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# Abstract

This project explores how protest messages affect audiences' decision to join policy oriented protests in an authoritarian context. By proposing an information model, I argue that citizens' participation is affected by the behaviors of the government and the protesters included in the protest message. Such effects are moderated by (1) the partially free media environment that selectively displays certain behaviors and hides the others; and (2) individuals' personal attributes that influences their interpretation of the messages. I used a survey experiment and a comparative text analysis of social media posts and news articles to test the information model. I found that government concession (responsiveness) can produce positive effects on audiences' participation willingness while protesters' violence generates negative effects. The propaganda media outlets selectively highlight government responsiveness in news about domestic protests so that, counter-intuitively, they become more mobilizing than non-propaganda outlets. Moreover, citizens' high government trust lead them to pay more attention to the government behaviors, while low trust lead them to be more susceptible to protesters' behaviors. Finally, the government repression remains uninfluential at this information level. These findings explain how citizens decide to participate by perceiving the macro socio-political conditions. It also explains the mechanism that protests diffuse at the individual level. Finally, it contributes to our understanding of "the dictator's dilemma" between responsiveness and increasing social demands in autocracies.

**The Power of Protest Messages**  
**An Information Model on Protest Participation in China**

by

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B.A, Renmin University of China, 2010

M.A., University of California at Berkeley, 2012

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

Syracuse University

May 2019

# Dedication

To Sherry Xirui Zhang, who brought me to the snow city and changed my life

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# Acknowledgements

The pursue of Ph.D is a long journey in which I cannot survive with the support from many people. First of all, I feel blessed to study in Syracuse from a group of talented, enthusiastic and decent faculty members. I would love to thank my chair, Brian Taylor, who has showed me what a great mentor and a respectful scholar should be since the first semester when I was his TA, or even the first meeting I had with him. His deep understanding of the literature and sharp analytical mind always provide me constructive and encouraging suggestions to get through the obstacles that I could have never imagined to overcome. I am so lucky to have Dimitar Gueorguiev in the department, as an advisor, a co-author, and a good friend. He holds my hand to get through the dark time as a noob in academia, pushes me to conduct researches and looks for my own research agenda, and warns me every trap that I step in. Without him, I can never be this confident as an independent scholar for my future career. Similarly, I have learned so much from Matt Cleary in his class. He can always provide great suggestions and teach me how to keep a critical mind on the research. He is the one who let me realize that as a researcher, our mission can never be done because of the limitation researches have. I so regret that I have not got a chance to take Shana Gardarian's class, while I am so grateful that she is happy to be in my committee. Her expertise on political communication shapes my research interests in my future career. I met Rongbin Han in Berkeley eight years ago, when he was still a five-year Ph.D student and I was a scary master who is really not certain about joining the academic world. He has always been an encouraging mentor since then. Thanks to Norman Kutcher to host my defense. I feel so honored to have these professors in my committee.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In October 2012, in the Southeast harbor city Ningbo, Zhejiang, citizens gathered in front of the local government building. They were opposing the local government's project to expand the petrochemical industry.<sup>1</sup> The concerns about this project were ignited by the rumors that a new para-xylene factory, or PX factory, would be built in the industrial zone. A Ningbo citizen explained why he participated: "Dalian and Xiamen have done this (to oppose PX). If we don't do it, we will lose face badly."<sup>2</sup>

Extracted from petroleum, para-xylene is an essential type of chemical to produce plastic products. Since mid-2000, the demand for para-xylene in China and in the global market skyrocketed with the rapid expansion of its manufacture. The attractive profits of para-xylene provide incentives to many Chinese local officials to initiate the PX factory projects in their cities. However, the Chinese public is not a fan of these projects. Citizens

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.voachinese.com/a/ningbo-riot-20121027/1534498.html>, access 02-04-2019

<sup>2</sup>Dalian and Xiamen are two metropolitan cities at east coast of China. Both are one of the most developed cities in their own provinces(Liaoning and Fujian). Source: <http://bit.ly/2WFEXoS>, access 02-04-2019

Figure 1: Ningbo residents opposed the PX factory in 2012



Source: <http://bit.ly/2REO71p>; the copyright belongs to the Apple Daily

in Xiamen became the first group to oppose such a project. In 2007, they launched the most famous(perhaps the first) “stroll-taking” activity to peacefully demonstrate in the city and express their opposition to the PX project. Their efforts were not wasted. The local government decided to move the project further away from Xiamen.<sup>3</sup> After that, citizens in multiple cities organized sizable protests against the PX factories, including Dalian in 2011 and Ningbo in 2012.

Nevertheless, it is not the event that inspires my interests in this project, but the very quote from the Ningbo citizen. It suggests that, at least for him, the opposition to the PX project was not isolated from the past events. His decision to participate was not the sole consequence of the Ningbo project. He learned about what had happened in the past, and that experience affected his behavior in his own city.

<sup>3</sup>Source: <http://bit.ly/2RF5mJU>, <http://bit.ly/2WGTukj> access 02-04-2019

What the Ningbo citizen said reflects two questions that interest scholars of contentious politics: 1) why do people decide to participate in a protest? And 2) why are protests destabilizing — How can protests diffuse? Previous literature has provided multiple answers for these two issues, while many unknown issues remain.

For the protest participation, explanations focus on features of individuals (Klandermans 1984; Olson 1965; Opp et al. 1989; Sturmer and Simon 2004) and macro structural conditions (Girod et al. 2018; Lapegna 2013; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Meyer 2004; Tsai and Xu 2017). However, how do these two processes connect? How are they aware of the conditions that facilitate or impair their chance of participation? How do they make decisions?

For the protest diffusion, studies focus on the tactics, culture, process, network, organization leadership and media (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Ayres 1999; Gerbaudo 2013; Kern 2011; Myers 2000; Zhang 2015). However, what is the mechanism of diffusion through individual citizens? When the news of protest reaches a broader range of audiences, how do the audiences interpret the knowledge of previous protests and adapt it to their own participation decisions?

This dissertation tries to address these questions by proposing the information model. The core assumption of the model is that people make their decisions by referring to the information they can obtain. Therefore, their final behavioral outcomes are determined by what kind of information they receive, what effects the information has on their willingness, and how they interpret the information.

In other words, the individual mechanism of protest participation and protest diffusion is

essentially a inquiry of political communication — the influence of political information on individuals' political attitude and behaviors. As the quote of the Ningbo citizen suggests, among all kinds of political information, one outstanding type is the information about protest — how protests happen in the past, what the protesters did and how the government reacted. Therefore, in this dissertation, the core question I plan to answer is: how do the protest messages affect audiences' prospective protest participation?

I tested the information model by three analyses, which construct Chapter 3 to Chapter 5 in this dissertation. First, by using news data and survey data, I find that the different preference of media selectively shapes the content of protest messages and audiences' perception as well. Second, by a survey experiment on Chinese Internet users, I explore how the behaviors of the government and the protesters in the protest messages change audiences' participation. I find that government responsiveness has a major positive effects, while repression has no effects. Protesters' violence discourages audiences' participation, but the standalone message of protesters' participation has no significant effects. Third, by further analyzing the data from the survey experiment, I find that political trust can moderate the effects of protest messages, while the interests to read about protest-related news cannot. My core survey experiment data comes from Collective Action Perception Survey of China, an online survey I conducted during December 2017 and January 2019. This unique data source allows me to conduct flexible studies unique for this project.

These findings generate a few important theoretical implications. First, I propose that, when explaining protest participation, a process of political communication should be regarded as the link(or mechanism) between macro social conditions and individual



behavior. Information such as news report and social media messages help audiences to understand the socio-political environment and the likelihood that their future participation can change an undesirable policy. Citizens make their decision to participate by referring to such likelihood. Second, the information model suggests that the media environment can shape how citizens obtain and perceive the social environment, and thus affect their participation. The information environment should become an important condition for analysis in future studies of protest participation. Third, by investigating the effects of protest messages onto individuals, this dissertation also contributes to our understanding of protest diffusion at individual level: how protests become epidemic and which element of protest messages is most stimulative. It supplements the relevant researches which focus on the tactics, culture, process, network, organization leadership and media.(Andrews and Biggs 2006; Ayres 1999; Gerbaudo 2013; Kern 2011; Myers 2000; Zhang 2015). Finally, the normative implication of this study is, again, on the role of media environment for citizenry actions. In the authoritarian context, collecting accurate information for political decisions is costly for citizens. The same applies to democracies, in which media polarization and misinformation becomes increasingly salient (Linden et al. 2017; Prior 2013; Southwell and Thorson 2015). The era of information explosion somehow elevates(or at least does not lower) the bar for citizens to collect accurate political information for appropriate decisions. The adaption to such heterogeneous media environment would become a similar challenge for citizens in both autocracies and democracies. This dissertation is a part of the effort to understand the effects of political information and heterogeneous media environment to determine citizens' behaviors.

The major empirical works I conducted are from China. China stands out as a good case to study the effects of protest messages. China witnesses large number of protest each year (Gobel 2017; Tong and Lei 2013). It also has a vibrant media system and Internet access that enable various types of news media sources while the political control is also strict. These conditions create a heterogeneous media environment about domestic protests and how citizens in authoritarian regimes react to them. I discuss to what extent the findings can travel in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, I regard this dissertation as the beginning rather than the end of studying the effects of protest messages. In the concluding part of this dissertation, I point out several possible future directions for this project.

# Chapter 2

## Disentangling the Effects of Protest messages

### Abstract

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework on the effects of protest messages. The literature on contentious politics has provided multiple explanations for protest participation. However, it pays less attention to the the juncture between the macro- and micro-mechanisms – how individuals make their decision to participate–by referring to broader social environments. This chapter proposes an information model that explains protest participation in terms of the influence of previous protest messages. Then it discusses the limitations of the currently available random sample survey data. Fianlly, it also introduces a new research design that can properly test the validity of the model.

In examining how people decide to participate in a protest, the literature has proposed multiple explanations for the rise of protests and social movements. Various institutional

settings, economic conditions, social tensions and protest tactics are believed to contribute to the rise and fall of political contention. In other words, changing external social conditions alter people's perceptions and thus alter the probability of participation. Past studies tended to focus on the social or "macro" level — for example, how structural social conditions encourage the rise of social movements. Yet few studies have discussed the influence of macro conditions on the micro level of individual citizens — how they perceive and make use of the conditions and translate their knowledge into political action.

This chapter proposes an information model that describes the micro mechanism through which structural conditions affect individual citizens. It emphasizes the importance of information, specifically the protest messages. In this dissertation, protest messages are defined as messages that describe the protest events in the past. They can be delivered in a variety of media forms through mass media, social media, or interpersonal communication. Protest messages are the window for citizens to observe the socio-political opportunities and constraints for political decisions. The shaping of protest messages can be translated into citizens' participation outcomes. The information model suggests that citizenry participation in protest will be determined by how the media shape protest messages, which elements of protest messages are mobilizing and how the audience interprets the messages. This chapter has three goals. First, it reviews the past literature and shows why the information model is necessary. Second, it describes the basic assumptions and setup of the information model. Third, it shows that the current survey data has shortcomings in testing the information model and proposes a two-step research design.

## 2.1 Literature on Protest Participation

The conventional explanations of protest participation can be generalized into two schools. The first school uses macro structural conditions to explain the emergence of contentious activities on a macro scale, or the “macro-macro” school. The second school, “micro-macro” school, explains the emergence of macro collective action events by individual calculation or perception. The classic models, however, have paid little attention to the process that translates macro conditions into people’ perception and behaviors, i.e. the “macro-micro” process.

The macro-macro perspective of contentious politics literature argues that macro structural factors avail or obstruct the emergence of collective action. For example, the resource mobilization theory argues that resources that potential activists can access determine whether a movement will grow. Protests or social movements rely on the resources that activists have, such as the social movement organizations, bystanders, media involvement and the help from authorities (McCarthy and Zald 1977) . Another school believes the political opportunity structure, such as institutional arrangements and historical precedents, creates incentives for activists to develop collective actions (Almeida 2003; Chen 2012; Kitschelt 1986; Meyer 2004).

The macro-macro perspective explains personal participation by following a certain procedure: first, the structural conditions change; then, people perceive the structural changes; people’s incentives change; people revise their decision to participation; and finally, individuals’ participation converges into collective actions.<sup>4</sup> This process, however,

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<sup>4</sup>For example, Tarrow (2011, p. 33) argues that citizens need to “perceive opportunities that lower the

does not theorize how structural opportunities are perceived. In other words, macro-macro perspective assumes that people are able to acquire knowledge of structural conditions and interpret them precisely for future action. When the society reaches a sufficient level of awareness of structural opportunities, collective contention emerges.

However, people are not always aware of their structural conditions nor can they always perceive structural conditions in an accurate way. Studies have found that people's understanding of the world is strongly affected by their ideology, partisanship, racial discrimination, education level, etc (Druckman et al. 2013; Geddes and Zaller 1989; Gilens 2009; Truex 2014; Zaller 1992). If the macro-macro perspective fails to consider the perception of structural conditions, it also fails to explain the individual variations in participation, such as anomalies in participatory patterns that apparently go against the current structural opportunities.

Micro perspective focuses on the association between participation and personal attributes and calculation. The rational choice school assumes that people will calculate costs and benefits and will participate when the benefits exceed costs. The costs and benefits could be determined by the group size of collective action or the social network structure, etc (Esteban and Ray 2001; Fireman and Gamson 1977; Granovetter 1978; Oliver and Marwell 1988; Opp et al. 1989). Empirical studies have also proved the existence of such calculations in surveys (Sturmer and Simon 2004; Stürmer and Simon 2009).

Other scholars believe political attitudes and social psychological factors are sources of rational calculation. One example of political attitudes is political trust. Muller (1979)

---

costs of collective action, reveal potential allies, show where elites and authorities are most vulnerable, and trigger social networks and collective identities into action around common themes.”

finds that normative belief is a determinant for aggressive participation. Hooghe and Marien (2013) find that political trust is positively associated with institutionalized participation (such as working in a political party or contacting the government) and negatively associated with non-institutionalized participation (such as boycotting products, signing petition, or participating in demonstrations). Braun and Hutter (2014) studied 22 European democracies and found that citizens who distrust representative institutions are indeed more likely to engage in extra-representational participation. The evidence in China is more mixed. Zhong and Hwang (2015) argues that environmental protests are caused by low political trust, while Tang (2016) argues that protesters usually trust the central government. Similar to rational calculation, political attitude is an important explanation, but may only partially explain people's motivation.

For social psychological factors, van Zomeren et al. (2008) try to organize the three major traditions of social psychological explanations on political participation, the perceived injustice, perceived efficacy and social identity theories. Perceived injustice, means the subjective experience of grievance and dissatisfaction generated by the given policy. A typical theory that explains the effect of perceived injustice on political participation is the relative deprivation theory (RDT) (Stouffer et al. 1949; Walker and Smith 2002). People go to protest because they want to oppose an unfavorable policy, have a better economic condition or ask for democracy (Opp 1988, 2000; Shafiq et al. 2014). Perceived efficacy means the expectation of probability that participation (protest) could achieve its goal. Klandermans (1984) argues that people's willingness to participate is a function of perceived costs and benefits. People consider the behaviors of their fellow citizens and the

government before deciding whether to participate (Hornsey et al. 2006; Mummendey et al. 1999; Verba and Nie 1987; Zimmerman 1989). This argument is consistent with the rational choice model argument but pays more attention to empirically measuring the calculations with survey data. Social identity theory(SIT) argues that participation is driven by people's desire to maintain self-esteem. Their self-esteem is determined by a positive social identity, which is based to “ a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups.” (Tajfel and Turner 1979). If they find their social identity unsatisfactory, they will try to either leave their group or act to improve their group. Empirical studies show that identity could encourage participation and empowerment from participation (Drury and Reicher 2005; Stürmer and Kampmeier 2003; Stürmer and Simon 2004).

The micro-macro approach addresses how individual decisions can turn into collective actions, while the empirical tests usually focus on how attitudinal variables or social psychological variables affect the behavioral variables. Some authors advocate that micro-macro theories can be combined with macro-macro approaches to explain the emergence of contentious politics.(Opp 2009, 31-32, and 351-353). However, the micro-macro approach shares the same issue as the macro-macro school – it does little to theorize how the structural conditions may translate into personal incentives. For example, when Opp (2009, pp. 353-354) attempted to bring together the advantages of macro-macro and micro-macro approaches, he assumed that macro factors can directly affect people's cognition with no discussion. However, due to imperfect information environments, citizens' cognition of macro factors can be fragmented when they are exposed to different



information sources and read different contents.

## 2.2 The Consequences of Seeing a Protest

In summary, the literature on contentious politics does little to theorize how macro social conditions can be translated into individual decisions. This dissertation proposes that individual citizens perceive social conditions via exposure to information — such as reading the news, watching TV, surfing the web, and talking to their friends. Particularly, they understand the efficacy of protest participation would be by observing the process and outcome of previous protests.

The conventional wisdom believes that protests are epidemic, especially in the context of authoritarian regime. Przeworski et al. (2000, p. 211) argue that “strikes, anti-government demonstrations, and riots occur more often in democracies, but they retard growth only in dictatorships.” Seeing a protest can encourage audiences to participate in more protests. Kuran (1991) argues that protests reveal the previously falsified political preference of fellow citizens so that citizens are more confident to go to a protest. Lohmann (1994) argues that in East Germany, the Leipzig Monday demonstration generated an “informational cascade” that finally brought about democratic movement and the rise of reformist. Literature on political censorship also suggests that the autocracies fear protests and the factors that may encourage protest (King et al. 2013, 2014; Lorentzen 2014). The underlying logic also assumes that “the government fears protests because protests will promote more protests.”

While the ability of protests to diffuse is certain, while the diffusion mechanism is not clear. First, protest diffusion relies on information communication. However, as previous studies point out, the autocrats tend to censor the communication of protest information (King et al. 2013, 2014; Shao 2018). Therefore, when a domestic protest occurs, audiences cannot obtain complete knowledge of the event. Second, a protest event includes multiple factors that may prompt contradictory effects on protest participation. For example, a protest can reveal fellow citizens' previously-falsified preference, while it may also contain the messages of government repression. And repression messages will deter further protest participation (Kricheli et al. 2011; Kuran 1997; Tilly 1978). Therefore, the dissemination of protest messages may not naturally lead to protest diffusion. Finally, personal interpretations of the same message can vary. Thus, protest messages may fail to mobilize certain groups of audiences.

Based on the current literature, this dissertation aims to study how variation in protest messages and variation in communication can generate different behavioral outcome. Specifically, it answers three questions about policy-oriented protests in authoritarian setting:

1. In an authoritarian setting, how do media outlets shape protest messages in different ways?
2. After being shaped by the media outlets, how do protest messages affect people's protest participation?
3. How do people's personal attributes moderate the effects of protest messages?

