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Policy Coordination for Elderly Care and Childcare in Xi'an: A Quantitative Analysis of Policy Documents, 2016-2026

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Abstract

Population ageing and fertility support have merged elderly care and childcare into one public service agenda. Using a three-level corpus of 57 policy documents (2016–2026) and 27 formal municipal documents from Xi'an, this study combines content analysis, social network analysis and a composite Policy Coordination Index. It finds a shift to integrated governance after 2023; strong supply- and environment-side but weak demand-side instruments; a 28-department network with 174 ties centred on civil affairs, finance, health and development-reform; and an index peak of 0.729 in 2023. Recommendations address coordination mechanisms, demand-side instruments and community-embedded facilities.

Keywords: Policy Coordination; Policy Instruments; Elderly Care and Childcare; Social Network Analysis；Environment Psychology；Asian

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Public services for older people and young children—the "one elderly, one child" agenda rendered in official English sources as elderly care and childcare—span population, social security, health, education, housing, spatial planning, finance and grassroots governance. The governing difficulty is not the addition of elderly care beds or childcare slots but the organisation of resources dispersed across departments, instruments and settings into a continuous, accessible service system. In 2020 the State Council required both to be incorporated into national economic and social development plans with coordinated allocation of planning, land, fiscal and human capital support (General Office of the State Council, 2020).

Xi'an offers a typical site for observing this evolution. The seventh national population census recorded 2.0753 million residents aged 60 and above in 2020, 16.02% of the permanent population (Xi'an Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2021); by the end of 2025 the permanent population reached 13.2363 million, with 221 elderly care institutions and 32,200 beds (Xi'an Municipal Bureau of Statistics & Survey Team of the National Bureau of Statistics in Xi'an, 2026). The 2025 and 2026 health work priorities set 4.8 childcare slots per 1,000 population

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and 3,500 additional inclusive slots (Xi'an Municipal Health Commission, 2026). Expansion on both sides has made single-department management inadequate for facility provision, fiscal payment, workforce training, medical support and community embedding.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Existing research has largely analysed instrument configuration within a single domain, and has seldom examined, at city scale, departmental coordination, instrument mixes, target integration between elderly care and childcare, and vertical transmission across the three levels. This study therefore asks how Xi'an's policies evolved between 2016 and 2026, what structural features characterise the instrument configuration and the coordination network, and whether coordination can be measured by reproducible indicators that locate structural weaknesses.

1.3 Objective of the study

The objective is to describe and measure this coordination through an auditable text-based procedure, and to derive optimisation priorities for municipal governance.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 From single instruments to policy mix coherence

Rothwell and Zegveld (1981) distinguished supply, demand and environment instruments; later research moved from asking which instrument to choose to asking how instruments combine (Howlett, 2004; Howlett & Rayner, 2007). Studies of elderly care and childcare in China have widely adopted the threefold classification: Huang and Sun (2022) found national elderly care policy moving towards resource integration while instrument structure remained unbalanced, and Lu, Zhao and Bai (2025) and Xie and Guo (2025) reported a high share of environment instruments with a shortage of demand stimulation and service purchasing. Counting three broad categories cannot explain diversity within them.

2.2 Network measurement of inter-departmental coordination

Elderly care and childcare are inherently cross-departmental. Social network analysis treats departments as nodes and their policy cooperation as ties (Wasserman & Faust, 1994); Provan and Kenis (2008) showed that network governance performance depends on the number of participants, trust, goal consensus and governance structure. Zhang, Lei and Zhou (2021) built an emergency coordination network from centrally co-issued documents, showing that policy texts validly record organisational coordination. A necessary distinction is that between responsibility co-occurrence, where several departments share implementation responsibility in one document, and joint issuance, where several co-sign it; equating the two overestimates formal coordination, so the two networks are constructed separately.

