% have viewed animal abuse videos, and 48% perceive such acts as exacerbating school bullying. Failure to implement timely educational interventions may foster cognitive distortions regarding self-identity and social interaction in minors, potentially triggering more severe unlawful conduct and elevating public security risks.

2.2 Analysis of Causes for Dilemmas in China's Public Security Governance Concerning Animal Cruelty

2.2.1 Systemic Deficiencies in the Legal Framework

China's current legal provisions governing animal cruelty exhibit significant fragmentation, lacking a dedicated Anti-Animal Cruelty Law. As illustrated in Table 2, relevant clauses dispersed across multiple legislations manifest structural defects including restrictive regulatory scope and ambiguous constitutive elements.

Table 2 Analysis of Legal Provisions Addressing Animal Cruelty in China

Sources of Law	Associated clauses	Limitations of Application
Public Security Administration Punishment Law	Article 26	Requires proof of both subjective and objective elements for "disruption of social order"
Wildlife Protection Law	Article 26	Protection scope limited to rare and endangered terrestrial/aquatic wildlife and terrestrial wildlife with significant ecological, scientific, or social value
Civil Code	Article 1245	Relief is preconditioned upon infringement of property rights.
Regulations on Administration of Laboratory Animals	Article 27	Explicitly excludes companion animals and stray animals.

2.2.2 Insufficiency of Foundational Theoretical Research Applicable to Public Order Governance Practices

The insufficient foundational theoretical research applicable to public order governance practices is evidenced by China's relatively nascent stage of development in animal rights theory compared to the long-established Western discourse in this field. Retrievals conducted on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) using "animal protection" and "animal cruelty" as search terms demonstrate that domestic theoretical studies predominantly concentrate on animal rights issues and the legal status of animals, with wildlife protection discussions constituting the academic mainstream. Concurrently, a parallel search employing "animal abuse" and "violence" as joint keywords yielded no relevant publications in core Chinese academic journals, indicating scarce scholarly attention to the governance of animal cruelty in society and inadequate research on risk governance theory within the anti-animal abuse domain. Significant theoretical deficiencies persist in addressing practical risks arising from animal maltreatment. Although risk governance theory has undergone institutional validation in U.S. anti-cruelty practices, its localized application in China suffers from insufficient attention, creating theoretical discontinuities. This theory nevertheless provides an analytical framework for addressing social risks posed by contemporary animal abuse, which manifests through five interconnected public order threats: animal-inflicted human injury (where abuse may trigger aggressive behavior in animals, as exemplified by attacks from mistreated stray dogs endangering public safety); mass incidents (such as the February 2023 Suzhou case where animal activists physically restrained, slapped, kicked, and publicly humiliated a cat abuser, causing significant social repercussions); infringement of legitimate rights including animal owners' property interests; public health hazards through zoonotic disease transmission; and social disorder stemming from moral controversies that erode social norms and destabilize communal order.

3 Extraterritorial Reference Framework: U.S. Animal Abuse Registry as Model

3.1 Establishment and Evolution of the U.S. Animal Abuse Registry System

The legal regulation of animal cruelty in the United States demonstrates a trajectory characterized by both circuitous developments and progressive refinement. Historically, animals were regarded merely as property under U.S. law, rendering acts against such "property" non-criminal. During the 19th century, numerous states enacted anti-cruelty statutes criminalizing animal maltreatment. Despite successful legislative adoption, most jurisdictions encountered substantial enforcement challenges, with the majority of offenses either escaping prosecution or receiving only nominal penalties. Responding to the abrupt surge in animal cruelty cases documented between October 1993 and October 1994, nearly all states had implemented enhanced penalty provisions within their anti-cruelty frameworks by 2012. This legislative hardening was significantly propelled by animal advocacy organizations—including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), and The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)—which persistently elevated public awareness and catalyzed societal transformation regard-



ing animal welfare. Concurrently, media outlets amplified public consciousness through targeted coverage of cruelty cases alongside psychological studies and statistical data on animal abuse, despite capturing only a fraction of actual incidents. Furthermore, congressional initiatives proposing specific legislative measures, coupled with growing societal recognition of animal cruelty's criminal severity, collectively drove the continual sophistication of anti-cruelty legislation.