The next section briefly introduces the theoretical model to understand the functions of protest messages. I discuss the specific theories and hypotheses in Chapter 3 to Chapter 5.

## 2.3 The Information Model

The information model argues that protest messages can generate an effect on audience' participation willingness. This process is also the mechanism of protest diffusion at the individual level. In this dissertation, the information model only discusses the effects of policy-oriented protest messages, defined as protests that aim to change a policy decision or status quo. The opposite type is politics-oriented protests in which protesters challenge politicians' power or fundamental institutions. Although a policy-oriented protest can escalate into a politics-oriented one, this project focuses on the former type for two reasons. First, policy-oriented protests are the most common form of protests in an authoritarian regime (Han 2018; Robertson 2011; Tong and Lei 2013). As Robertson (2011, p. 62) discusses, protests in Russia were "very numerous but mostly isolated, mainly local in nature, and focused on very basic, bread-and-butter issues." Tong and Lei (2013, pp. 54-57) calculate that the majority of social protests in China are based on policy-oriented issues. Han (2018, p. 155) argues that Chinese citizens "do not directly question the Party-state's right to rule. They instead contest how the state and its agents exercise power in specific cases and seek immediate remedies to their grievances." Second, politics-oriented protests and relevant information can rarely spread out in authoritarian regimes, especially in ones with sophisticated censorship systems. The

regimes are more concerned with protests that challenge their fundamental legitimacy. If the protests focus only on policy issues, the censors have less incentives to censor them since the regime can win popular support by actively responding to the protests (Shao 2018). In other words, the majority of domestic protest messages available in the media environment of autocracies are policy-oriented.

In policy-oriented protests, the grievances are narrow and specific to living conditions so that they do not easily arouse sympathy across different social groups or different locations. In addition, when protesters only target policy issues, they may choose to ask for help from the autocrats, which can be less costly than joining a revolution. Therefore, how the autocrats act may also affect people's choice whether to participate.

This information model assumes that individual audiences are rational actors. Citizens have a preference for government policy decisions or the status quo. When they dislike a policy, they rationally assess how likely it can be changed by joining a protest. Such an assessment relies on their perception of the government and the society, which comes from protest messages, i.e. information about past domestic protest. In other words, protest messages provide knowledge for citizens to understand the benefits and risks of their own protest participation. Citizens make the decision to participate or no after they assess the protest messages they have obtained.

Audiences are rational, but their rationality is bounded. Protest messages contain abundant information about the protest events. The question arises as to the types of information within a protest message that are most efficient in influencing audiences?

What do audiences pay attention to so that they can decide whether to participate? The

information model assumes two main categories of information — the protesters' behavior and the government's behavior in the protest.

In policy-oriented protests, participants' behaviors are useful information because they reflect the mobilizing resources available in the society. Scholars believe political contention can be determined by the resources citizens can mobilize (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Based on this argument, the information model argues that citizens need to be aware that enough resources are accessible. As Kuran (1991) suggests, witnessing a protest may indicate the social support for citizenry objections. Citizens form their perception of available mobilizing resources by observing the protesters in the previous protests. This dissertation examines two types of protester's behavior: their *participation* and *violence*.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, the government's behavior suggests the available political opportunities for protesters. Political opportunities are also considered as a factor affecting participation in political contention (Meyer 2004). Previous research shows that institutional channels are important opportunities both in democracies and authoritarian regimes (Almeida 2003; Chen 2012; Kitschelt 1986). However, an institutional opening is not self-evident to citizens. An authoritarian government's tolerance of citizen participation is not clearly defined (Stern and Hassid 2012; Stern and O'Brien 2012). To citizens, one useful way to detect political opportunities is to observe how the government behave in the protest messages. In this dissertation, I particularly focus on three types of government behavior: their *responsiveness*(*concessions to protesters*), *violent repression*, and *legal repression*.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, the information model of protest participation assumes citizens as rational

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<sup>5</sup>For detailed discussion, please see Chapter 4

<sup>6</sup>For detailed discussion, please see Chapter 4

actors who process protest messages and then determine their participation based on these messages. At a protest event, the most important elements are the behaviors of the government and the protesters. Based on these assumptions, I propose three factors that may determine how a protest event can influence an individual's decision to participate.

First, protest messages are not homogeneous across the society. A regime's information control creates a media environment that is only partially free. Media outlets have biases in reporting protest events due to their different political backgrounds. Consequently, the audiences of different media outlets are likely to receive partial information on protests that describe the government and the protesters in distinct patterns. The same protest event will generate different effects on audiences' participation. Therefore, it is necessary to study how media outlets shape the protest messages in autocracies.

Second, in a protest event, the government and protesters usually have multiple behaviors, which may generate controversial effects on audiences. For example, the government can generally make concessions to protesters' requests, while at the same time arrest protesters. Therefore, rather than understand the general effect of one event, it is necessary to study the effects of major behaviors of the government and the protesters.

Finally, even with the same protest message, individuals' background may affect their interpretation. With a protest message, people may pay various levels of attention to certain factors. Their capability for understanding can also be diverse. Their assessment of the credibility of a message may also be affected by their own beliefs. Therefore, it is necessary to study the heterogeneous effects of protest messages generated by individuals' backgrounds.

In the next section, I discuss the limitations of current survey data on studying the effects of protest messages on individuals. Then, I propose a two-step research design to test the information model. The empirical chapters provide detailed hypotheses, and use novel data I collected to test the three factors that can affect audiences protest participation.

## **2.4 Assessing the Effects of Protest Messages**

Conventionally, survey data are an important empirical source for systematic assessment of protest participation. For example, Zhong and Hwang (2015) and Tang (2016) used survey data to study how political trust affects people's protest participation. However, the available large-scale surveys do not address people's exposure to protest messages. In the authoritarian context, face-to-face survey questions are also constrained by political censorship on academia. For example, it is politically too sensitive to ask respondents whether and how frequently they have witnessed government repression on protesters. In addition, survey data may also suffer from endogenous issues. These issues give rise to three consequences. First, the relation between media usage (or protest exposure) and respondents' political participation is mixed. Second, questions about the effects of protest messages may remain unanswered. Third, the causal direction is unclear.

In this section, I will present my findings from China General Social Survey(CGSS) 2010 and supplementary analysis of Asian Barometer Third Wave, China(ABS3). Then, I will discuss their weakness on answering the research question of this dissertation.

The CGSS is a nationwide representative survey conducted by Renmin University of

China. With more than 11,000 respondents, the 2010 survey contains a section of political questions, including political trust and political participation. The survey did not ask about protest messages. I used two sets of questions to measure respondents' likelihood of exposure to protest news. The first one is their protest exposure. The question asked respondents whether they have witnessed a protest in their daily life. The answers were binary — "yes" was coded as 1 and "no" coded as 0.

In addition, Chinese newspapers are all state-owned media, but private sectors own a large portion of online media. Although the government tends to control protest messages, it is still reasonable to believe audiences may have a higher probability of reading about domestic protests online compared to newspaper readers. Therefore, I also used their consumption of newspaper and Internet as the proxies to measure the likelihood of protest message exposure. Respondents were asked, "In the past one year, did you read books/newspapers/magazines in leisure time?" and "Did you surf the Internet in leisure time?" The answer was designed as a five-point Likert scale with a larger number for the more frequently they used the respective media.

Respondents' participation, I used variables listed in Table 1, all of which are binary variables in the CGSS2010 data. Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of the survey data. Among the dependent variables, I particularly care about three variables, Petition, Co-Letter and Protest since they indicate self-organized collective actions outside of the state's institutional channel.

I used two methods to estimate the effects of protest exposure on respondents' political participation. First, since protest exposure is a binary variable, I treat it as a "treatment"



Table 1: Participation in CGSS 2010

Variable Name	Question Wording
Voting	Vote for Residential(Village) Committee (local government branch)
Help Community	Work for Residential(Village) Committee
Suggest to Community	Provide a suggestion to Residential(Village) Committee
Petition	Make a petition(Shangfang)
Co-Letter	Write a joint petition letter
Report to Media	Report local issues to news media
Report to Gov.	Report local issues to the government
Protest	Participate in protests and petition

for respondents. I used nearest-neighbor matching to test whether they can increase respondents' participation. The plot of treatment effects is shown in Figure 2. The results show that exposure to collective action is indeed positively associated with protest participation.<sup>7</sup> In fact, exposure to collective action is only negatively associated with voting for the local government branch, while it seems to encourage other forms of political participation.

I also conducted regression analysis. The independent variables I used are exposure to protest, frequency of reading newspapers, and frequency of Internet use. Since all participation variables are binary, I used Logit analysis for estimates. I included a collection of control variables: their gender, age, education, religion, income, Communist Party membership, level of depression, level of health, political trust of the center and local governments, and whether they have experienced government mistreatment.

The coefficient plots of three independent variables are depicted on Figure 3. Each column stands for one independent variable and each row stands for dependent variables of political participation. The control variables are omitted. For exposure to protest, the

<sup>7</sup>Based on the results of three variables: Petition, Co-Letter and Protest

Figure 2: The treatment effects of protest exposure on participation (Near-neighbor matching)

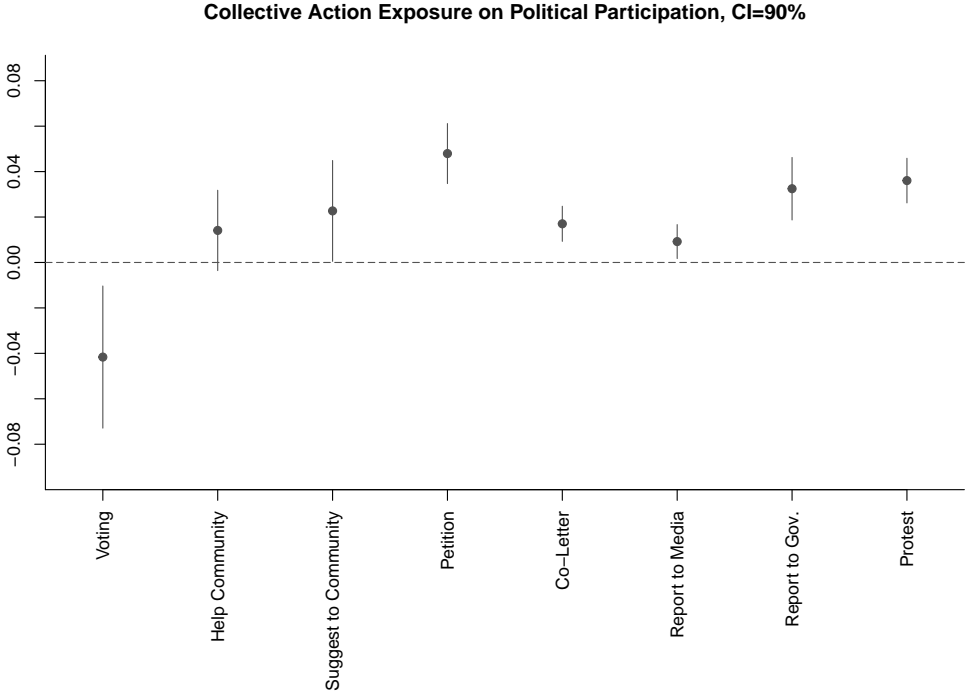
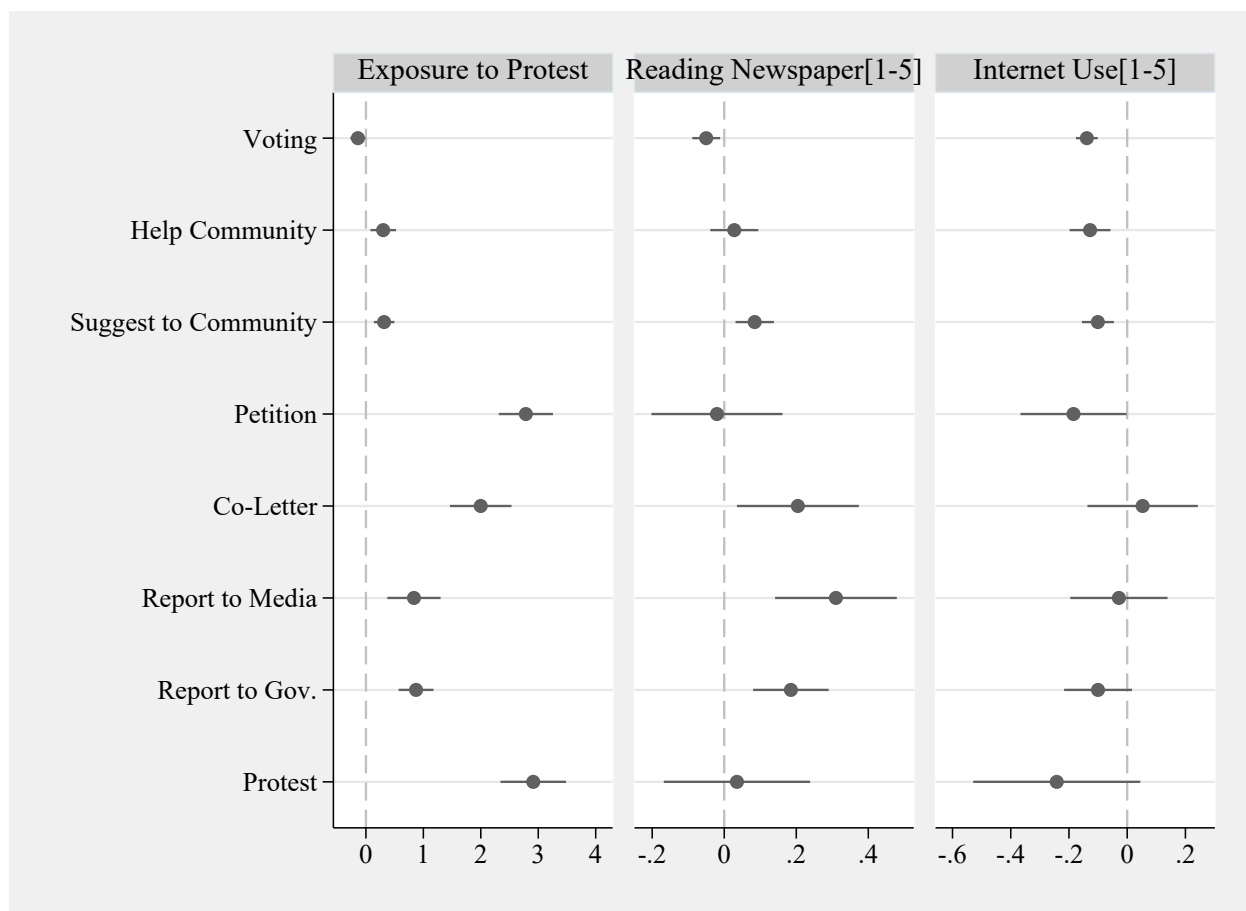


Figure 3: Coefficient plots of protest exposure on participation (Logit Regression)



effects estimated by regression are similar to those estimated by matching — negatively associated with voting and positively associated with other types of participation. In contrast, the effects of media exposure are mixed. Reading newspaper does not have an effect on petition and protest, while writing joint letters, reporting to media and government, and helping the local government branch to serve the community. Similar to protest exposure, reading newspapers also has a negative effects on voting. OHowever, Internet consumption generally has negative effects on most types of participation.

In order to examine the robustness of the effects of media usage onto political participation, I also analyzed the data from Asian Barometer (Third Wave), or ABS3. In ABS3, Chinese

respondents answered whether they participated in each of the three activities below:

1. Got together with others to try to resolve local problems [Get Together]
2. Got together with others to raise an issue or sign a petition [Petition]
3. Attended a demonstration or protest march [Protest]

These variables were scored on a three-point scale(Never, Once, More than once) which I recoded into binary. Since more than 90% of respondents answered “Never” in these three questions, I coded “Never” as 0 and combined the remaining two options as 1. Unlike CGSS2010, ABS3 only asked the respondents the length of Internet use (on a four-point scale). Hence, I analyzed the relation between Internet use and participation tendency. I also added control variables such as their interests to politics, interests in political news, frequency of discussing politics, political trust, confidence in the political system and its level of democracy and demographic are added. Then, a rare-event logistic estimator was used, since very few respondents said they participated in activities provided(King and Zeng 2001). The results are summarized on Table 2.

Table 2: Effects of Internet consumption on protest in ABS3

	Get Together		Petition		Protest	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Internet Consumption	0.113*** (0.023)	0.009 (0.037)	0.171*** (0.033)	0.098* (0.054)	0.128*** (0.043)	0.006 (0.074)
Control Variables	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	-2.161*** (0.080)	-2.069*** (0.438)	-3.400*** (0.129)	-5.273*** (0.817)	-3.772*** (0.156)	-2.914*** (0.768)
Observations	3411	1790	3409	1792	3402	1789

\* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

In contrast to the CGSS2010 results, Internet consumption is positively associated with protest participation and related forms of collective actions. The effects of Internet consumption disappear when control variables are added. This suggests that Internet consumption may actually capture the effects of variables like the interests in politics. In other words, we cannot conclude that high Internet consumption encourages protest participation because both of these variables can be driven by their interests in politics. In other words, from these results, we still cannot assess the effects of protest messages.

In summary, the analysis of observational data shows that exposure to protest seems to encourage both protest participation and other forms of participation that can benefit the local community, according to the analysis in CGSS2010. Its negative effects on voting are reasonable because a local election cannot create a substantial change in policies or hold local bureaucrats accountable.<sup>8</sup> However, this result has many weaknesses in determining the mobilizing effects of protest messages.

First, these results are not supported by the evidence of media exposure. Since people are more likely to read about protests on Internet, the frequency of Internet use should be positively associated with participation. The analysis in CGSS2010 shows weakly negative association. The analysis in ABS3 supports this argument in a bivariate analysis, while the effects of Internet consumption disappear when other control variables are added.

Second, the causal direction between protest exposure and participation is unclear. People who are exposed to protest may be those who care about protests. The interests in politics drive these citizens to learn about (be exposed to) protest events and encourage them to

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<sup>8</sup>For example, see the article from Washington Post about local election in China. source: <https://wapo.st/2UpcFx9>, access 01-29-2019

participate. In addition to the bias of a third variable, the causal link may also be reversed. Those exposed to protest events were actually protest participants themselves. The effects of protest messages per se still remain unknown.

Third, measurement errors of survey data can further bias the results. The representative surveys were mainly conducted face-to-face. Respondents may be reluctant to admit that they participated in protests due to the concerns of punishment. In the analysis of survey data, there is little room to reduce such bias.