2.3 A four-dimensional coordination framework

On this basis, local coordination of elderly care and childcare is defined as an institutional arrangement in which departments support one another through instrument mixes, target integration and vertical articulation under a common public service goal. Four dimensions are specified: actor coordination (C), the breadth of participating departments and the intensity of joint issuance; instrument coordination (T), the combination of the three instrument types and the coverage intensity of eleven sub-instruments; target integration (I), whether one document covers elderly care and childcare simultaneously; and vertical alignment (V), whether a municipal document forms an explicit link with national or provincial policy. The framework avoids the equation of more policies with stronger coordination.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Corpus construction

The study period is 2016–2026. Documents were collected from the official websites of the Central Government, the National Health Commission, the People's Government of Shaanxi Province, the Xi'an Municipal People's Government and its civil affairs, health and development-reform departments; for the few earlier documents removed from their original pages, cross-verification used gazette indexes, later citations and verifiable mirrors. After excluding two auxiliary texts, 27 formal municipal documents form the main sample of a three-level corpus of 57 documents (Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of the three-level policy document corpus

Level	Documents	Use in this study
National	14	Central baseline and vertical alignment
Shaanxi Province	14	Provincial translation and municipal reception
Xi'an	29	Municipal pool; 27 enter formal analysis
Total	57	Three-level policy document corpus

Inclusion required content directly concerning elderly care, childcare, birth support, integrated medical and elderly care, health-supported childcare, community-embedded services or integrated provision; issuance by the municipal government, its general office, a municipal department or the local legislature; and a planning, implementation, management or resource allocation function. For 2019 only auxiliary material was located, so the annual index is treated as missing rather than zero.

3.2 Instrument coding and reliability

Following the supply-demand-environment trichotomy and the substantive content of elderly care and childcare policy, instruments were refined into eleven sub-types (Table 2). After a first round coded with keyword and metadata assistance and verified clause by clause, a second coder, blinded to the first results and working from a common codebook, independently judged the three primary and eleven secondary instruments in all 27 documents and assigned values for I and V. Primary instruments were coded binarily and I and V were graded 0, 0.5 or 1. Agreement was tested with Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960),

$$\kappa = (Po - Pe) / (1 - Pe) \quad (1)$$

where Po is observed agreement and Pe is chance agreement from the marginal distributions, with $\kappa \geq 0.70$ set ex ante. Where the coders agreed completely and the dichotomised marginal distribution had no variance, κ is undefined and reported as n.d., not as $\kappa = 1$ (Table 3). At document level, the coders' PCI values differ by a mean absolute 0.0870 and a maximum 0.1531, with a Pearson correlation of 0.9198.

Table 2. Coding framework of the eleven sub-instruments

Primary type	Code	Sub-instrument	Typical content
Supply	S1	Facility supply	Nursing homes, childcare slots
Supply	S2	Human capital supply	Care workers, training
Supply	S3	Information technology	Smart platforms
Supply	S4	Service capacity	Care, meal assistance
Demand	D1	Cash subsidies	Vouchers, subsidies
Demand	D2	Government purchasing	Service purchasing
Demand	D3	Pricing and payment	Long-term care, pricing
Environment	E1	Planning and land	Plans, land use
Environment	E2	Fiscal and financial	Funding, tax support
Environment	E3	Regulation and standards	Standards, evaluation
Environment	E4	Organisational coordination	Joint conference

Table 3. Results of the second-coder agreement test

Dimension	Cohen's κ	Observed agreement	Note
C Actor coordination	0.9153	0.9583	Above the 0.70 threshold
T Instrument coordination	n.d.	1.0000	κ undefined: no marginal variance
I Target integration	n.d.	1.0000	κ undefined: no marginal variance
V Vertical alignment	n.d.	1.0000	κ undefined: no marginal variance

3.3 Network and composite index measurement

The responsibility network takes departments as nodes; two departments sharing implementation responsibility in one document form an undirected tie weighted by their number of shared documents. Network density, $D = 2E/[N(N - 1)]$, describes overall structure, while degree, weighted degree, closeness and betweenness centrality describe node positions (Wasserman & Faust, 1994); these describe link structures in policy text, not governance performance. A composite Policy Coordination Index was constructed as

$$PCI_i = 0.35C_i + 0.30T_i + 0.20I_i + 0.15V_i \quad (2)$$

with C and T continuous and I and V graded, all normalised to [0, 1] (Table 4). Because the weights are not treated as objective truth, four alternatives were used for sensitivity analysis—equal, structure-reinforced, entropy and CRITIC weights (Diakoulaki, Mavrotas, & Papayannis, 1995)—together with a bootstrap procedure for annual means with $n \geq 2$ ($B = 10{,}000$; Efron & Tibshirani, 1993).