To address the absence of effective tracking mechanisms for convicted animal abusers, the U.S. federal government enhanced the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and enacted the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act (PACT). Currently, no federal-level animal abuse registry exists nationwide. In May 2015, Tennessee's legislature passed the Animal Abuser Registration Act, establishing America's first statewide animal abuse registry. Numerous municipalities including New York City have implemented local ordinances. This study conducts a comparative examination of representative statutes from Tennessee and New York City, revealing distinctions in both statutory hierarchy and differential provisions as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Animal Abuse Registry Acts

	Tennessee Act	New York City Act
Registry Method	Compulsory registration covering appellants	Voluntary registration (excluding appellants)
Registry Data	Excludes Social Security numbers, driver's license numbers, or any state/federal identification	Includes driver's license numbers or other photo-bearing identification card numbers
Registry Duration	Two years post-first conviction; five years for subsequent offenses	Five years post-first conviction; ten years for subsequent offenses
Access Obligation	No access obligations	Access obligations for specified entities/persons (e.g., pet stores prohibited from selling to registrants)
Access Procedure	Publicly accessible information	Registration-based access
Penalty Provisions	No penalty provisions	Any violation shall be punishable by imprisonment for not more than one year, or a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both.

Comparative analysis of the tabulated data reveals that although Tennessee's Animal Abuser Registration Act occupies a higher statutory hierarchy than New York City's Animal Abuse Registry Act, it imposes lower mandatory force and predominantly embodies public-interest functions. From an institutional reference perspective, New York City's regulatory framework holds greater instructive value. First, the Act's legislative purposes are dual-faceted: (1) establishing registration obligations for animal abusers to prohibit their physical contact with animals, thereby directly safeguarding animal welfare interests; and (2) impos-

ing access obligations on designated entities to indirectly mitigate risks of abuser-animal contact. Second, regarding registration content and methodology, the Act comprehensively defines abusive conduct while mandating proactive self-registration by offenders, with collected data possessing heightened personal identifiability that serves deterrent and rehabilitative functions. Third, it transforms entity access obligations into mandatory compliance requirements, effectively standardizing operational norms within animal-related industries and enhancing professional ethics to reduce abuse probabilities. Finally, the Act's incorporated penalty provisions "put teeth into the law," ensuring tangible enforceability and operational viability.

3.2 Criminological Foundations of U.S. Animal Abuse Registries: Violence Escalation and Risk Prevention

The theoretical foundation of the U.S. animal abuse registry system derives from scholarly examination of the linkage between animal maltreatment and other forms of violent crime. Since the early 19th century, American Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCAs) have advocated for recognition of this connection, though the theory initially lacked empirical substantiation. Contemporary psychological research has now confirmed the existence of such correlations through multidisciplinary studies. As an interdisciplinary subject, the nexus between animal cruelty governance and violence prevention has been extensively debated across academic literature spanning sociology, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, social work, criminology, public policy, and jurisprudence. Operationally, scholars define animal abuse as "non-accidental, socially unacceptable conduct that causes animals suffering, torment, or death." Research primarily demonstrates significant interconnections between animal and human-directed violence: animal abusers exhibit heightened propensity for other criminal behaviors—serving as a predictor for school shootings, a risk indicator for domestic violence, and a marker for juvenile delinquency. Conversely, animal abusers frequently report histories of childhood victimization or exposure to domestic violence, including witnessing animal cruelty. Early exposure to animal maltreatment constitutes a risk factor for future antisocial behavior and youth delinquency. From a law enforcement perspective, identifying individuals or families at highest risk of interpersonal violence may prevent criminal occurrences, while prosecutors can strengthen charges through concurrent indictment of animal cruelty offenses. Juveniles exhibiting recurrent abusive behavior require early identification for intervention. These findings collectively indicate that animal abusers demonstrate elevated likelihood of perpetrating domestic violence and other violent crimes, warranting prioritized risk intervention measures.