Finally, even if the results were valid, we still do not know which element of a protest event encourages participation: protesters' enthusiasm, non-repressive police, or a responsive government? The kinds of messages audiences read or experience in their daily life are still unknown. Without detailed questions on protest messages interpretation, the current observational data cannot provide satisfactory answers to our inquiry on effects of protest messages.

### **2.4.1 The Research Design and the Chapter Introduction**

Given the weaknesses of the current observational data, this dissertation provides a novel design and collects new data to study the effects of protest messages on audience participation. First, I break down the question "How do protest messages affect participation?" to three sub-questions, each of which answers one aspect of the information model:

1. In an authoritarian context, how are protest messages shaped in the media

environment? Which behaviors of the government and protesters do the media report?

2. How can each of the behaviors of the government and protesters affect audiences' willingness to participate?
3. How does the interpretation vary among audiences with different backgrounds?

To address these three questions, I propose a two-step research design. The first step, I examined how different types of media shape protest messages, and more specifically, what types of government and protester behaviors. I collected the texts of Chinese domestic protests from both professional media and social media and then compare their differences by automated content analysis. The detailed results are discussed in Chapter 3.

The second step, I addressed the effects of government and the protesters behaviors on audiences' participation willingness. To avoid the problems of observational data, I conducted a survey experiment on Chinese Internet, the China Collective Action Perception Survey. The detailed results are discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, I maximize the utility of this survey experiment by analyzing how social backgrounds moderate audiences' interpretation of protests and the effects on participation. The findings are presented in Chapter 5.

In the final chapter, I provide a conclusion by summarizing the findings of the three empirical chapters. I discuss how my findings can contribute to the current studies of contentious politics and political participation in China and to the authoritarian context and several directions that I can continue to pursue on this project.

## Chapter 3

# The Selective Exposure of Protests in Chinese Media

### Abstract

This chapter investigates how protests are depicted on different media channels. I argue that the non-propaganda channel, e.g. social media, are more likely to depict government repression and less likely to report government responsiveness in China, compared to propaganda outlets that are pre-censored by the government. I conducted an automated content analysis that compared social media posts collected by volunteers and articles from professional media that discussed domestic protests in China. The analysis shows that social media depict police as more violent and professional media are more likely to report on issues that are easier to solve. Survey evidence shows that the more Chinese respondents read protest news from professional media, the more responsive and less repressive they perceived the government. The results provide systematic evidence showing how Chinese media depict domestic protests and shape



the people's perceptions of and behavior toward those protests.

### 3.1 Introduction

In May 2017, residents of Qingyuan city in Guangdong, China gathered around the city's government hall to protest against a waste incinerator power plant project. According to *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), over 10,000 people participated in the protest, demonstrating along more than ten kilometers of a local turnpike. RFA noted that no government officials had come to talk to participants, and that police had arrested hundreds of peaceful protesters.<sup>9</sup> On the Chinese news website Netease, the story was totally different. The government claimed that about 400 protesters participated in the gathering. While the protesters demonstrated, pedestrians passing by watched. The police made no arrests, only “forcefully taking out disruptive participants to maintain public order.” It also spent three paragraphs noting that the government had invited residents to discuss the project, and explaining why the project was necessary for the city. The end of the article noted that the government “sincerely welcome the society to provide suggestions.”<sup>10</sup>

Dictators like to depict themselves as popular, and they claim to care about the basic bread and butter issues of citizens. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has “to serve the people” at the center of its mission. A massive propaganda campaign operate restlessly to convince people that the Party's leadership acts in their best interests (Brady 2008; Shambaugh 2007; Stockmann 2013). Moreover, the leaders of authoritarian regimes are in

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<sup>9</sup>Source: <http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/huanjing/m12-05092017104009.html>, access 05-09-2017

<sup>10</sup>Source: <http://news.163.com/17/0509/13/CK0G2S5I0001875N.html>, access 05-09-2017

need of information for their survival. For example, Magaloni and Kricheli (2010, p. 128) have summarized that the Communist system relies on Party organizations to collect information about citizen loyalties. Dictators use institutions of democracies to collect information from the society and demonstrate their power (Brancati 2014; Magaloni 2006). Other than elections, collective actions can also provide valuable information to them, including how much support the government has, and how well local officials perform (Cai 2004; Lorentzen 2017).

However, the Internet, especially social media, seems to effectively resist the information monopoly of autocracies. (Diamond 2010; Xiao 2011; Yang 2009) Autocrats are cautious to let people know about domestic protests (King et al. 2013, 2014; Shao 2018). The underlying implication is that protest messages are dangerous to regime survival.

Protest coverage is at the center of this two-party struggle. On one hand, the regime tried to conceal as many protests as it can (King et al. 2013, 2014; Shao 2018). On the other hand, information flow facilitated by new technology can disseminate the news. In addition, the regime also benefits from the free information flow economically and politically (Cai 2004; Lorentzen 2013, 2017). Hence, protest coverage exists in China's media environment, although the content can vary as in the Qingyuan case.

There is abundant literature to discuss how protests are depicted and selected to media in a democratic context. In United States, the media, and especially the conservative news media, regards protests as deviant.(Boyle et al. 2005; Lee 2014). Similar research in autocratic contexts is surprisingly rare. As discussed above, the prior studies interested in the censorship of protests, and how the government can manipulate the appearance of

protest stories. How protests are shaped in the media environment is a less concern for students of authoritarianism. Still, there is a shortage of systematic evidence on how protests are reported in autocracies.

This is what this chapter tries to answer. As I argue, the media's depiction of protests has important behavioral consequences for audiences – i.e. ordinary citizens. Understanding such procedures is necessary for studying how protests diffuse at an individual level and how the participation decision is made at the individual level. I collected systematic data from media sources and a survey in China. I focus my analysis on how different media sources report the government's responsive and repressive behaviors in domestic protests. Through an automated content analysis of media content and regression analysis to survey questions, I found that propaganda outlets, defined as those with pre-publication censorship, publish more on responsiveness and less on repression, compared to non-propaganda ones. In addition, data from Collective Action Perception Survey of China showed that audiences who read protests news from propaganda outlets are more likely to perceive the government as more responsive and less repressive.

The finding of this chapter completes the logical link of the dissertation: When government responsiveness can encourage citizens to participate, such information usually is provided by propaganda outlets. In other words, propaganda outlets somehow encourage citizens to join policy-oriented protests. It explains the procedure of protest diffusion – when the government wants to be responsive, people are encouraged to demand more.

## 3.2 The Literature

Previous literature the kind of protest that is more likely to be covered. Earl et al. (2004) summarize that protest events data from newspapers have selection biases due to event characteristics, news agency and issue characteristics. For example, Oliver and Meyer (1999) find that in the United States, only 32% protest events in a small city were covered by local newspaper. The media prefer large protests with conflict and occurring in central locations. The media attention cycle also matters in protest coverage (McCarthy et al. 1996). McCarthy et al. (2008) find that, in transitional Belarus, protests with large-scale events, with strong sponsors or accompanied by arrests are more likely to be covered.

Another group of studies is interested in how media systematically present protest events to the public. Protests were described as deviant in newspapers (Boyle et al. 2005). To the media, protests are a public nuisance, bothersome, ineffective and unpatriotic (Di Cicco 2010). Media's hostility to protests is even labeled as a "protest paradigm," emphasizing violence and disruption rather than the protesters' voice (Boykoff 2006; Lee 2014). In addition, media prefer to focus on specific events or activists rather than issues and themes (Boyle et al. 2004; Watkins 2001). The government's interests, institution and foreign policies may also affect the pattern of protest coverage (Wittebols 1996).

Previous studies of protest coverage focus on contexts in which media have moderate or high freedom of expression. In such contexts, the government does not have direct control of media content. In authoritarian contexts, the literature believes that media are unlikely to cover stories about protests. King et al. (2013, 2014) argues that social media posts with

collective action potential are more likely to be removed from the Chinese Internet. Shao (2018) surveyed media professionals and confirms that news with collective action or posts that ask for collective action are more likely to be censored. Censoring protest messages on media platforms suggest that the regime is concerned about protest diffusion across media (Koesel and Bunce 2013). However, China's media environment is not protest-free. Lorentzen (2013)'s discussion of selective permission of protests suggests that the regime allows protests when it needs to monitor its local agents. This argument provides a mild criticism to the collective action censorship findings — as the regime occasionally allows protests, it may also allow coverage of protests. Coverage of protests can be an important source of information in shaping citizens' perception of protests and thus in shaping their behaviors. Nevertheless, the evidence for this expectation is underdeveloped. In addition, empirical evidence also shows that highly sensitive environmental protests were published and circulated on social media (Qin et al. 2017, p. 118). Although protest messages are indeed more likely to be censored, there are still such messages circulated around the Internet. Thus, it is necessary to explore the consequences.

In studies of contentious politics and social movement, social media are treated as a weapon for participants while the nature of the information provider is ignored. The tide of the Arab Spring attracted scholars' attention on the power of social media in inducing revolution (Diamond 2010; Farrell 2012; Lynch 2011). Tufekci and Wilson (2012, p. 363) argue that in the Egyptian revolution, social media use increased the odds that a respondent attended protests on the first day. Similar research also suggests that the Internet facilitates activist mobilization (Esarey and Xiao 2008; Yang 2009). Although

other authors challenge this view, they focus on social media's function of networking and mobilization (Comunello and Anzera 2012; Gunitsky 2015; Han 2018). For example, Gunitsky (2015) argues that autocrats can utilize social media to maintain stability by mobilizing their own supporters, collecting public preferences, coordinating elites and framing popular discourse. This literature highlights the new elements that social media bring to political contention. In other words, the social networking function of social media is at the center of analysis. However, social media is not merely a tool of coordination. Like traditional media, it also provide a lens for audiences to understand the world around them. Can social media provide the same amount information as professional media do on a given event? Do they tell a different story? Do social media audiences perceive the event differently from those of professional media? The answers to these questions remain unexplored.

In summary, the literature is flawed in three ways. First, studies of protest coverage overwhelmingly focus on the context of free expression. Findings on how media in authoritarian regimes report protests. In addition, studies of the protest paradigm indicate that media shape public opinion but do not address the media's function as an information provider: how informing citizens (rather than shaping their opinion directly) will change citizens' opinions and behaviors. Second, while the literature assumes that media are unlikely to publish news about protests in an autocratic context, it also suggests that the government has incentives to tolerate protest-relevant news. This means that audiences can indeed obtain news about protest from media sources. Yet, the formats and effects of any news are unknown. Finally, studies of social media and protest regard social media as

a tool for coordination and participation and do not discuss its media attribute – how social media inform citizens about a protest.

## **Theory**

This chapter explores the coverage of protest in the authoritarian context of China. The approach I take regards the media, both professional and social, as information providers. For parsimony, I do not consider other functions of media outlets, such as the coordination tool of social media. My assumption is that individuals obtain information about the state and society from media coverages of protests. Then, they rethink their opportunities and constraints about affecting the state.

I theorize that the variation of protest coverages is caused by the different natures of media outlets. I differentiate two types of outlets, Propaganda outlets whose content is pre-censored by the regime and non-propaganda outlets whose content is not. As a consequence, the coverage of protest by propaganda outlets reflects the regime's willingness to build up its reputation and public support. The non-propaganda outlets' coverage, in contrast, is determined by the producers who write the coverage, although coverage is subject to censorship after its publication.

In China, propaganda outlets include domestic professional media that are supervised by various CCP branches. They also include the news channels of private online news portals and social media accounts of the professional media. Non-propaganda outlets include social media accounts which do not undergo ordinary pre-censorship processes and foreign media.

This categorization is different from the current literature on Chinese media politics, which prefers to highlight the differences between “Party media,” “marketized media” and “social media.”<sup>11</sup> Marketized media are differentiated from Party media because they are more likely to be subject to the market competition and relatively more independent. Thus, marketized media are more critical (Lei 2011; Repnikova 2017; Stockmann 2013). However, although marketized media may report protest events more frequently, their coverage is still subject to CCP’s political discipline of media professionals. Consequently, coverage of protests from professional media is restricted by the willingness of the Party. In contrast, non-propaganda outlets include the content generated by ordinary Internet users who are not bounded by such media disciplines. Therefore, the protest messages produced by ordinary Internet users should be systematically different from those of the professional media.

The theoretical prediction is presented in Table 3. Since the regime needs to demonstrate its responsive image, propaganda outlets are more likely to highlight benevolent behaviors of the regime. When the government makes concession to protesters, it needs media coverage for two reasons. First, it needs to quickly notify the dissenting citizens in order to end the protest. Second, by making a concession, the government also demonstrates its care for citizens’ interests. In the Qingyuan case, the government finally announced that “the project will never proceed without the consent from the local people.”<sup>12</sup> Tang (2016) describes such eagerness for government concession as the need for “hyper-response.” One should note that such concessions on propaganda outlets are not representative to the

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<sup>11</sup>For example, see Lei (2016), Stockmann (2013), and Zhao (2008)

<sup>12</sup>Source: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/2017-05-10/doc-ifyfecvz0825050.shtml>, access 10-14-2018



general level of responsiveness toward protests in the country. The government can be less responsive to the majority of the protests while only responding to those covered by professional media. Nevertheless, protest messages in professional media deliver the impression that the government is mostly responsive to protesters. Likewise, since the government does not want to create a “cold-blooded” reputation among citizens, propaganda outlets are less likely to publish the government’s punishment toward protesters.

In contrast, non-propaganda outlets have less constraint in reporting cases that the government represses, especially when social media is the main component of non-propaganda outlets. When a protest happens, protesters and audiences have incentives to post the protest to generate support. Especially, when protesters are confronted by the police, they are more enthusiastic in disseminating the results and drawing public attention. As Qin et al. (2017, p. 137) find, social media users have an incentive to speak out about local problems. When the government responds, protesters have no incentive to post the protest anymore. Therefore, the non-propaganda outlets are more likely to present government repression than government responsiveness.

Table 3: Theoretical prediction of media selection

Outlet	Media Example	Repression	Responsiveness
Propaganda	Professional Media (People’s Daily, CCTV)	-	+
Non-Propaganda	Social Media(Weibo, Tieba, Weixin)	+	-

### **3.3 Research Design**

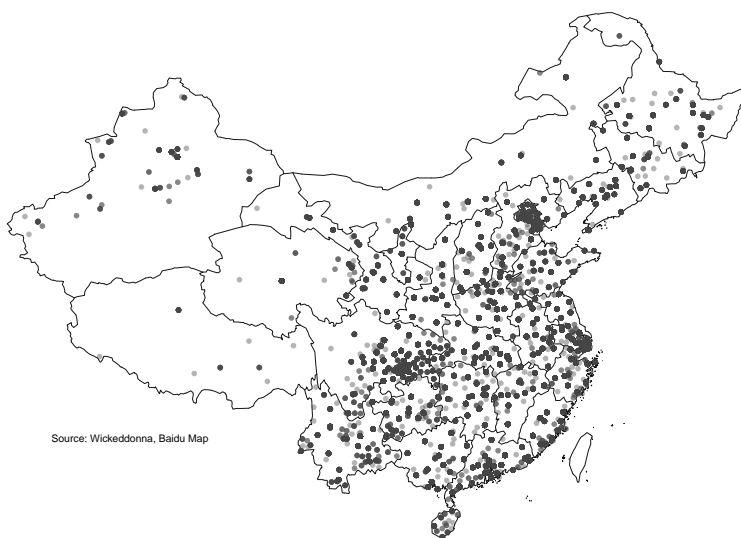
To test the given hypotheses, I conducted an automated content analysis on the datasets of social media posts as well as professional media articles regarding domestic protests in China. The goal of this analysis was to see what kind of words and topics different media outlets use when they present a domestic protest. I also used the questions in the collective action perception survey experiment to cross-validate the results.

#### **3.3.1 Media Evidence**

I used the “Wickedonna” dataset of protest as the source for social media posts.

“Wickedonna” was developed by two activists Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu. It recorded over 60,000 protest events all over China. Figure 4 shows the spatial distribution of the events in Wickedonna if geographical information was recorded. The dataset was collected manually day by day from October 2013 to June 2016 from social media in China, including Sina Weibo, Baidu Tieba and other major bulletin board system(BBS). For each event, the dataset provides one to multiple original posts as evidence. This feature makes Wickedonna an ideal material to study how social media posts describe domestic protests. Although it is hard to assess the representativeness of the Wickedonna posts, the fact that it was manually create provides an advantage: the collecting process is similar to that of an ordinary Internet user browsing protest messages. While the dataset resulted from the tremendous efforts by Lu and Li, less-enthusiastic ordinary citizens could follow a similar procedure to read protest messages. Therefore, analyzing Wickedonna indicates what

Figure 4: Spatial distribution of Wickedonna data



ordinary Internet users can read about protest from social media in China. I clustered social media posts for each event as a unit of analysis (one document). This procedure yielded 65,262 observations.

To collect text materials of professional media, I used WISE Search news dataset and Baidu News search engine. WISE Research contains the main stream newspapers in mainland China, including news paper at the central, local and metropolitan levels. First, I used WISE keyword search to collect articles containing at least one of these four words: parade, demonstration, protest and assembly(游行, 示威, 抗议, 集会). The time span was from January 2010 to December 2016. This produced 56,844 articles from 598 newspapers across China. Then, I excluded the articles from the pages of International affairs, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Sports, Entertainment, Travel and other irrelevant pages. I kept the news from domestic pages or politics pages. I further cleaned the data by

removing articles indicating that the news was not about China. For example, I excluded those with the names of foreign countries in their titles. I also removed articles with specific terms about “foreign Chinese” (such as *huaren* or *huaqiao*). Finally, I removed irrelevant topics like “assembly for Nanjing massacre anniversary.” I kept 2,924 articles at the end. The process was done by keyword search and manipulation in **R**. The majority of the data was about domestic protest in China while a small number of irrelevant articles remained. As my analysis shows, they did not affect the results.

In order to obtain more observations from professional media, I also manually searched a series keywords in Baidu’s news search engine. The keywords were chosen based on typical descriptions of protest activities in the Chinese language or events I was aware of.<sup>13</sup> Then, I selected the news about domestic protests from January 2010 to July 2017 in the search engine. This process yielded 583 articles. This process is by no means a random sampling method. However, since Baidu is the most popular search engine in China, my sampling process at best approximates how ordinary citizens approach similar news in China via the Internet. In other words, the results analyzed were those results that Chinese netizens were most likely to read. The data from WISE Search and Baidu were compiled as the dataset of professional media. The unit of analysis(document) is each article.

I conducted the analysis by using Structural Topic Models(STM) developed by Roberts et al. (2014). The principles of topic modeling can be explained by the following procedure. First, the computer calculates the correlation of words in all documents, i.e. to what frequency the same collection of words appear in the same document. Then, for a

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<sup>13</sup>For the detailed key words, see Table 12.

collection of words that is highly correlated, the computer returns it as an estimated topic. It then assigns an estimated probability of topic to each observation. The computer returns multiple topics whose number is set by the researcher. Then, the researcher can label the topic by referring to the frequently used words of the topic.