Table 4. Indicators and measurement rules for coordination

Indicator	Code	Measurement rule
Network density	D	$2E / [N(N - 1)]$
Actor coordination	C	0.6 × department breadth + 0.4 × joint issuance
Instrument coordination	T	0.6 × primary diversity + 0.4 × sub-instrument coverage
Target integration	I	Both targets = 1; single target = 0.5
Vertical alignment	V	Direct link = 1; same direction = 0.5; unconfirmed = 0
Coordination index	PCI	0.35C + 0.30T + 0.20I + 0.15V

4.0 Findings

4.1 Evolution of policy: from separate domains to integrated governance

From 2016 to 2018 municipal policy concentrated on integrating medical and elderly care services, the elderly care market and facility layout, reflecting a logic of filling gaps; after 2020 childcare became institutionalised, and the plan for infants and toddlers under three brought eight departments into childcare governance. 2023 is the turning point: the implementation plan for elderly care and childcare placed both in one work system with a joint conference, two task forces and joint supervision (Xi'an Municipal People's Government General Office, 2023), after which policy moved beyond institutions towards community-embedded facilities and integrated care. The 2024 basic elderly care plan formed a clear central-provincial-municipal chain (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2023; Shaanxi Provincial People's Government General Office, 2023; Xi'an Municipal People's Government General Office, 2024a), and demand-side instruments increased markedly by 2025–2026.

4.2 Structure of policy instruments

Among the 27 documents, S4 service capacity has the highest coverage (25 documents), followed by E2 fiscal and financial support (20), E1 planning and land (16) and S1 facility supply (14); E3 regulation and standards and E4 organisational coordination cover 12 and 10. By contrast, D2 government purchasing appears in only one document, S3 information technology and S2 human capital supply in 3 and 5, and D1 cash subsidies and D3 pricing and payment in 6 and 7 (Fig. 1). The configuration shows a strong supply-building and institutional-environment orientation, with service capacity, fiscal input, planning, land and facility construction forming the skeleton of the mix; demand-side instruments remain weak, particularly government purchasing (Huang & Sun, 2022; Lu, Zhao, & Bai, 2025; Xie & Guo, 2025).