Discourse on establishing animal abuse registries centers on governmental imperatives for enhanced monitoring and regulatory mechanisms. Although animal cruelty constitutes a criminal offense across all 50 U.S. states, scholars note that prosecuted cases typically culminate in plea agreements involving misdemeanor charges, probation, pet ownership bans, fines, or restitution. A substantial volume of offenses against animals escapes prosecution, resulting in near-total absence of formal documentation. This evidentiary void impedes domestic violence victims' access to critical support services while depriving communities of legally actionable notification regarding perpetrators' propensity for violence—systemic gaps that potentiate deterioration of violent criminal behavior. Consequently, the U.S. animal abuse registry framework emerged from theoretical discourse addressing these institutional deficiencies.



3.3 Referential Significance of the U.S. Animal Abuse Registry System

Under risk society conditions, advancing risk prevention has emerged as a publicly anticipated state function. The preventive legal governance model necessitates state intervention through organized collective action to mitigate risks. Confronting social hazards stemming from animal abuse, the registry system—grounded in risk governance theory centered on violence prevention and escalation control—synergizes with preventive legal principles to form a responsive theoretical foundation for regulation, manifesting in two dimensions.

First, theoretical adaptability. The preventive legal governance paradigm as the guiding framework and risk governance theory as the operational core constitute a hierarchical yet complementary system with shared regulatory objectives. Preventive governance excels in preempting significant legal interest infringement through proactive measures before violations occur. Addressing animal abuse's societal harms, particularly youth vulnerability, demands prevention as the primary regulatory principle. Simultaneously, risk governance theory provides normative justification by evidencing linkages between animal cruelty and violent crimes, enabling multi-stakeholder risk identification, preventive interventions, and accountability delineation to reduce secondary violence and safeguard public safety. In animal abuse regulation, risk governance operationalizes preventive legal governance, necessitating preemptive regulatory frameworks centered on prevention.

Second, forward-looking regulatory implementation. The U.S. animal abuse registry system—anchored in risk governance theory and violence escalation prevention—epitomizes preventive public order governance. Through legislative, judicial, enforcement, and community management mechanisms augmented by data systems, it minimizes recidivism risk among animal abusers, offering actionable insights for China's governance framework. Despite the absence of criminalized animal cruelty in China's Penal Code, existing public order penalties for such conduct necessitate establishing risk prevention mechanisms to forestall behavioral recurrence.

4 Constructing Public Order Governance and Risk Prevention Frameworks for Animal Abuse

While Chinese enforcement agencies already impose punitive practices for animal cruelty, growing public demand for systematic governance and insights from U.S. registry systems necessitate further legal institutionalization. Addressing deficiencies in China's current regulatory framework, a three-tiered risk prevention innovation system—"theoretical foundation-technological application-institutional safeguards"—should be established under risk governance theory guidance.

4.1 Theoretical Foundation: Developing the Trichotomous Risk Identification Model

China's governance of animal abuse urgently requires transcending Western theoretical limitations through a localized Trichotomous Risk Identification Model. Guided by risk governance theory and analysis of publicly documented abuse incidents, this study proposes assessing abusive acts through three core di-

mensions: Behavioral Frequency, Cruelty Severity, and Social Diffusion, implementing tiered intervention protocols as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Tiered Risk Assessment Model for Animal Abuse Behaviors

Risk Level	Assessment Criteria	Intervention Measures
Yellow	1-2 violations annually without causing animal death	Community Correction + Psychological Intervention
Orange	3-5 violations annually involving tool-inflicted permanent disability	Conduct Orders + Electronic Monitoring
Red	≥6 violations annually with online dissemination of abusive acts	Criminal Case Filing + Compulsory Treatment

This risk identification model provides law enforcement authorities with an objective framework for adjudicating animal abuse cases, mitigating further societal repercussions while preventing online vigilantism from infringing individual rights and disrupting social order. The 2024 “Cat-Abusing Graduate Applicant Incident” exemplifies its application: the examinee’s conduct would be assessed through the Trichotomous Risk Identification Model. Should the abuse register at Yellow risk level, post-intervention rehabilitation demonstrating ceased threat potential should preserve educational opportunities; conversely, Red-level abuse warrants criminal case filing and compulsory treatment, establishing evidentiary grounds for admission revocation.