The structural topic model advances the analysis of topic modeling by adding analysis of meta data i.e. the independent variables. It enables researchers to observe how the meta data affects topic distribution. In this study, the meta data is the source of the text – social media or professional media. Using STM package in **R**, I compared the frequencies of topics across social media and professional media. I also compared the usage of words between the two types of media outlets.

### **3.3.2 Survey Evidence**

Other than directly exploring the content of media outlets, I also used the China Collective Action Perception Survey to test my theoretical prediction from the citizen side. The details of this survey are provided in Chapter 4. At this point, it is sufficient to explain that the survey was conducted on over two thousand Chinese Internet users, focusing on their understanding and exposure of domestic environmental protests.<sup>14</sup>

I used the “channel of protest exposure” as the independent variable for the media outlets.

The wording of the question is:

Here are some channels to get new information. From which channel do you  
get the most messages about environmental protests?

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<sup>14</sup>The survey experiment was approved by Institutional Review Board in Syracuse University, NO.17-355.

The options are domestic professional media, governmental websites or social media accounts, private talk, online friends in social media and foreign media or news websites. I coded the first two as “propaganda outlets” and the latter two as “non-propaganda outlets.” Respondents answered their perceptions of the government’s attitude toward collective actions. Three questions were used as the dependent variables.

“Please tell us to what extent you agree with the following statements about collective action events (*quntixing shijian*, 群体性事件) in China. ”

- Participants are most likely to be detained (Detain);
- Participants usually get what they want (Responsiveness);
- Participants usually experience violence (Violence).

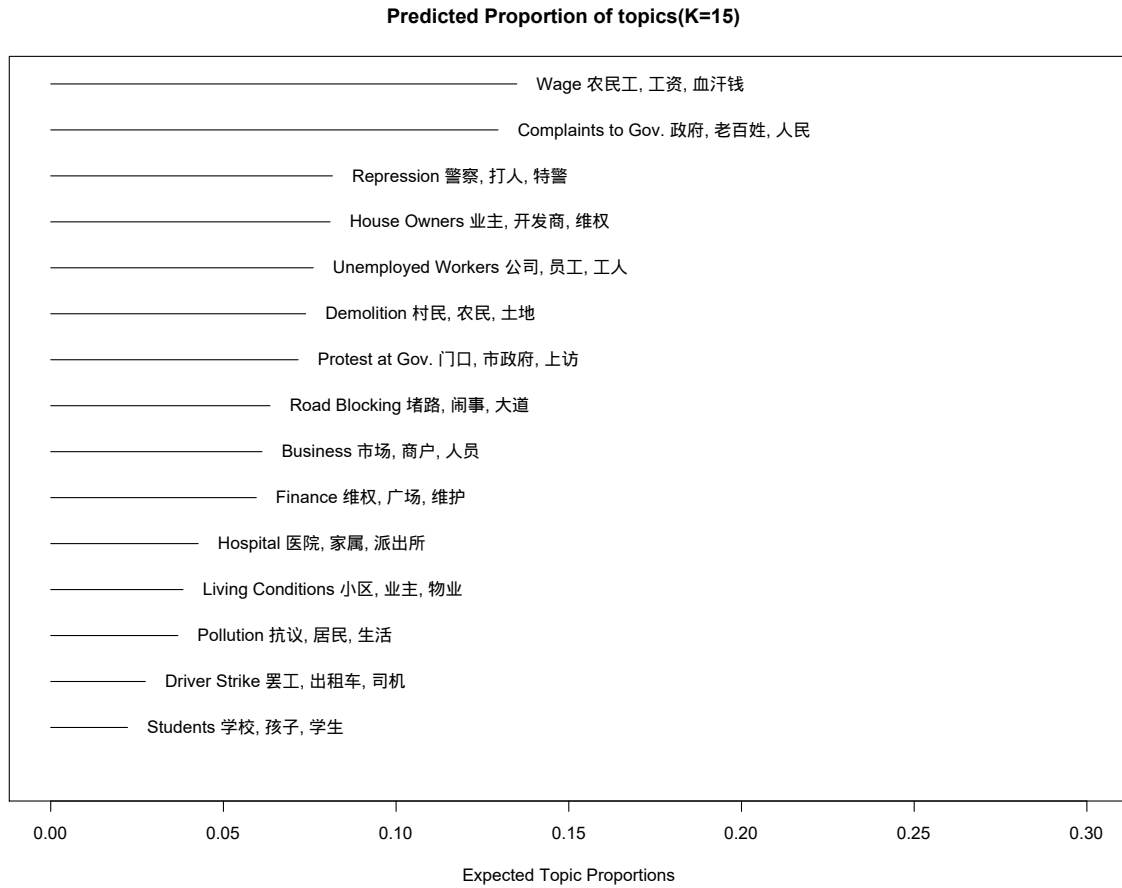
My purpose was to test whether exposure to protests in propaganda outlets leads to higher perceived responsiveness and lower perceived repression. It is the evidence to support my theoretical expectation from the audiences perspective.

## **3.4 Results**

### **3.4.1 Automated Content Analysis**

The 15 most common topics of all texts are shown in Figure 5. The Chinese words are the three most frequently-used words for each topic. According to these words, I concluded the topic, shown as the English labels. The number of topics(15) was set arbitrarily after

Figure 5: Topic distribution



several attempts. If the number of topic was fewer than 15, the estimated topics would include two or more different actual topics. If it was more than 15, actual topics repeated so that estimated topics were not mutually exclusive. By setting the topics at 15, each topic is relatively independent while no topic repeats. Thus, 15 is an acceptable number of topics. Using 20 or 30 topics yielded similar results in the analysis.

In Figure 5, the two most popular topics in the data are wage issues of migrant workers and direct complaints from the people to the government. The topic of repression, involving law enforcement and police, has the third highest frequency, with about 8% of the documents mentioning government repression of protests.

Figure 6: Usage of words for repression topic

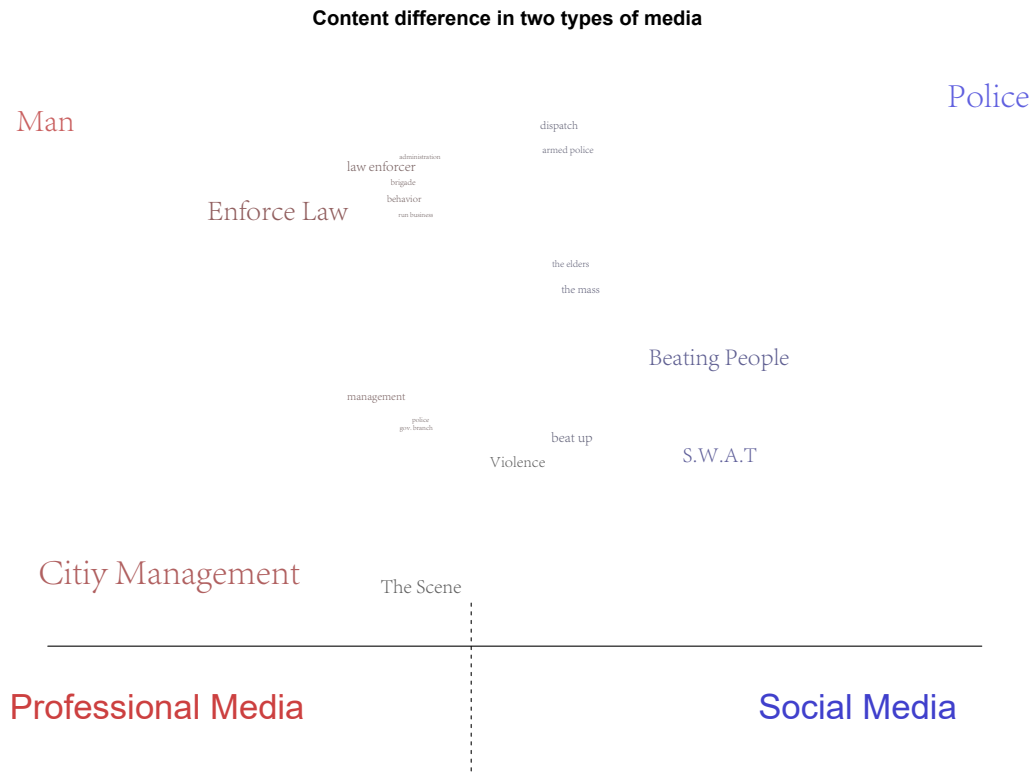


Figure 6 shows the comparison between documents from professional media and social media, including differences in word usage for coverage of repression. Social media are more likely to use words like “police,” “special police force, beating people, beat up” and “violence(警察, 特警, 打人, 殴打, 暴力).” In contrast, professional media are more likely to use “Personnel of city management, law enforcement” or “management(城管, 执法, 管理).” This result shows that in descriptions on social media, the government is more violent in its confrontations with the protesters. Professional media, however, emphasize the management and legal actions of the government employees.

As shown in Figure 5, the automated analysis does not return any topics of responsiveness.



This may be caused by divergent descriptions of responsiveness. Due to the variety of protest issues, descriptions of the government (or stakeholder) response can vary from fixing the electric grid, terminating a chemical factory project, doctors' protests against moving a hospital, to students' protests against dining conditions in cafeteria. Thus, two methods were used to detect different levels in government responsiveness. First, I randomly selected 200 documents from the data, 50% from professional media and 50% from social media. Then, I compared the percentage of documents in which the government had made responses. Consistent with my theoretical expectation, I found that in the social media data, no document has mentioned the government responsiveness. In the professional media, 29% of documents demonstrate government responsiveness.

Second, I also compared the topic distribution across two types of media. Figure 7 shows the different frequencies of topics between the two types of media outlets. Each spike represents the frequency difference, with a 99% confidence interval for each topic. The vertical dashed line indicates that social media and professional media have same predicted proportion. Consistent with the theoretical prediction, documents of social media generally contain higher proportion of repression. It also has a higher proportion of four groups of topics:

1. Employment grievances (wage, unemployment, taxi driver strike);
2. Description of protests (protests at government, complaints to the government, road blocking);
3. House property issue (demolition, house owners);

4. Consumer/investor grievances (finance).

In contrast, professional media are more likely to report the following topics:

1. Business grievances (rent or local fine issues);
2. Education grievances(students);
3. Doctor-patient conflicts(hospital);
4. Environmental hazard of residential zones(pollution).
5. Malfunction of public service (living conditions, power outages, garbage disposal)

The topics of professional media are typically local — they focus on local bureaucrats or agencies and can be easily fixed by the bureaucrats and officials. For example, protests in hospitals and schools are directed against doctors or teachers and principals. The conflicts can be resolved by local law enforcement. For example, in Chaozhou city, the family of a deceased patient with alcoholic toxicity demonstrated in the hospital and asked for compensation. The local police went to hospital and restored order.<sup>15</sup> With business grievances, the local government can prevent street-level officials from taking any extra fines from businesses. For the malfunction of public service, the government can also immediately coordinate with the local power grid, property managers or garbage disposal agencies. For example, in 2010, residents of an apartment complex blocked the entrance of the complex to protest rising parking fee in Wuhan city. According to the news coverage, the property manager promised to discuss the situation with the developer of the complex

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<sup>15</sup>Source: <http://bit.ly/2GLyAuD>, access02-14-2019

who owns the parking lot.<sup>16</sup> In summary, protests covered by professional media are easier to resolve than those covered by social media. Although words of responsiveness did not form a topic themselves, professional media tend to demonstrate report on more responsiveness-facilitating cases.

In contrast, topics covered by social media are harder to resolve. It is unlikely that the local government can compensate for investors losses, unpaid workers or owners of apartments who paid the developers who did not finish construction. Demolition grievances are usually relevant to complex conflicts involving property rights and developmental plans of the local government. Some incidents involve high-ranking officials. Asking for concessions would not be easy. For example, in a village of Handan city in Hebei, villagers protested against the acquisition of their farmland, which they claimed was sold by local Director of People's Congress without the villagers' consent.<sup>17</sup>

These findings are consistent with my expectation that social media present more repression and less responsiveness for coverages of protest. In the next section, I will show that such differences can also shape audience perception.

### 3.4.2 Survey Results

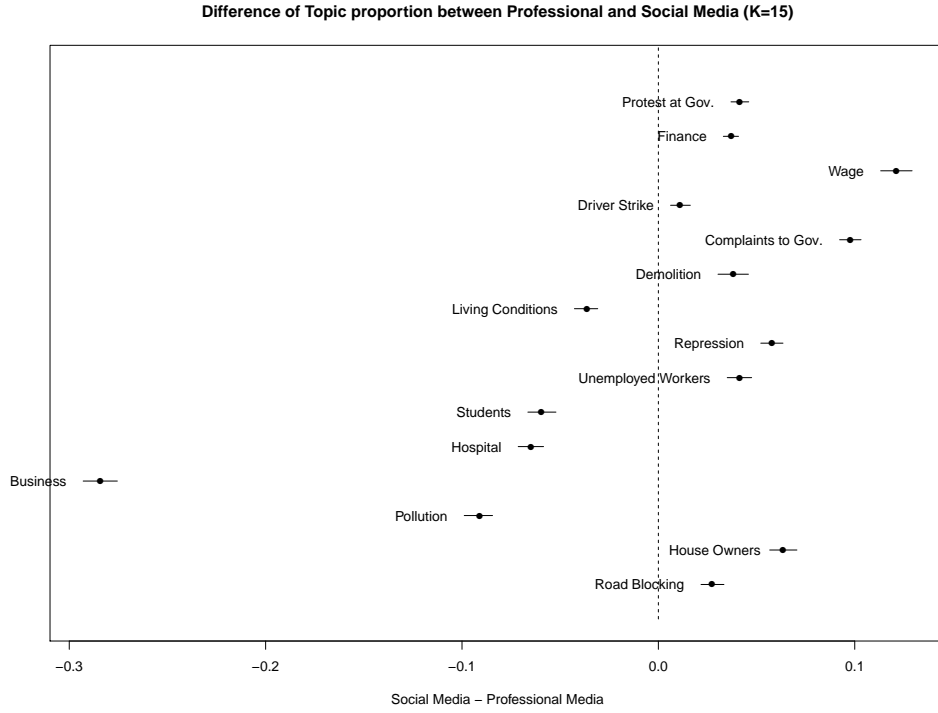
For the survey data, I used the Equation 3.1 to explore the relation between different outlet exposures and general perception of regime repression and responsiveness to protests.  $Outlet_i$  is a binary variable in which 1 equals Respondent  $i$  receives protest messages mainly from propaganda outlets rather than non-propaganda ones. Since these

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<sup>16</sup>Source: <http://bit.ly/2tnIbzZ>, access02-14-2019

<sup>17</sup>Source: No.13404, Wickedonna

Figure 7: Topic comparison across media outlets



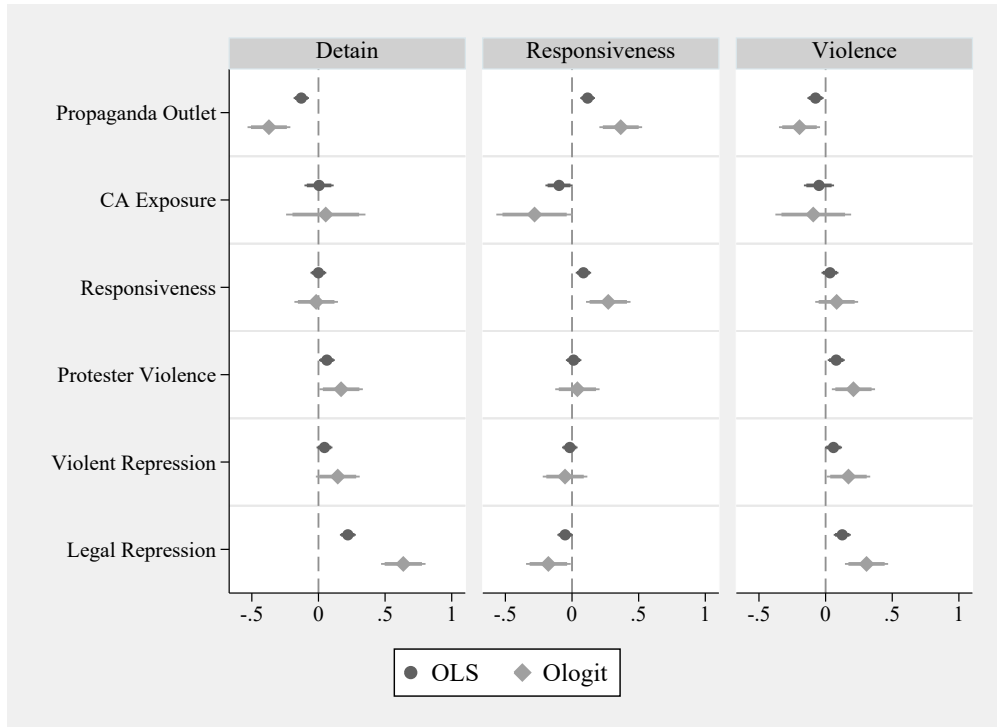
survey questions were asked after the experimental treatments in Chapter 4, I also included the vector of treatment variables  $X$ .  $C$  is the vector of control variables.

$$Perception_i = \beta Outlet_i + \gamma X_i + \Sigma C_i + \epsilon_i \quad (3.1)$$

The regression results are shown in Figure 8 (control variables omitted). The results show that when people read protest news from propaganda outlets, their perception of government detainment drops 4.3%, perception of responsiveness increases 4.0%, and perception of violence drops 2.6%, compared to non-propaganda outlets.<sup>18</sup> All the results are significant with a 95% confidence level. These results support the expectation that

<sup>18</sup>These results are estimated from the OLS models. The other covariates are treatments in Chapter 4. Control variables were included.

Figure 8: Exposure to media outlets and perception of protest



propaganda outlets, such as state-control professional media, shape audiences' perception of domestic protests by highlighting more government responsiveness while downplaying governmental arrests of and violence toward protesters.

This result cannot demonstrate a causal relation since respondents can self-select media channels. Such endogeneity should be mitigated by the wording of the question; it did not ask which channel they *liked* to read about protest. Rather, it asked which channel they frequently used to learn about protest. If people followed the instruction of the question, they should not bring personal preference into their answer. In addition, this evidence is consistent with the results of the study of media content. It provides supportive evidence on the selective exposure of protest on Chinese media.