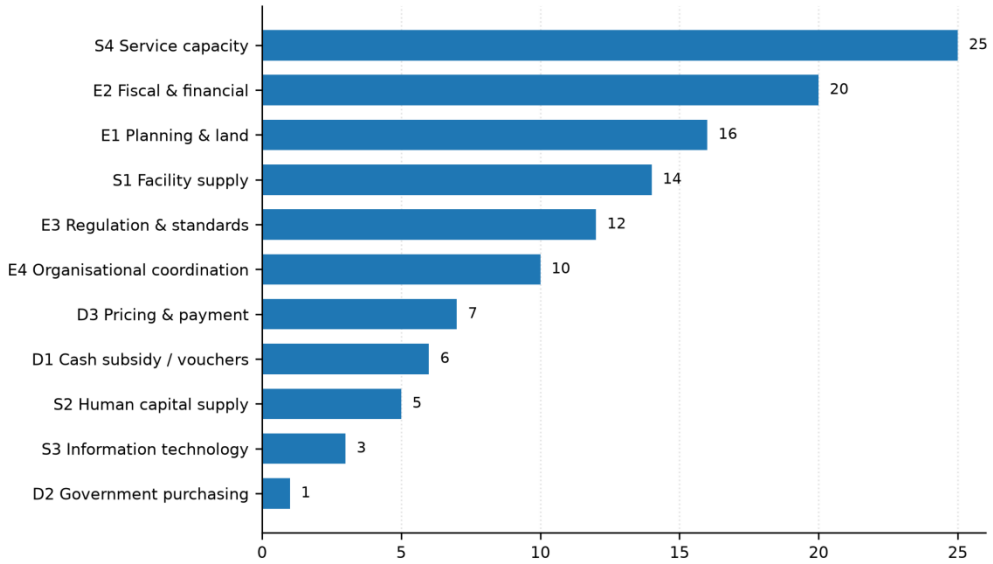


Fig. 1. Coverage frequency of the eleven sub-instruments (N = 27)

Digital and human capital instruments also deserve attention. Although a smart childcare platform was proposed for 2026 (Xi'an Municipal Health Commission, 2026), information technology has not become a foundational instrument running through planning, provision, regulation and evaluation, and workforce policy remains attached to specific tasks rather than forming a career pathway.

4.3 Departmental coordination network

The responsibility network comprises 28 department nodes and 174 ties, a density of 0.460; the joint-issuance network has 20 nodes and 88 ties, density 0.463. The densities are similar but the meanings differ, since joint issuance reflects cooperation at the drafting stage. The civil affairs bureau and the health commission each participated in 21 sampled documents, the finance bureau in 20 and the development-reform commission in 16, with weighted degrees of 120, 108, 112 and 102, forming a multi-core structure (Table 5): civil affairs holds a stable centre in elderly care, facilities and community services; health occupies a professional position in childcare, birth support, integrated care and the health of older adults; development-reform carries planning and project coordination; and finance is embedded in almost all key policies through funding guarantees.

Table 5. Centrality in the responsibility co-occurrence network (top six)

Department	Docs	Degree	Weighted degree	Closeness	Betweenness
Civil affairs	21	26	120	0.964	0.129
Finance	20	25	112	0.931	0.135
Health	21	21	108	0.818	0.067
Development and reform	16	25	102	0.931	0.107

Housing and urban-rural development	11	19	81	0.771	0.024
Natural resources and planning	11	19	80	0.771	0.024

The finance bureau's betweenness centrality (0.135) exceeds those of civil affairs (0.129) and development-reform (0.107), indicating a bridging role across sub-networks: coordination is not only horizontal cooperation among service departments but also a process linking dispersed tasks into an executable mix. The smaller joint-issuance network suggests that part of the coordination remains a hierarchical division of one lead department plus multiple responsible units.

4.4 Composite coordination index

Under the theory-weighted scheme, PCI was 0.631 in 2016 and 0.635 in 2017, fell to 0.496 in 2018 and recovered to 0.612 in 2020. In 2021 several documents remained single-domain and single-department, giving 0.589; in 2022 only one document met the criteria, so 0.433 should be interpreted cautiously. PCI rose to 0.729 in 2023, a stage peak among comparable years, because the integrated plan raised target integration, the joint conference raised actor coordination, and the co-occurrence of planning, facility, fiscal, workforce and regulatory instruments raised instrument diversity (Table 6). In 2024 the sample grew to six documents and PCI remained at 0.655 with mean vertical alignment of 0.917.

Table 6. Annual Policy Coordination Index and robustness checks, 2016–2026

Year	n	C	T	I	V	PCI	CRITIC
2016	1	0.450	0.745	0.500	1.000	0.631	0.686
2017	1	0.600	0.582	0.500	1.000	0.635	0.669
2018	1	0.450	0.545	0.500	0.500	0.496	0.504
2019	0	—	—	—	—	—	—
2020	2	0.525	0.718	0.500	0.750	0.612	0.620
2021	4	0.556	0.586	0.625	0.625	0.589	0.608
2022	1	0.300	0.509	0.500	0.500	0.433	0.477
2023	2	0.600	0.855	0.750	0.750	0.729	0.754
2024	6	0.529	0.664	0.667	0.917	0.655	0.718
2025	4	0.300	0.568	0.625	0.625	0.494	0.572
2026	5	0.335	0.680	0.900	0.500	0.576	0.671