4.2 Technological Application: Establishing a Centralized Animal Abuse Database

Despite limitations in the U.S. animal abuse registry system, its efficacy in deterring animal cruelty remains significant. Registries exert deterrent and rehabilitative effects on convicted offenders while enabling community notification mechanisms that foster collaborative prevention—establishing a virtuous governance cycle. Under risk governance theory, big data analytics and monitoring technologies empower law enforcement to transition from reactive to preventive crime control. China can leverage mature big data capabilities to develop a context-specific registry framework, exemplified by Shenzhen’s 2023 Canine Nose-Print Recognition System. Integrating databases into community policing systems enables three key applications: 1) high-risk individual monitoring with real-time tracking of pets associated with prior offenders; 2) abnormal behavior identification via AI video analytics detecting poisoning or confinement; and 3) online content governance removing abusive media through network surveillance. Unlike the fragmented U.S. system with disjointed local data, China’s centralized governance structure facilitates a nationally unified registry database integrated with public security tracking systems. Crucially, technological implementation must balance privacy safeguards through controlled information disclosure—limiting system access to authorized entities and implementing identity-authenticated query protocols.

4.3 Institutional Safeguards: Enhancing Legal Frameworks and Evaluation Systems

The U.S. animal abuse registry system fundamentally presupposes the criminalization of animal cruelty across all jurisdictions, restricting application solely to convicted offenders and thereby establishing legal codification as the prerequisite for effective governance. While scholarly consensus in China advocates criminalizing animal abuse, practical implementation barriers persist. Within the preventive legal governance paradigm, transitioning from passive to proactive protection of legal interests necessitates prioritizing administrative regulation over criminal law for enhanced feasibility. China's existing Public Order Administration Punishments Law provides only marginally applicable provisions—Article 26 (Disturbing Public Order) and Article 49 (Intentional Property Damage)—both lacking behavioral specificity. Legislative amendments must therefore institutionalize animal protection principles, introduce a dedicated “Animal Cruelty” clause defining constitutive elements (e.g., “inflicting unnecessary suffering through cruel means”), and implement quantifiable penalties: base sanctions of CNY 500–1,000 fines; aggravated penalties for disability/death outcomes entailing 10–15 days' detention with concurrent fines ≤CNY 2,000; and enhanced sanctions including confiscation of illicit proceeds for online dissemination offenses.

Following the incorporation of animal abuse into the legal regulatory framework, complementary Risk Assessment Guidelines for Animal Cruelty should be promulgated to operationalize the Trichotomous Risk Identification Model. Core components must include: assessment authorities—joint task forces led by public security organs incorporating communities, NGOs, veterinarians, and psychologists; assessment procedures—preliminary screening (within 24 hours of reporting) → professional evaluation (72 hours) → tiered intervention (within 48 hours post-assessment); and dynamic adjustment mechanisms—maintaining Red-Orange-Yellow registries with semi-annual risk reevaluations. These guidelines will institutionalize multi-stakeholder governance obligations, establishing a polycentric prevention framework engaging governmental, institutional, and individual actors.

5 Conclusion

The governance dilemmas surrounding animal abuse in China reflect structural tensions inherent in modernizing social risk prevention systems. This study constructs a three-tiered progressive risk prevention framework—»theoretical foundation, technological application, institutional safeguards«—achieving transformative progression from theoretical innovation to governance efficacy through extraterritorial adaptation. This represents a scientifically grounded approach to animal abuse governance. Future research should prioritize modeling risk transmission mechanisms and conducting cost-benefit analyses of intervention strategies, facilitating the evolution from ethical persuasion to rule-of-law and AI-enhanced governance, while strengthening comparative studies to integrate collaborative governance insights from the EU's animal welfare legislation and analogous jurisdictions.

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