## 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores how different types of media in China present protest stories. Specifically, it focuses on the divergence between social media and professional media on government responsiveness and repression, which can be influential on observers' protest behaviors. Social media, i.e. the typical non-propaganda outlets, are more likely to describe the government as repressive and non-responsive to protesters. In contrast, propaganda outlets, featured by professional media in China, are more likely to depict the government as responsive and benign. This argument is supported by evidence from both media content and citizens' perception in China.

This chapter fills a gap in the studies of media coverage of protests by providing the evidence in an authoritarian context, namely China. While previous studies discuss the media's paradigm of depicting protests as deviant, I show how media discuss the attitude of the government in China. Variation in the image of government is determined by the nature of media outlets. This phenomenon is distinctive in the authoritarian context, in which the information flow is usually impeded. The different levels of control over professional media and social media create variation in protest coverage. The government's incentives to maintain its reputation of responsiveness drive professional media to highlight its benign attitude toward protests. The protesters' incentives to ask for broader support produce social media posts concerning the government's lack of response to protesters' demands.

Moreover, this chapter also engages in the conversation with the literature of contentious

politics and media freedom in autocracies. While protests are generally censored by the regime (King et al. 2013, 2014), they are also occasionally addressed in the media so that the central government can collect information about the local officials (Lorentzen 2013, 2014). This chapter provides more detailed evidence on how media depict protests.

Finally, this chapter highlights social media's information provision function that was less discussed in previous literature. Social media may systematically depict the government as non-responsive and repressive in domestic protests. This bias, in turn, has behavioral consequences in audiences. Previous literature regarded social media as a platform for activism and revolution, while this chapter focuses on their long-term effects and bias in the coverage of domestic protests.

This chapter relies on the best accessible text data for content analysis, which are by no means randomly-sampled representative data. The Wickedonna data was collected by two volunteers manually, which may reflect their personal bias. The limitations of human labor may also result in missing observations. However, as their protest-searching procedure is similar to normal audiences', the texts they collected should have little difference from what ordinary audiences would access.

The data has a limited time range. The Wickedonna project stopped when they were repressed by the Chinese government. The news articles ranged from 2010 to 2017. It was likely that restrictions on protest coverage changed before or after the time range for the data. However, the change should be quantitative not qualitative. As long as CCP is concerned with its reputation as a responsible regime, it needs to demonstrate to some extent its responsiveness to citizens. This means that the professional media occasionally

report how the CCP cadres have addressed the grievances of ordinary citizens. However, protesters continue to use social media to spread information on their own protests. Even though censorship has become more intense, social media are still low-cost tools for protesters. While the number may be reduced, protest stories can still flow into the public sphere and inform the audiences.

The survey evidence was based on a sample of highly-educated population. Although this group is not representative of the population as a whole, it is more likely to read and disseminate protest stories as they care more about public issues. I expect that the representative sample may be less clear or confident about what they perceive while the positive association between propaganda outlets exposure and perception of benign government is unlikely to change.

The finding of this chapter completes the theoretical logic of this dissertation: When citizens' behaviors are affected by actors' behaviors in protest stories, the actors' behaviors are selectively presented by media outlets. Therefore, domestic protests do not automatically affect citizens. They are shaped and filtered by the media environment and then affect citizens in the form of protest messages. Although a large portion of protests are blocked by the government's censorship, the media in China still contain information about protests, and their moderating effects are still significant. It also suggests that scholars should pay attention to the role of information flow when examining the relation between macro political events (such as protests) and individual citizens.



# Chapter 4

## How Protest messages Encourage Further Protest

### Abstract

This chapter investigates the subsequent effects of protest messages onto audiences' protest willingness. It argues that how the protesters and the government behave in the event will determine the effects on audiences. I conducted a survey experiment on over 2,000 Chinese Internet users and treated them with multiple behaviors of the government and the protesters in one protest story. I find that the standalone message of protest has no effect on respondents' likelihood of participation. Adding information about government responsiveness has a significant positive effect. Weaker evidence also shows that protesters' violence decreases respondents' willingness, but government repression has no effects. The further tests show that the increase of protest willingness was mediated by their perceived protest efficacy — the likelihood that citizens can change a policy by protest against local government decision.

## 4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I find that different types of media outlets can shape protest messages in systematically different ways. In propaganda outlets, the government is responsive, merciful and generous to citizens. In non-propaganda outlets, the government is repressive. Consequently, citizens who obtain protest messages constantly from one type of media channel can only receive a partial image of a protest event. Which component of a protest event is most capable of stimulating protests? Which media outlet can be most effective in mobilizing audiences? How do audiences use protest messages produced by media channels to determine their political behavior?

This chapter tries to provide an answer by conducting a survey experiment on over 2,000 Chinese Internet users, who were randomly treated with multiple behaviors of the government and the protesters in a protest message. I find that the standalone message of people going into the street has no effects in their willingness of participation while adding information of government responsiveness has a significant positive effect. Weaker evidence also shows that protesters' violence decreases respondents' willingness, but government repression has no effects.

This finding confirms that within a message about one protest event, the different behaviors of the government and citizens can affect audiences behavioral decision towards different directions. In addition, the fact that government responsiveness leads to greater expressed willingness to protest indicates why protests can be epidemic – it informs audiences that such participation may get a desirable outcome. This finding confirms the dilemma of

“responsive authoritarianism”(Heurlin 2011): response to the bottom-up protests will increase public demands. The pacification of citizens’ anger will become increasing costly. Nevertheless, since the regime imposes selective censorship, the fragmented information environments guarantee that only a few citizens can be exposed to protest-encouraging messages. Thus, the number of citizens with high potential to protest is limited.

## 4.2 Literature and Theory

Previous literature suggests that for ordinary citizens, protest information is also important for political action. Kuran (1991) argues that protests reveal the previously-falsified political preference of fellow citizens so that citizens are more confident to go to protest. Lohmann (1994) argues that in East Germany, the Leipzig Monday demonstration generated an “informational cascade” that finally brought democratic movement and the rise of reformist. The government’s reaction to protests can also change people’s behaviors. For example, scholars have found contradictory evidence on the relation between repression on protests and further collective actions. One school of scholars believe repression will deter further collective actions (Kricheli et al. 2011; Kuran 1997; Tilly 1978). Yet other scholars argue that repression can backlash and encourage more participation(Francisco 1995; Gartner and Regan 1996). O’Brien and Deng (2015) find that crackdown of protests can bring the “theatrical performances” – attract an audience and bring external supports to the protester.

These studies suggest that stories of protests can be mobilizing. Audiences change their

behaviors after they observe how the protesters and the government act. However, to have a panoramic view of a protest event is impossible. The variation of knowledge about the same protest generates heterogeneous effects on people's behaviors. In authoritarian regimes, such variation is even larger than that in democracies because the government has different levels of control on media platforms and the free flow of information is impeded. As Chapter 3 finds, when social media users reveal that the police violently repressed protesters, state-control professional outlets may show that the government has made concessions.

## **Theory**

Given the variety of messages within one protest event, which form of message is the most mobilizing? Which type of media outlet is more likely to spread mobilizing messages?

Following the previous literature, this chapter tests the mobilizing effects of multiple behaviors of the government and the protesters.

The theoretical framework of protest event effects are based on the conventional literature of resource mobilization and political opportunities. In policy-oriented protests, participants' behaviors are useful information because they reflect the mobilizing resources available in the society. Scholars believe people decide their participation by looking at how much resources they can mobilize (McCarthy and Zald 1977). One of such resources is their fellow citizens as potential participants. Klandermans (1984, p. 585) summarizes that three expectations determine whether people think participation can produce collective good: 1) expectations about the number of participants; 2) that about their own

contribution to success; 3) that of the probability of success if many people participate.

Therefore, when a protest story shows that protesters participate, the audience is informed that their fellow citizens are joining the protest. This message increases their expectation that when another similar protest happens in the future, citizens are ready to participate. Accordingly, the audience becomes more confident and participation willingness increases.

In contrast, if the protesters behave violently, the expected risk of participation increases: the chance of being repressed elevates, and the violence may also endanger the participants themselves. Therefore, when the information shows that violence of protesters occurs, the audience becomes less likely to participate.

The government's behavior suggests the available political opportunities for protesters. Political opportunities are also believed as a factor to affect participation of political contention (Meyer 2004). Previous research shows that institutional channels are important opportunities both in democracies and authoritarian regimes (Almeida 2003; Chen 2012; Kitschelt 1986). However, institutional opening is not self-evident to citizens. Authoritarian government's toleration of citizen participation is not clearly defined (Stern and Hassid 2012; Stern and O'Brien 2012). To citizens, one useful way to detect political opportunities is to observe how the government behave in the messages of collective action. When the government responds to protester's need, the observers will perceive that political opportunities enlarge. They will become more optimistic about the outcome of protest and thus willingness of participation increases.

When the government represses the protester, the effects onto the audience can be ambiguous: the types of repression may also matter. Koopmans (1997) find that

institutional repression was more effective to demobilize the extreme rightists in Germany, while situational police repression had an escalating effects. In an authoritarian context like China, repression can also be differentiated into legal repression and violent repression. I argue that violent repression is discouraging since it increases the perception of risks of participation. The government's violence also suggests that the institutional opportunities for policy participation are not sufficient for citizens. Thus, the audiences are less likely to participate if they are exposed to violent repression. Legal repression means the government arrests people for their participation. However, to a policy-oriented protest, the government cannot directly blame the participants, since changing a policy is usually a legitimate request as long as the government claims that it serves citizens' interests. Therefore, the government usually legally repressed those protesters by accusing them of disturbing the social order and exercising social violence. Such accusation may generate ambiguous understanding among citizens. People may believe the legal repression only targets the disruptive participants, and thus participation is safe as long as protest is peaceful. If this is true, then we should expect information about legal repression has no effects on participation willingness. In contrast, citizens may interpret that legal repression is also a warning from the government on participation. Such interpretation will come to a conclusion that the window of opportunity is closing and thus participation is discouraged.<sup>19</sup>

To summarize the theoretical predictions in Table 4, one piece of a policy-oriented protest message usually contains five types of behaviors of the protester and the government. The

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<sup>19</sup>The dichotomy of legal vs. violent repression is different from Levitsky and Way (2010)'s distinction of high vs. low intensity of coercion. In fact, when repressive behaviors reach audiences via mass media, they become highly visible – they should both belong to high intensity of coercion.

behaviors of the protesters reflect the structural conditions of mobilizing resources. If the message shows that citizens are enthusiastic in participating in a protest, it will increase the audience's willingness of participation. If the message shows that protesters are violent, it will discourage the audience. The behaviors of the government suggest the conditions of political opportunities at the macro level. The government's response to protesters can encourage the audiences to participate in the next protest. However, the literature suggests that the effects of government repression are mixed. Both types of repression may scare the audience away from future participation. However, the violent repression may also have backfire effects, and the legal repression may have no effects. The effects of repression may be highly dependent on the interpretation of the audience.

Table 4: The Effects of Protest Messages and its Corresponding Structural Conditions

<b>Actor Behaviors</b>	<b>Perception Change</b>	<b>Expected Effects on Future Protest Probability</b>
Protesters participate	Mobilizing Resources	Positive
Protesters' violence	Mobilizing Resources	Negative
Government Responsiveness	Political Opportunities	Positive
Legal Repression	Political Opportunities	Negative or No Effects
Violent Repression	Political Opportunities	Negative

One should note that the behaviors of the protesters and the government are not the only influential factors in a protest message. However, they are arguably the most important factors within a protest message because they can shape the perception of mobilizing resources and political opportunities. This dissertation only examines the behaviors of these two actors, while further studies should be done to examine the other aspects of influential factors within a protest message.

### 4.3 Research Design

In order to assess how actors behaviors in a protest message change audiences' political behaviors, I conducted the China Collective Action Perception Survey on Chinese Internet users. The Communist Party's regime stays resilient when massive amounts of protest happen each year (Dimitrov 2013; Tang 2016; Tong and Lei 2013), which provides abundant information about how the protesters and the government behave in the policy-oriented protests. In addition, the censorship machine in China created distinctive information environments for citizens to receive messages of protests (King et al. 2013, 2014; MacKinnon 2011; Roberts 2018; Shao 2018; Tai 2014). Such institutional context provides us an ideal place to understand the influence of protest messages to citizens under the same autocratic rule. Since this chapter mainly focuses on the behaviors of the government and the protesters, survey experiment provides an useful tool to test its effects. I constructed a protest message based on a true event. I manipulated the message into several versions to selectively exhibit the behaviors of the protesters and the government to randomly assigned experimental groups. Then, I asked them questions about the dependent variables. In this way, I guaranteed that each group was similar in terms of their demographic features.

Thus, I was able to identify the causal effects of the information about behaviors.

The process of the survey experiment is briefly introduced in Table 5. The detailed original questions are available in Appendix (if not shown in the main text).



Table 5: Procedure of China Collective Action Perception Survey

Procedure	Questions/Treatment	Chapter
1	Demographic Questions	Three-Five
2	Trust Treatment	Five
3	Reading Interest Question	Five
4	Protest Message Treatment	Four/Five
5	Protest Exposure Outlets	Three
6(1)	Participation Question*	Four/Five
6(2)	Perception of Efficacy*	Four
6(3)	Perception of Grievances*	Four
7	Perception of Trust	Four

Note: \* Section orders are randomized

### 4.3.1 The Treatment

The control group in the survey read a piece of entertainment news, while the treatment read the protest message as follows:

July 1st 2012, hundreds of students gathered in front of the government building of Shifang, Sichuan, protesting the Molybdenum copper project. Protesters brought banners of protest slogans, such as “Unite and protect the environment for the next generations,” “Guard our home, no chemical factory” or “We could sacrifice, we are the young (generation),” etc. The next day, participants had risen up to thousands.

The message was accompanied with an image of protesters(the left image of Figure 9). I chose environmental protest because it is one of the most prominent public issues in China. Multiple protests were triggered by environmental concerns.<sup>20</sup> It is also an issue that can be relatively tolerated by the authority because of its far distance from the legitimacy issue

<sup>20</sup>For example, see: Hung (2013),Zhu (2017),Buckley (2016) and Huang and Sun (2016).

(Shao 2018).

The treatments of government/protester behaviors were shown right below the general message of the protest. Table 6 shows the translation of messages according to each treatment.

Table 6: The Treatments of Survey Experiments

<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Message</b>
Collective Action Exposure	(Included in the general treatment)
Protesters Violence	Some citizens became very emotional. They broke through the cordon, rushed into the local Party Committee office building, and smashed 8 pieces of display glass, three billboards and four cardboards on the first floor.
Government Responsiveness	In the afternoon of July 3rd 2012, Shifang city Party secretary told the media that Shifang would terminate building Molybdenum copper project from now on.
Legal Repression	The local government published an announcement on forbidding illegal assembly, demonstration and protest. It finally arrested 27 people.
Violent Repression	The police used tear gas and shock bomb to drive protesters

In the treatment groups[CA Exposure], all respondents read about protesters participating into the protest. The treated respondents were equally likely to read the different combinations of the rest of the four treatments. Respondents may have read only about the protest message with no other treatments, or they might have been exposed to all the treatments. The order of the treatments was adjusted so that the message appear to be a consistent piece of news. As long as respondents were treated with the information about repression, they were shown an image suggesting the confrontation between the protesters

Figure 9: Treatment Images



and the police, rather than the original image just about the protesters (the right image of Figure 9). Therefore, in the treatment group, there are in total sixteen ( $2^4$ ) versions of news plus one control group.

### 4.3.2 Dependent Variable

After they answered their perception about collective action in general, they were provided a hypothetical situation – the government in their city was to build a Molybdenum copper factory. The survey introduced the background of this situation: “The project elicits many discussions among their neighbours and friends. Some citizens believe the project can boost the economy, some others try to express their opposition to the government.”

Then, respondents needed to answer how much grievance they feel about the project and how they wanted to participate if they were not satisfied with the project. Particularly, I used this question as the measurement of dependent variable:

According to the chemical factory plan, if you want to oppose, how much do

you want to demonstrate on the main avenues of the city? (4-point scale: Must not participate, Not likely, likely, must participate)

This measurement raises several issues worth further discussion. First, it is not measuring true participation but participation willingness. Participation willingness is usually higher than the probability of true participation since answering a question involves almost no cost. However, it is not viable to measure actual participation within one survey experiment. This measurement is based on the assumption that people who express higher willingness are still more likely, though usually discounted, to participate than those who have lower willingness. Second, the goal of this experiment is to estimate the relation between dependent variables and the treatments. As long as the errors using willingness to measure true participation do not correlate with the independent variables, the relations we find would not be biased. At the current stage, there are no theoretical reasons to believe that the information shown in the treatment may affect such errors. In other words, reading the treatments in Table 6 is unlikely to make people exaggerate their willingness when they would not participate, or, in reverse, deny high willingness when they would participate. Therefore, willingness of participation is a valid measurement. The same technique has been adopted by other scholars like Berinsky (2017) and Huang (2018).

### **4.3.3 Control Variables**

Although experimental analysis usually does not need to add control variables into the analysis, adding them will increase the accuracy to estimating effects on each individual (Mutz 2011). Several demographic variables were controlled, including gender, age,

education, income, whether or not they have children, party membership and whether or not they are public employees. In addition, their daily usage of media was also controlled, as they wrote the name of media brand that they most frequently used. I then recoded into three categories: state media, marketized media and social media. I also controlled whether they are Sichuan resident (affinity to the event), their perception of their own health, and anxiety about pollution.

This survey experiment has several advantages compared to the observational data I discussed in Chapter 2. First, the experimental design guarantees a test of causal relation between the independent variable (protest messages) and the dependent variable (participation willingness.) We can exclude the potential confounders, such as their political trust or media exposure from the study. Furthermore, experimental design allowed me to break down different elements of a protest message (the behaviors of the government and the protesters) so that I can test the effect of each of the behavior independently. Third, as discussed in Section 4.3.2, the measurement error of participation is unlikely to bias the estimation of causal relation between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Finally, compared to studies on audiences of an actual protest event, the survey experiment partially addressed the selection bias by surveying those who may not pay enough attention to the specific event.

## 4.4 Empirical Results

### 4.4.1 Data

The survey experiment was conducted from December 5th 2017 to January 12th 2018. A Chinese Internet survey company was hired to recruit respondents.<sup>21</sup> 2777 respondents enrolled into the survey. I filtered the respondents by two conditions. First, they needed to spend more than 12 seconds to read the news article. Second, they took more than 8 minutes to finish the survey.<sup>22</sup> This yielded 2452 respondents qualified into the analysis. Four quality-control questions were asked after they read the news article (if they read the collective action news). The questions were about the content of the article they just read. Three options were given. The correct rate of the quality-control questions were ranged from 70.6% to 79.8%. It means the majority of respondents had paid attention to the treatment.