The fall to 0.494 in 2025 reflects composition rather than declining quality, since annual work priorities and the government work report carry low joint-issuance values; in 2026 PCI recovered to 0.576 and target integration reached 0.900, while actor coordination was only 0.335, showing that compound tasks are still carried by different lead departments. Across five weighting schemes (Fig. 2) the 2023–2024 rise is not an artefact of the theoretical weights: CRITIC weighting, which lowers C and raises I and V, still yields 0.754 for 2023 and 0.718 for 2024. Bootstrap intervals for multi-document years remain wide, the 95% interval for 2024 being approximately [0.531, 0.756], so emphasis is placed on stage-level trends rather than fine ranking of adjacent years.

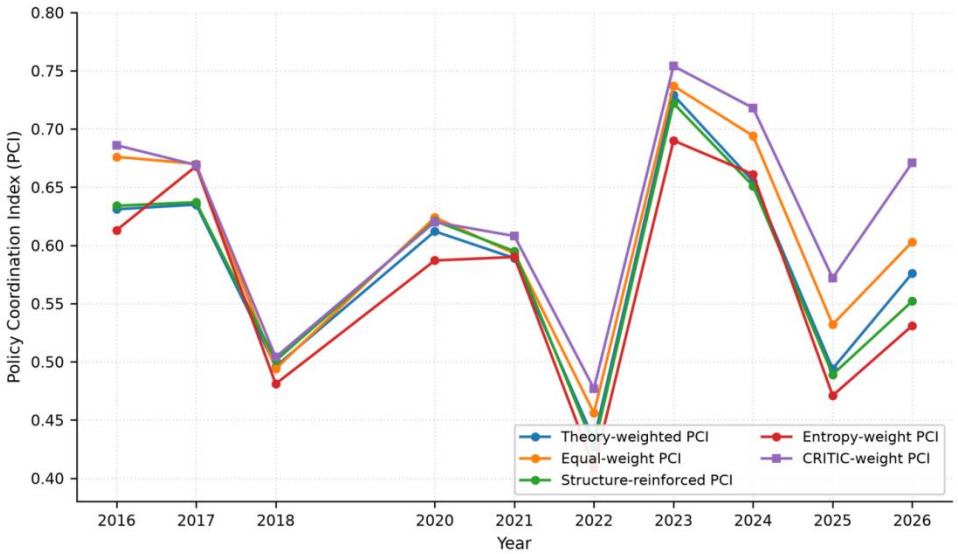


Fig. 2. Annual Policy Coordination Index under five weighting schemes

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Integrated governance with a stable multi-core structure

Integrated governance in Xi'an is not simply writing two sectors into one document, but connecting them through shared settings such as planning, community facilities, fiscal support, health-supported care and digital platforms. By 2026 elderly health, childcare quality, child-rearing subsidies and elderly care consumption subsidies were placed in one livelihood service system (Xi'an Municipal Health Commission, 2026; Xi'an Municipal People's Government, 2026), although professional division persists. The network reveals a stable multi-core structure: civil affairs supplies elderly care operations and grassroots service networks, health supplies childcare and integrated care, development-reform carries planning and project coordination, and finance carries payment support. High centrality means these departments perform many linking functions in policy text, but it does not guarantee effective coordination; if budgeting, data standards, facility planning and evaluation remain separate, co-occurrence may be only formal.

The distinction between participation and joint issuance is important for interpreting this structure. A department may appear in an implementation plan because it is assigned a responsibility, even when it did not participate in preparing the policy. Accordingly, the responsibility network captures the breadth of administrative tasks, whereas the joint-issuance network offers a narrower indication of formal cooperation. Their similar densities should not be interpreted as equivalent organisational relationships. The contrast also explains why a multi-core network can coexist with implementation led by individual departments. Shared plans and budgets are therefore more informative potential tests of substantive coordination than the number of departments named in a document alone.