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of demographic and control variables, including their ANOVA balance check. The sample has slightly more women than men, concentrated on young and high-educated population. The proportion of a Party member is also more than the proportion in the population.<sup>23</sup> Six out of nine variables have achieved balance across experimental groups. This meant that the randomization was generally successful, while we needed to control the three imbalanced variables in the analysis.

In order to get enough observations for comparison, the control group was oversampled –

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<sup>21</sup>The company chose to not publish its real name.

<sup>22</sup>Such criteria were determined after I considered the length of the survey and the treatment.

<sup>23</sup>In the entire population, about 5-6% of Chinese are CCP members.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

	mean	sd	F <sup>1</sup>	Prob>F
Male[0-1]	0.44	0.50	2.309133	0.0419
Age[1-3] <sup>2</sup>	1.39	0.70	4.354504	0.0006
College[0-1]	0.68	0.47	1.49693	0.18746
Income >60K[0-1]	0.29	0.46	0.447009	0.815707
CCP Member[0-1]	0.24	0.43	1.757113	0.118374
State Employee[0-1]	0.19	0.40	0.602056	0.698402
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	0.05	0.21	2.275563	0.044719
Self-perceived Health[1-5] <sup>3</sup>	4.31	0.67	1.093898	0.361608
Anxiety about Pollution[1-5] <sup>4</sup>	3.32	1.02	0.597853	0.70164
Observations			2452	

<sup>1</sup> ANOVA was used to estimate the balance of each control variable and the treatments.

<sup>2</sup> 1 “18-29”, 2 “30-39”, 3 “>=40”

<sup>3</sup> “Please evaluate your level of health”

<sup>4</sup> “How much do you worry about pollution in your city? ”

319 out of 2,452 respondents were assigned to the control group reading an entertainment news piece (13% rather than 5% if not oversampled). The other treatments have almost the same amount of respondents (the difference was within 5 people for each treatment).

The major model I used to estimate the effects is given in Equation 4.1.  $y_i$  is Respondent  $i$ 's willingness to participate in demonstration.  $X_i$  is the vector of treatments (actors' behaviors), including collective action exposure, government responsiveness, participant violence, violent repression and legal repression.  $C_i$  is the vector of control variables shown in Table 7.  $\epsilon_i$  is the error for each individual.

$$y_i = \beta X_i + \gamma C_i + \epsilon_i \quad (4.1)$$

OLS estimator was used to estimate the results while Ordered Logit analysis was also used to check the robustness. The results turned out to be similar. Figure 10 presents the main

coefficients of five treatments. The dots refer to the coefficients of OLS model and the diamonds refer to those of the Ordered Logit model. The thick spike stands for 90% confidence interval while the thin spike stands for 95%.

Government responsiveness has a significant positive effect on respondents' participation willingness. According to the OLS model, participation willingness increases 3.33% after people read the information about government responsiveness.<sup>24</sup> Protester violence has a negative effect (2.00%), while it is only significant at 90% confidence interval. The exposure to collective action has an 1.3% positive effect on participation willingness, while the result was not significant. The two types of repression have small coefficients and are statistically not significant.

I further used conjoint experiment estimator of Hainmueller et al. (2014) to estimate the results with no modeling assumption. Hainmueller et al. (2014, p. 12) argues that the average marginal component effect (AMCE) in the conjoint estimator can be a "natural causal estimand in any other randomized experiment involving more than one treatment component." Therefore, the conjoint analysis is still useful even though this experiment was not a conjoint design. In the model, I put five treatments at the right hand side of the equation plus three variables that failed the balance check, gender, age and whether they are Sichuan resident.<sup>25</sup> The results are shown in Figure 11. The dots are the estimated AMCE. Black confidence interval is at 90% and the grey one is at 95%. The outcomes are similar to the OLS analysis, in which government responsiveness has a significant positive effect in willingness of protest, while participant violence has a negative effect, although the

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<sup>24</sup>The percentage is calculated using 4-point scale as 100%.

<sup>25</sup>The control variables were transformed into binary variables so that fit the requirement of conjoint analysis.



Figure 10: The Regression Coefficients of Treatments

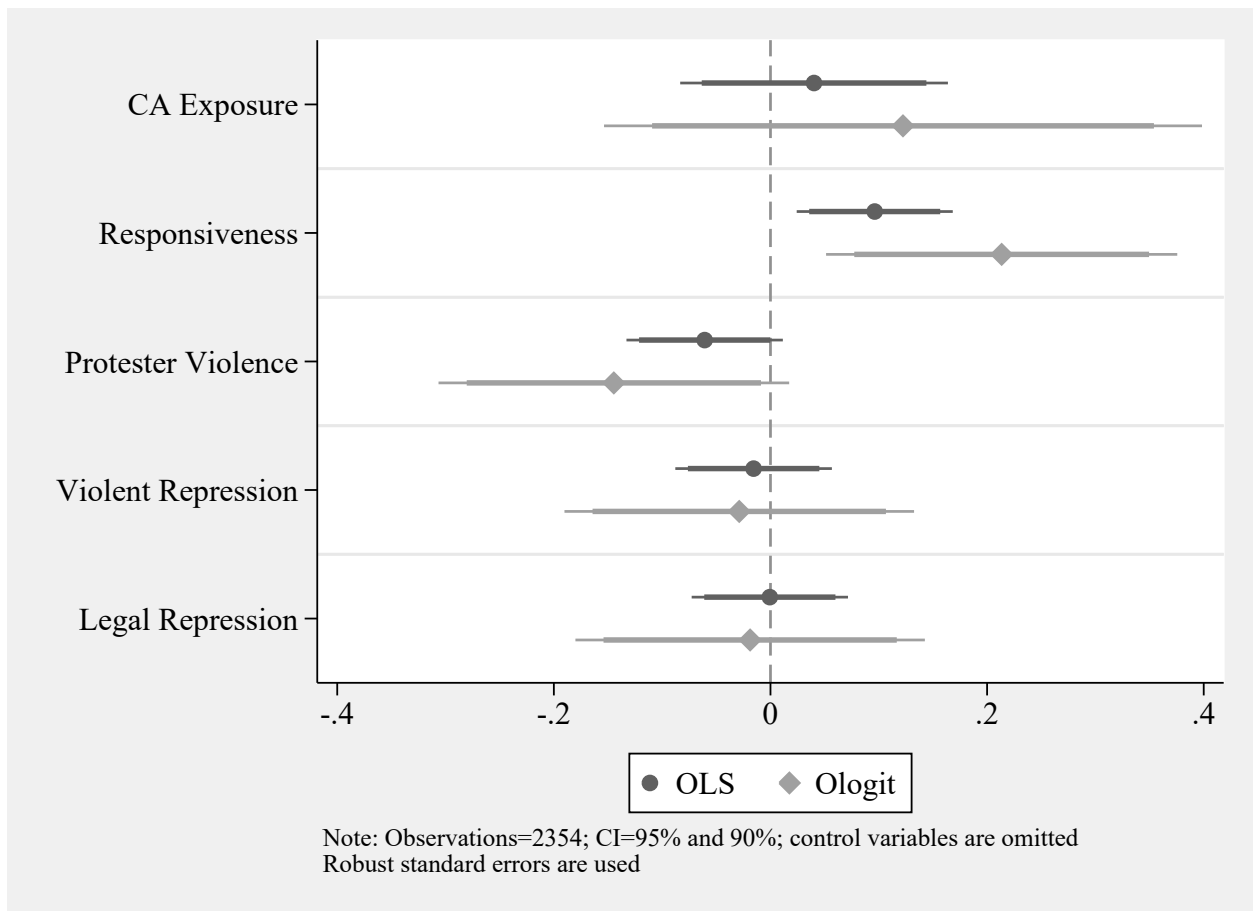
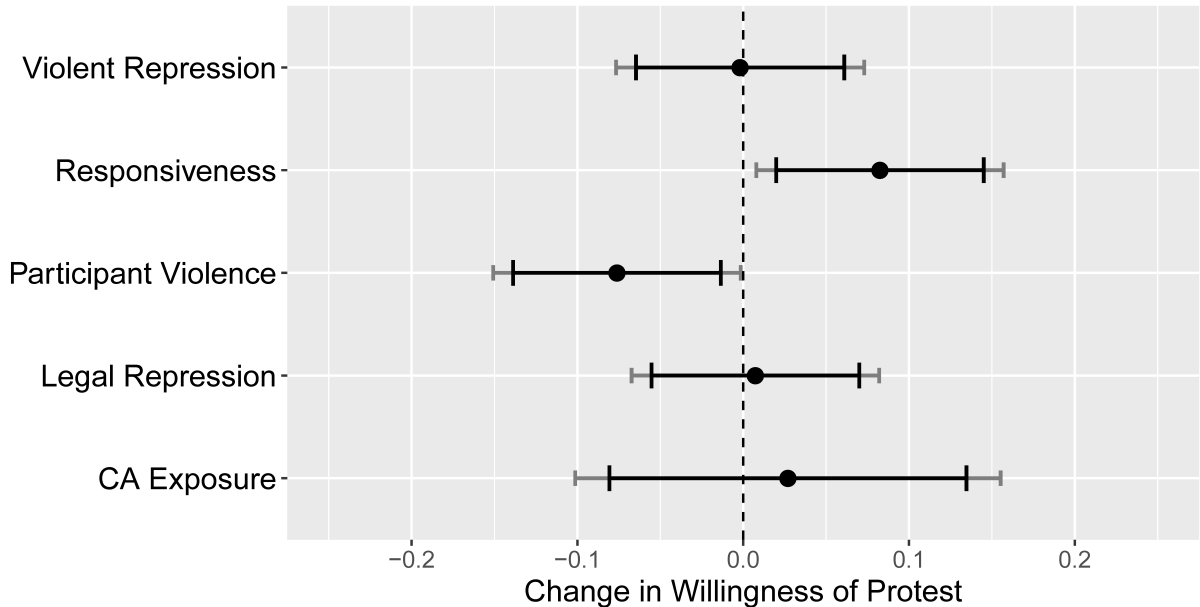


Figure 11: The AMCE of Treatments, Conjoint Estimator



level of significance is lower. The other three treatments have minimal effects and are not statistically significant.

#### 4.4.2 Discussion and Robustness Check

The main analysis confirms that message about government responsiveness in a protest can increase audiences' willingness of protest participation, while protesters' violence discourages participation. Although the estimated size of the effects was limited around 2% and 3%, such effects only came from one piece of protest message. In reality, if one exposed to multiple cases of protest that with similar contents, their willingness of participation can be affected in a larger scale.

A further examination shows that government responsiveness increases participation willingness mainly through enhancing the perceived effectiveness rather than perceived

grievances or political trust. After the treatment, respondents also needed to answer whether they agreed with the statements on Table 8. I also conducted regression analysis on the treatments' effects on the variables of grievance, efficacy and political trust. It turns out that CA exposure can increase perceived grievances, but fail to increase participation willingness (see Figure 12, control variables omitted). In contrast, government responsiveness increases the perception of efficacy, and perceived efficacy increases participation willingness (see Figure 13, control variables omitted). Figure 14 shows that the treatments do not have significant effects on political trust. I also conducted mediation analysis with structural equation model, using the questions of efficacy and grievance as mediators. The efficacy model shows that perceived efficacy, as a mechanism, can explain 55% variation between government responsiveness and participation willingness. The result is significant at 95% confidence level. The grievance only explains 6% of variation (insignificant) and has a poorer model fit. The trust only explains 0.1% (insignificant).<sup>26</sup> This analysis shows that protest messages mainly change people's behavior by changing their perceived efficacy rather than grievances.

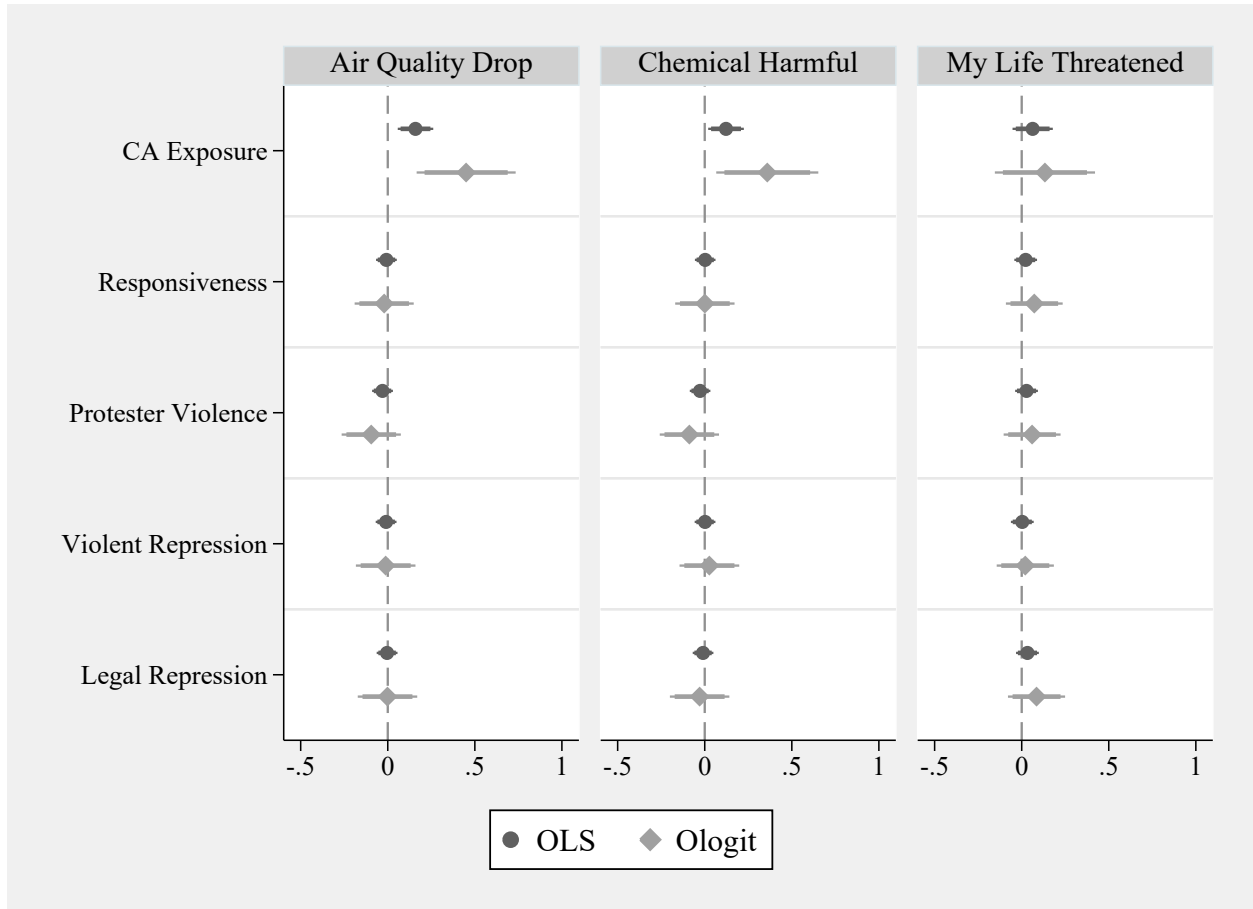
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<sup>26</sup>Efficacy model: RMSEA=0.110, CFI=0.21; grievance model: RMSEA=0.439, CFI=0.169; trust model: RMSEA=0.383, CFI=0.175.

Table 8: Measurements of Mechanism

Category	Variable Name	Question Wording
Grievances	Air Quality Drop[1-4]	This project will seriously harm our air quality
	Chemical Harmful[1-4]	I feel the Molybdenum Copper factory is harmful to people
	My Life Threatened[1-4]	I feel my safety is under threats
Efficacy	Gov.Concede[1-4]	If many people protest in the street, the government will give up the project
	Media Coverage[1-4]	If the media report our complaints, the government will give up the project
	Superior Gov.[1-4]	If we oppose the project, the upper level government will probably be on our side
	Protest Eff.[0-10]	Taking a stroll in the main avenue of downtown is the most likely to change the government's decision
Trust	Policy Trust[1-4]	I trust the policies made by the government
	System Trust[1-4]	The current system fits our country's circumstance
	Response Trust[1-4]	As long as citizens have requirements, our government will try to satisfy

Figure 12: The Coefficients of Mechanism Test: Grievances



I cannot find significant effects of the protest exposure and two types of repressions in willingness of participation. Such finding may indicate several possibilities. First possibility (P1) is that respondents may not have received the treatments properly. Second, the respondents may not have been sensitive enough to these treatments (P2). Third, the treatments' effects can be contradictory to different individuals – people with various demographic backgrounds may interpret these behaviors differently and the causal effects are heterogeneous (P3).

Since Chapter 5 will explore the heterogeneous effects of the treatments, this chapter mainly addresses P1 and P2. For P1, three pieces of evidence suggest that respondents

Figure 13: The Coefficients of Mechanism Test: Efficacy

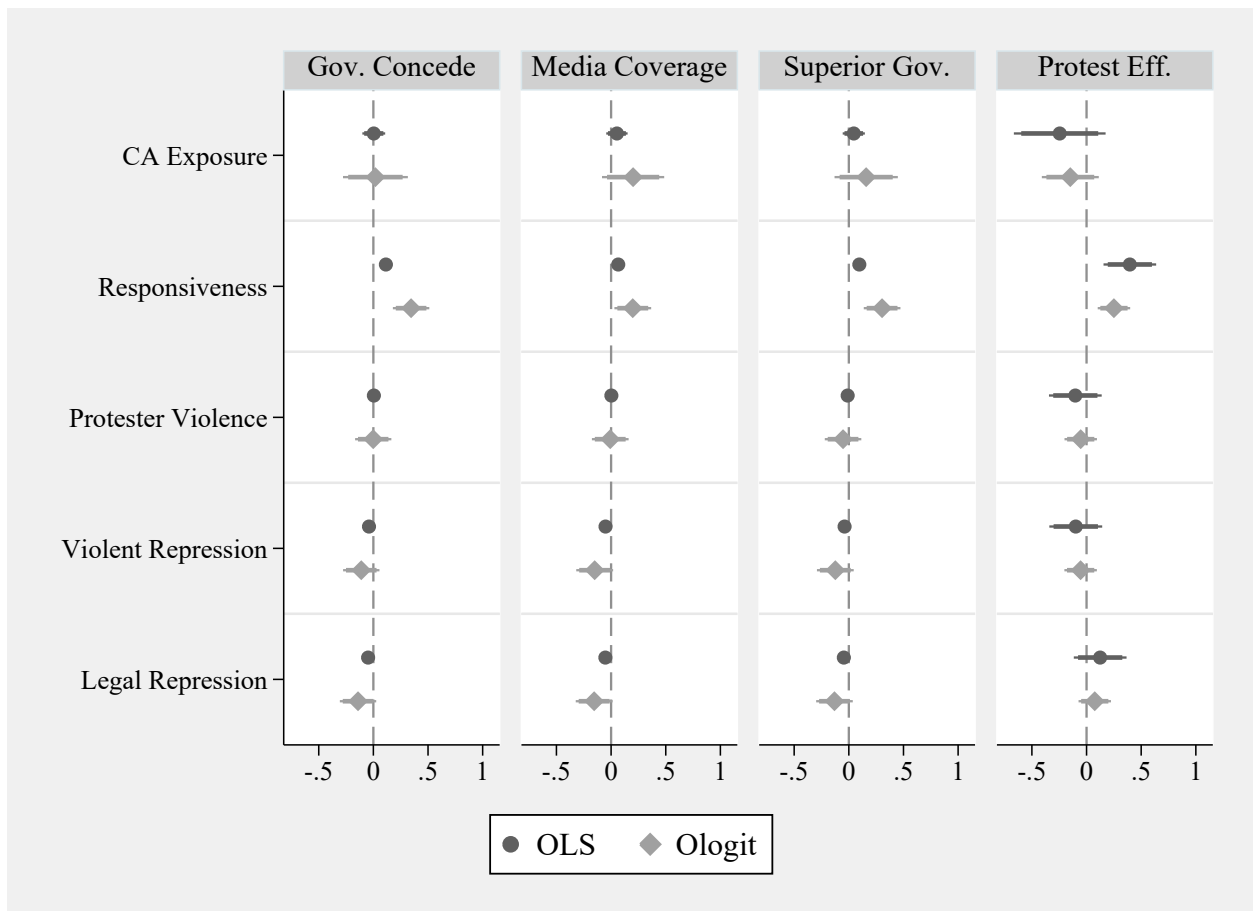
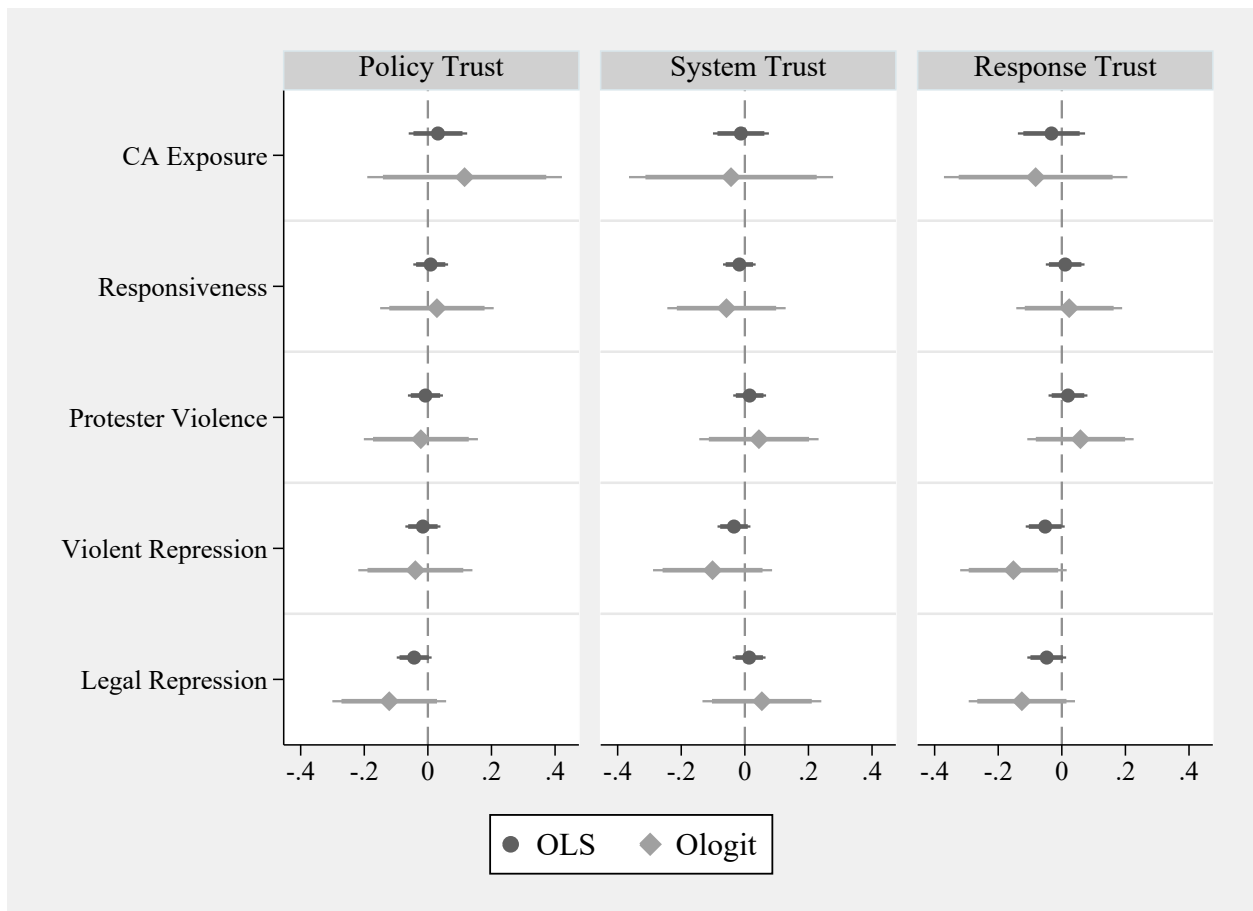


Figure 14: The Coefficients of Mechanism Test: Trust



have received the treatments properly. First, as discussed before, respondents have a high rate of correctly answering the validation questions about the contents of the treatments. Second, after the treatment exposure, respondents were also asked about their perception of protests in China in general:

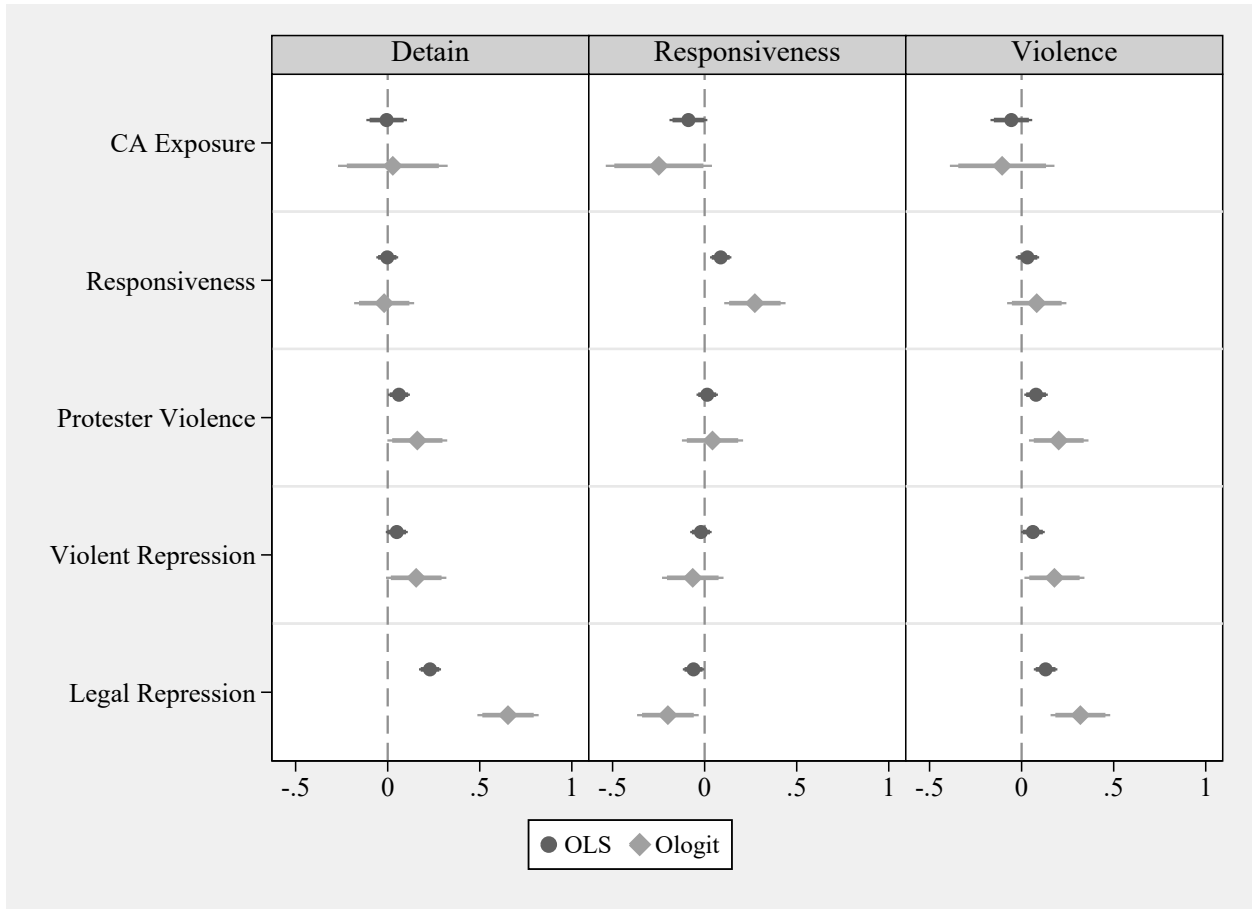
Among these protests (*quntixing shijian*) in China, to what extent do you agree:

1. Protesters are most likely to be detained [Detain];
2. Protesters usually get what they want [Responsiveness];
3. Protesters are usually experienced violence [Violence].

The third question did not specify the source of violence in order to make the question less sensitive to answer. I regressed the treatment variables and the control variables on these three questions. As the coefficient plots in Figure 15 show, respondents' perception changes in accordance with the treatments they were exposed to (Control variables omitted). When respondents read about protester violence and government's repression, they perceive that detaining protesters are more likely. Likewise, the exposure to government responsiveness increases their perceived likelihood of responsiveness, while the exposure to repression decreases such perception. Finally, perceived likelihood of experiencing violence increases when respondents read about protester violences or both types of repressions. Most of these effects are significant at a 95% level. This analysis reflects that respondents indeed paid attention to the treatments so that their perception of protests changed. However, as to participation willingness, only the government responsiveness and protester violence



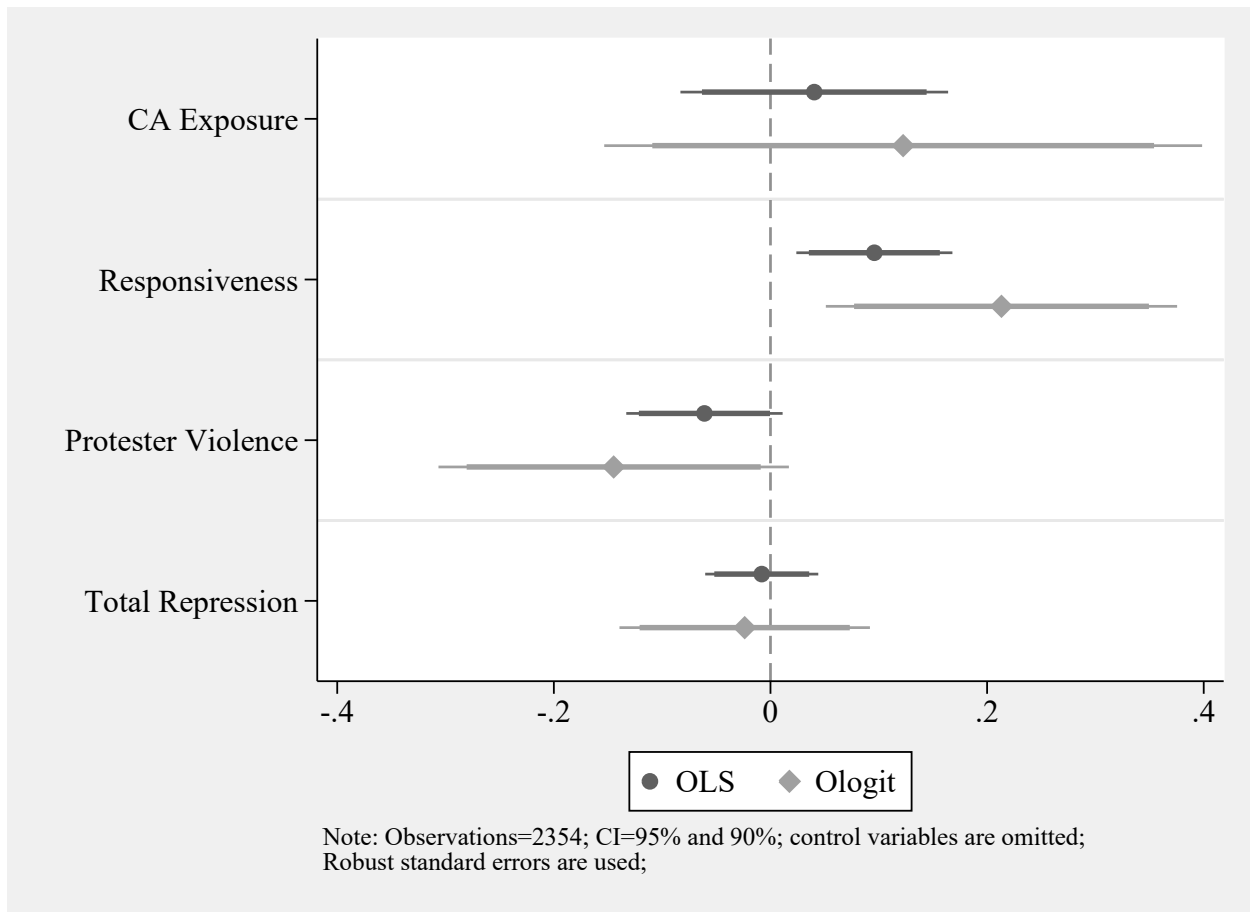
Figure 15: Treatments Affect General Perception of Protest



were effective.

For P2, respondents might have been insensitive about the messages of protest participation and repression. For example, they read too many stories about protests with repression as the outcome so that one more message about repression could not change their behavioral patterns significantly. They were more susceptible to protester violence and government responsiveness because these messages were relatively rare in their daily experience. This explanation is invalid since the results of Figure 15 shows that the treatments of protest exposure and repression can change people's perception. It means that these messages do not saturate the respondents.

Figure 16: Regression Model with Repression Recoded



A similar argument may suggest that the treatment of repression was not strong enough since I separated two types of repression. I recoded two treatments of repression into one ordinal variable “total repression,” in which if both types appeared, I coded it as 2, and if only one type appeared, I coded as 1. Neither was coded as 0. I reran the analysis and found that the repression variable remained not significant (see Figure 16). It means that repressive behaviors in this experiment did not have significant effects in general.

The analyses above cannot rule out the possibility that protest exposure and both types of repression are still influential, although their effects are very small. In other words, by reading one piece of a message audiences cannot be affected by these three behaviors. Yet

this finding is still contributive, in that it shows, in a protest message, that government responsiveness is *the most influential* behavior to people's participation willingness. It means that the power of protest diffusion is most effective when people read that the government makes response to citizens.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores the effects of protesters and the government behaviors in a protest message on audiences' future protest decision in an authoritarian context. Its logic was built on the literature that audiences observe how the protesters act to determine their own action. It argues that a protest story contains multiple types of behaviors of the regime and of the protesters, including the protesters' violence, the government's responsiveness (concession) and repression to audiences' future participation willingness. By observing how the protesters and government act, audiences change their perception of mobilizing resources and political opportunities. In turn, audiences' participation willingness changes. In the empirical test, I find robust evidence on the positive effects of government responsiveness and weaker evidence on the negative impact of participant violence. No evidence supports that the other three behaviors – protest participation, legal repression and violent repression – have significant impacts. A further analysis shows that the change of participation willingness is brought by the change of perceived efficacy of protest. These results show that the audiences' participation willingness is most sensitive to the government's responsiveness. When audiences saw that the government made concession to other citizens (protesters), they become more confident that their own

participation will also be rewarding. Then, they are more likely to choose to participate.

As Chapter 3 shows, the information about these behaviors is not distributed to audiences homogeneously in autocracies, due to the existence of censorship. The media outlets controlled by the regime may, for example, be more likely to show off its responsiveness and conceal its repression. Then, state-controlled outlets have a larger mobilizing effects when they cover protests.

I used a survey experiment to identify the effects of protest messages. Compared to observation data, survey experiments can directly establish the causal relation between the treatments and the dependent variables, but they also have limited external validity.

Although environmental protest is one of the most outstanding types of policy-oriented protests in authoritarian regimes like China, future studies also need to explore whether protests on other issues may change the main effects of the protest messages discussed. In addition, the experiment has only one event as treatment. The short-term effects of one protest message can provide implications for researchers to imply long-term effects, while further tests are still necessary to understand the long-term effects.

The sample of the survey experiment used is also not representative for the Chinese population. Online survey experiment has the issue of self-response bias — those who answered the survey are also the ones who care about the relevant issues. In fact, the sample is biased to young and educated groups, the population which is more likely to join protest.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, studying this sample is more likely to learn about the main potential

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<sup>27</sup>For instance, Melo and Stockemer (2014) find that young population is more likely to join protest in Europe. High-educated population is also seen as to have more resources to participate in contentious politics; see Verba and Nie (1987)

protesters in China. However, further analysis should be done to look at the heterogeneous effects in different demographics.

The previous literature discusses the consequences of autocratic repression and responsiveness separately. This study compares how different governmental behaviors affect citizens at the information level in the context of policy-oriented protest. It shows that people are more susceptible to government responsiveness. It reveals that citizens are more likely to act when the probability of success is high and the cost is relatively low (compared to acting for regime change). Respondents are less susceptible to repressive messages. It confirms that people may interpret legal repression not as a constraint on protest participation per se, but on disruptive participation. It does not invalidate, however, the intimidating effects of repression onto political contentions. The government can demobilize protesters by violence, surveillance and harassment (Levitsky and Way 2010, p. 58). Nevertheless, it shows that demonstrating repression can be ineffective to demobilize citizens.

# Chapter 5

## The Interpretation of Protest

### Messages

#### Abstract

This chapter examines the last factor that affects the influence of protest messages: the audiences' individual interpretations. I argue that two major elements may affect the way that audiences understand the behaviors of the government and the protesters: their trust in the government and their interests in reading relevant news in ordinary time. I theorize that audiences with lower trust in the government are more susceptible to protesters while those with high trust are more susceptible to the government. In addition, the new message may be less influential on people who usually choose to read relevant news. I implemented a trust treatment and a self-selective design in the protest message survey. I found supportive evidence on the effects of political trust but no evidence that shows reading interest affects the interpretation of protest messages.