5.2 A demand side catching up

Over the past decade, Xi'an's policy first addressed whether services existed and who would provide them, hence the heavy use of facilities, service capacity, planning and land, fiscal and regulatory instruments. Since 2025 it has increasingly responded to household affordability, with childcare vouchers, child-rearing subsidies and elderly care consumption subsidies clearly demand-side (Xi'an Municipal Health Commission, 2025; Xi'an Municipal People's Government, 2026). Because accessibility depends not only on facility numbers but on whether households can purchase services, demand-side policy should move from one-off subsidies towards government purchasing, long-term care payment and targeted support for households in difficulty.

The instrument frequencies reinforce this interpretation. Service capacity appears in 25 of the 27 municipal documents, while government purchasing appears in only one. This difference does not establish the effectiveness of either instrument, but it identifies an imbalance in the policy texts. Facilities and service capacity address the availability of provision; subsidies, purchasing and payment arrangements address the conditions under which residents can use that provision. The distinction matters particularly when elderly care and childcare services are located in the same communities but respond to different household needs. The policy mix should therefore be assessed not only by the presence of individual instruments but also by whether supply and demand measures operate together.

5.3 Strong vertical transmission, weak horizontal evaluation

The central-Shaanxi-Xi'an chain is already clear: the national opinions were transmitted through the Shaanxi plan into the municipal plan (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2023; Shaanxi Provincial People's Government General Office, 2023; Xi'an Municipal People's Government General Office, 2024a), and the guidance issued by 17 departments underpins local childcare and family support (National Health Commission and 17 other departments, 2022). Horizontal evaluation remains weak: documents specify responsible departments and target tasks but seldom define shared outcome indicators such as childcare slot utilisation or continuity of care for older adults with disabilities, so coordination tends to remain at the level of task lists.

The annual index requires equally careful interpretation. The 2023 value of 0.729 is the highest reported theory-weighted annual mean, but it is based on two documents. The 2024 mean of 0.655 draws on six documents, while 2019 has no eligible formal municipal document and is appropriately recorded as missing. These differences in annual sample size restrict direct comparisons. Moreover, the index measures properties of policy documents rather than observed service delivery. Its agreement and sensitivity tests strengthen confidence in the coding procedure, but they cannot establish whether residents experienced improved access, affordability or continuity of care. Such outcomes would require complementary administrative and household-level evidence.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the 2016–2026 corpus and the 27 formal municipal documents, this study analysed instruments, departmental networks and a composite coordination index. Xi’an has completed a stage transition from separate domain advancement to an integrated governance framework, formed a network centred on civil affairs, health, development-reform and finance, and is extending from facility and institutional supply towards consumption subsidies, child-rearing support and smart services. Structural weaknesses remain in demand-side, digital and human capital instruments, formal joint issuance and cross-departmental performance evaluation.

Three limitations apply. Some early documents required cross-verification through gazettes, later citations and mirrors, and original archives need continued supplementation. Although double coding supports stability, borderline codebook clauses may still affect a few documents. And PCI remains a text-structure index: utilisation of beds and childcare slots, household burden and resident satisfaction still require independent verification.

Five priorities follow. First, upgrade the joint conference into an annual joint decision-making platform with synchronised agendas for plans, budgets, facility projects and indicators. Second, rebalance the mix towards demand-side and payment instruments: long-term care payment, government purchasing and vouchers for older adults with disabilities, and inclusive pricing, household burden monitoring and stable-operation support for childcare institutions. Third, make community-embedded services the main spatial carrier, incorporating elderly care, childcare, meal assistance and medical care into one facility plan for new residential areas and renewal projects. Fourth, converge smart childcare, elderly care statistics and livelihood subsidy systems on shared base data standards; the municipal statistical monitoring system established in 2025 already covers six departments. Fifth, establish an evaluation loop combining text indicators with bed and childcare slot utilisation, household burden and fiscal performance.

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