## 5.1 Introduction

The effects of information are not solely determined by the content. The audiences' interpretation is also important. The same protest messages can reflect both the regime's mercy and cruelty to people with different prior perception of the government. Such prior perception may come from their diverse social background — what books they read, what events they see and who they talk to. In short, protest messages can generate heterogeneous effects on different social groups. Then, to what extent do such effects differ? And how do they differ? This chapter aims to explore the factors diversify audiences' understanding of the same protest messages.

The previous literature suggests two factors that may affect the interpretation of protest messages, especially the behaviors of the government and the protesters this dissertation is interested in. First, the effects of protest messages may interact with “political knowledge and propensity to reflect on media content.” (Hwang et al. 2007) Citizens' prior trust in the government may affect the interpretation of protest messages. In this chapter, I argue that the level of political trust sets the expectation of citizens on the behaviors of the government and the citizens. When they read the new messages of a protest, their expectation moderates the adjustment of participation willingness. Second, the effect magnitude of protest messages can also be affected by the extent that audiences are exposed to relevant news. The more people read the news on daily basis, the less the impact of the new message should be. Therefore, selective exposure to protest messages in usual time determines the size of the effects.

In the survey experiment of protest message, I added a trust manipulation treatment before the formal experiment. The analysis of heterogeneous effects confirms that citizens are more susceptible to the government's behavior when they have higher political trust. In contrast, when their trust drops, citizens change their participation willingness according to the protesters' behaviors. To test the theory of selective exposure, I also added a question, before the experimental treatment, to ask about their interests in reading news article related to environmental protests. However, I could not find consistent evidence to support the theory of selective exposure.

The findings provide a new answer to the old question—what effects political trust can bring to political participation. While previous literature has disagreement on “positive versus negative,” I suggest that trust does not affect participation directly. Political trust affects the way that people interpret the new protest messages and the government's behaviors; accordingly, they change their perceived protest efficacy and participation willingness.

In the next section, I will briefly theorize how political trust and selective exposure may moderate the effects of protest messages in individuals' participation willingness. Then, I will provide my research design and the results.

## **5.2 Literature and Theory**

The literature is interested in the relation between political trust and political participation in the comparative context. Muller (1979) finds that normative belief is a determinant for



aggressive participation. Hooghe and Marien (2013) argue that state political trust is positively associated with institutionalized participation (working in a political party/contacting the government) while negatively associated with non-institutionalized participation (boycotting products/signing petitions/participating in demonstrations). Braun and Hutter (2014) studied 22 European democracies. They found that citizens who distrust representative institutions are indeed more likely to engage in extra-representational participation. The evidence in China is more mixed. Zhong and Hwang (2015) argues that environmental protests are caused by low political trust, while Tang (2016) argues that protesters usually trust the central government. When people perceive the regime can no longer bring desirable public service, they are willing to act to change the political leadership (Gueorguiev and Shao 2018). In summary, the past literature tries to theorize that trust is the cause of political participation. They disagree on whether the effects of trust is positive or negative.

In this chapter, I argue that political trust does not need to be a direct factor — it can also affect the updating of perceived protest efficacy, i.e. the interpretation of protest messages. I draw the theoretical expectation from the studies of confirmation bias (Munro and Stansbury 2009). During the acquisition of information, people search for evidence that could confirm their previous belief (Jones and Sugden 2001). When audiences receive new protest messages, they do not assess the actions of the government and of the protesters with equal attention. Audiences with high political trust pay more attention to the government's behavior than the protesters, since they tend to self-confirm that the government is responsive. Therefore, they are more susceptible to the government's

behavior. Relatively, low trust audiences tend to believe that the government would not make concession that easily. Their hope is hung on protesters who can produce tremendous pressure to force the government to surrender. Therefore, low trust audiences pay more attention to the behaviors of protesters so that they are more susceptible to the protesters. In summary, audiences' political trust serves as a priming factor to moderate the effects of protest messages.

Hypothesis 5.1: When reading a protest message, the participation willingness of respondents with high political trust are more likely to be affected by the government's behaviors.

Hypothesis 5.1.1: Exposure to government responsiveness will increase the participation willingness of the high trust group but not the low trust group.

Hypothesis 5.1.2: Exposure to government violent repression will decrease the participation willingness of the high trust group but not the low trust group.

Hypothesis 5.1.3: Exposure to government legal repression will decrease the participation willingness of the high trust group but not the low trust group.

Hypothesis 5.2: When reading a protest message, the participation willingness of respondents with low political trust are more likely to be affected by the protesters' behaviors.

Hypothesis 5.2.1: Exposure to collective action messages will increase the participation willingness of the low trust group but not the high trust group.

Hypothesis 5.2.2: Exposure to protester violence will decrease the participation willingness of the low trust group but not the high trust group.

The interpretation of protest messages is not only influenced by citizens' prior belief, but also by the frequency of exposure to the protest news. Protest messages may not reach audiences in the same level of frequency. Some audiences may actively pursue to read stories about domestic protests. They like to know more about the socio-political issues and acquire news from multiple sources other than propaganda outlets. These high interest audiences may have already read multiple stories about domestic protests against the local government. In contrast, some audiences may have little interests in reading protest news. It does not mean that they will never read news about protest. In contrast, low interest audiences may still encounter news about protests when the event appears in their social media stream or they accidentally read about it on news media. Low interest audiences nevertheless read less about domestic protest than the high interest ones. Thus, a new protest event should have larger effects on low interest audience and change their participation willingness more dramatically. In contrast, high interest audiences may change their expectation in a lesser scale, since their past reading experience has already shaped their understanding of domestic protests.

Hypothesis 5.3: When reading a protest message, the participation willingness changes more dramatically among respondents with less exposure of such messages.

### 5.3 Research Design

To test the given hypotheses, I added two designs in the China Collective Action Perception Survey. To test the effects of trust, I assigned a treatment of political trust to respondents before their formal treatment in Chapter 4.<sup>28</sup> The traditional way to measure political trust is via survey questions(Chen 2017; Hutchison and Xu 2017; Ma and Yang 2014; Wang and You 2016; Wu et al. 2017). However, survey questions may not provide enough variation in the variable since Chinese respondents tend to express a high level of trust in the government(Wang 2006). The measurement can be inaccurate, since people may exaggerate their trust to the government. Survey questions may also incur an endogeneity issue to the dependent variables.

Hence, I adopted experimental design in this chapter. The key method is to use psychological cues to temporarily manipulate respondents' satisfaction with the government. Respondents assigned to the "high-trust group" were asked to answer two questions: 1) write down one policy you are most satisfied with the government; 2) here is a list of policies, choose the ones you think the government has done a good job; you can choose from 0 to 5 items. On the other hand, the low-trust group answered two questions with the exact same wording except that "most satisfied" was replaced with "most angry" and "good job" was replaced with "bad job." The answers to these two questions are not important. My goal was to induce respondents' positive (or negative) image of the government at the group level when they recalled the good (or bad) things the government did in their perspective.

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<sup>28</sup>The treatment of trust is orthogonal to the treatments of the main survey in Chapter 4. Therefore, the results in Chapter 4 are unlikely to be affected.

After the manipulation, two questions were asked to check the group difference of political trust. Respondents were asked to evaluate their agreement on two statements: S1 “In general, the government has done things right;” and S2 “in general, I am satisfied with what the government does.” A five-point Likert scale was applied. T-test results show that the high trust group held higher trust, significant at a 95% confidence level, meaning that the manipulation is successful.<sup>29</sup>

To study the influence of exposure frequency, I used a self-select exposure question to measure respondents’ interests in news about domestic environmental protests, following the previous works. This method has been widely used to study whether self-selection on information may affect the information effects.<sup>30</sup> In the protest message survey, I inserted a question on reading interests between the trust manipulation and protest message treatment. Respondents were provided five randomly-ordered news titles. Two titles were about irrelevant entertainment and sports news (coded as 0 in the self-select variable). Two titles were about the paradox between environmental protection and economic development brought by chemical plants (coded as 1). One was about the environmental protest (coded as 2).

I used two interaction models to test hypotheses. In Equation 5.1 and Equation 5.2, I interacted the variable Political trust( $T_i$ ) and Self-select variable( $S_i$ ) with five treatment variables. If H5.1 is right, then the marginal effects of government behavior treatments should be larger in the high trust group than in the low trust group. If H5.2 is right, then the marginal effects of protesters behavior treatments should be smaller in the high trust

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<sup>29</sup>S1: H-L=0.126, with 95% CI [0.064, 0.188]; S2:H-L=0.254, 95% CI [0.187, 0.322]

<sup>30</sup>For example, see Arceneaux and Johnson (2015) and Huang and Yeh (2016).

group than in the low trust group. If H5.3 is right, we should see that the marginal effects of treatments under the condition of low exposure interest are higher than those under high exposure.

$$y_i = \beta X_i \times \lambda T_i + \gamma C_i + \epsilon_i \quad (5.1)$$

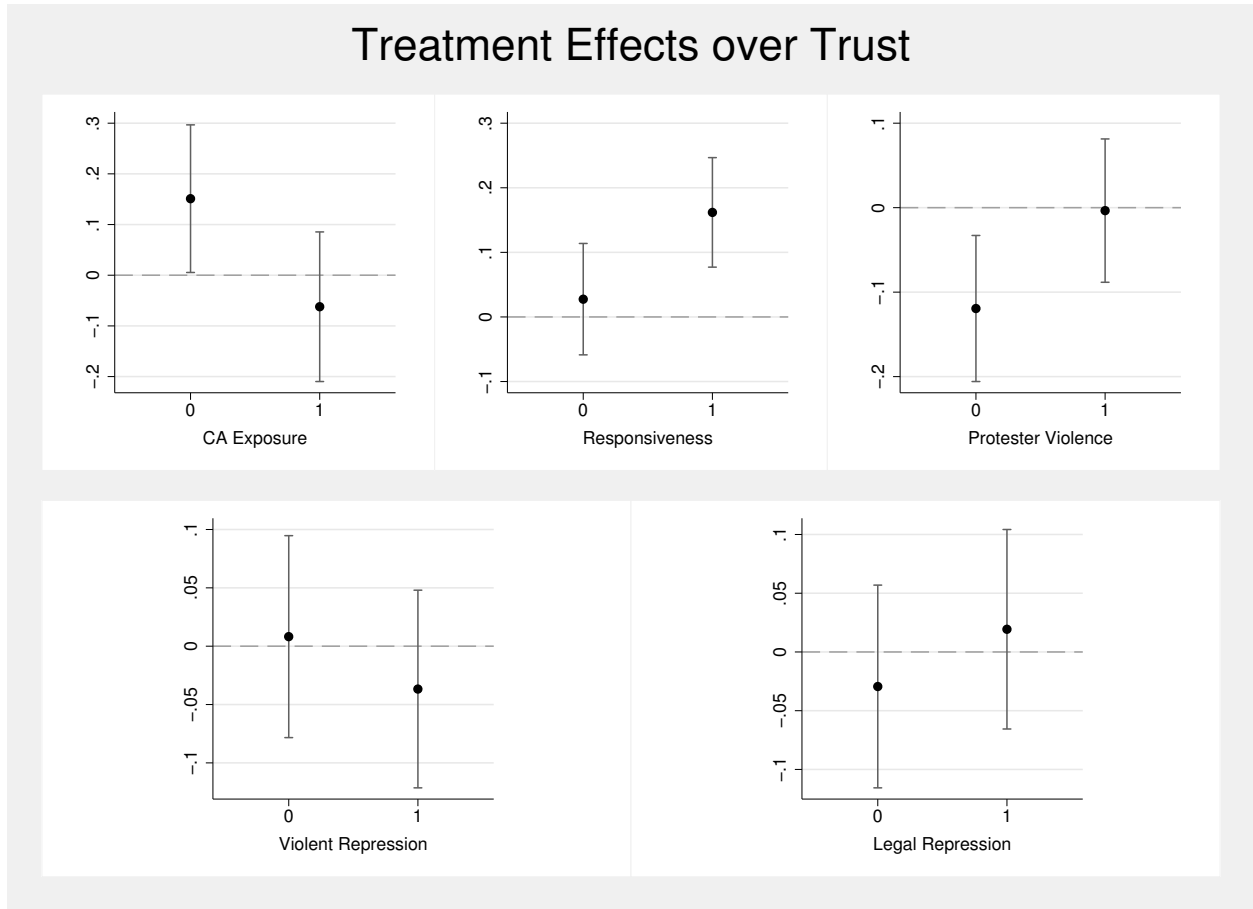
$$y_i = \beta X_i \times \lambda S_i + \gamma C_i + \epsilon_i \quad (5.2)$$

## 5.4 Results

### 5.4.1 Effects over trust

I used OLS estimator to estimate the results; additionally Ordered Logit analysis was also used to check the robustness. The results turned out to be similar. Figure 17 shows the marginal effects of each treatment under different levels of political trust. In Figure 17, the horizontal axis of each panel shows whether the group was exposed to low trust (0) or high trust(1) treatment. The left panel and the right panel in the first row show the treatments of protester behavior. As H5.2.1 predicts, exposure to collective action increases participation willingness by 5% (significant at 90% confidence interval) of the low political trust group. As H5.2.2 predicts, exposure to protester violence decreases 3.6% participation willingness of only the low trust group. These two results support H5.2 in that people who have lower political trust in the government are more susceptible to the

Figure 17: Heterogeneous effects of protest messages over political trust



behaviors of protesters.

In Figure 17, the middle panel in the first row and the two panels of the second row show the marginal effects of the government behaviors. As H5.1.1 expects, government responsiveness increases participation willingness of the high trust group by 5.3% while its effects to the low trust group was not significant. H5.1.2 and H5.1.3 are not supported since both types of repression did not have significant effects on participation willingness, whichever the level of trust. Such results are consistent with the results of Chapter 4: the message of repression does not reduce participation willingness. Respondents were not discouraged of policy-oriented protests because of the government's repression.

In general, the results reveal that political trust diversifies the interpretation of protest messages and thus moderates the effects of the messages on protest participation. Such findings reveal that citizens with different levels of trust can both be encouraged to participate in protests. Political trust determines which type of information is more effective. Protesters' behaviors are more influential to citizens losing their trust in the government. Government responsiveness strengthens high-trust citizens' confidence in the efficacy of protest, while repression has no discouraging effects.

#### **5.4.2 Effects over reading interest**

Figure 18 shows the marginal effects of each treatment over respondents' reading interests. The horizontal axis of each panel depicts the level of interests from 0 (reading irrelevant news) to 2 (reading protest news).

According to Figure 18, the effects of treatment did not change significantly in four out of five panels. The exception is the right panel of the first row. When respondents were exposed to protest violence, those who were more interested in reading protest news reduced participation willingness more dramatically. This result went against H5.3. In general, the findings provide no support to H5.3.

The non-finding may be affected by coding, in I artificially distinguished people who were interested in the policy issue and those interested in the protest related to the policy issue. I recoded the reading interest variable by collapsing those interested in the policy and in the protest. I reran the model by using the new coding scheme. The results are shown in Figure 19. Again, the differences of treatment effects between high interest and low interest



Figure 18: Heterogeneous effects of protest messages over reading interests

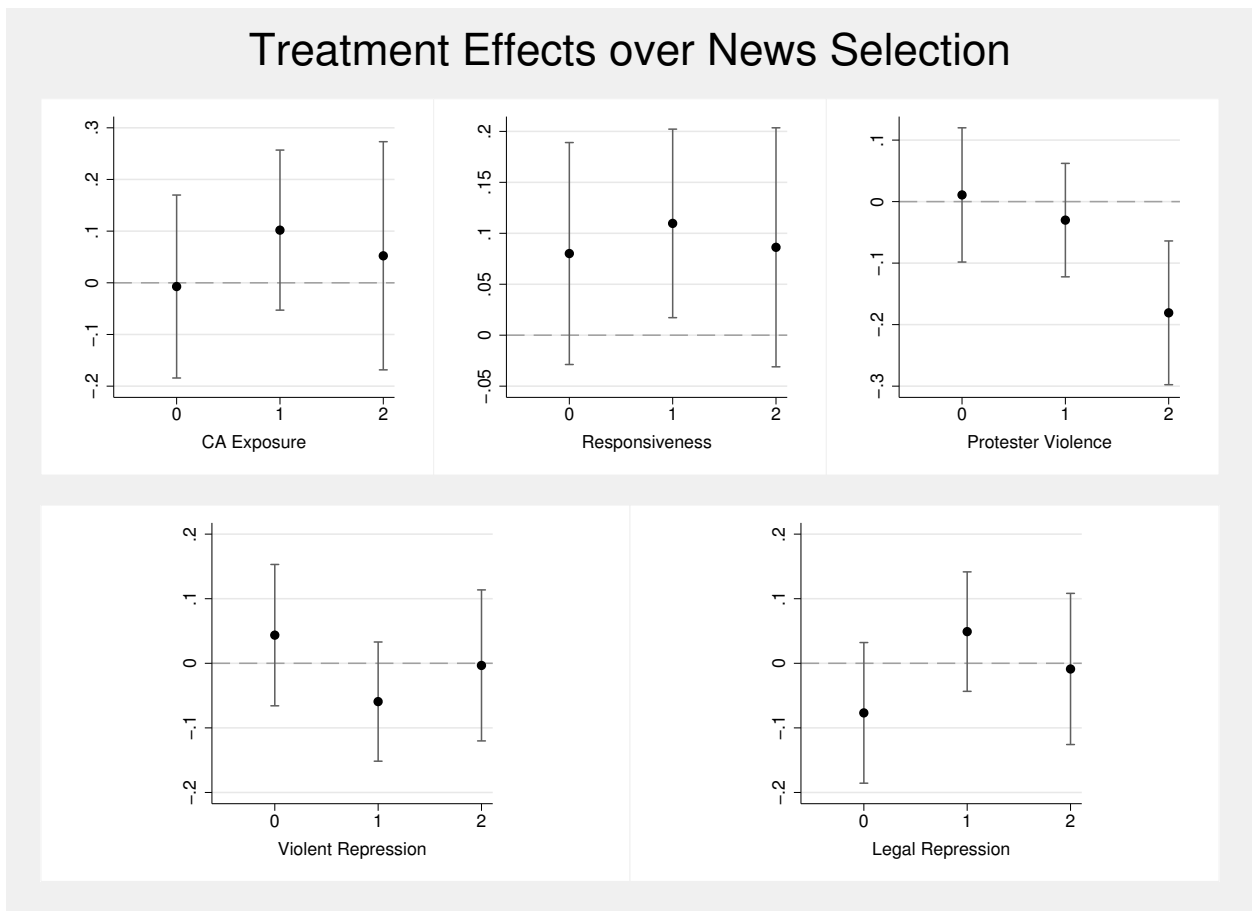
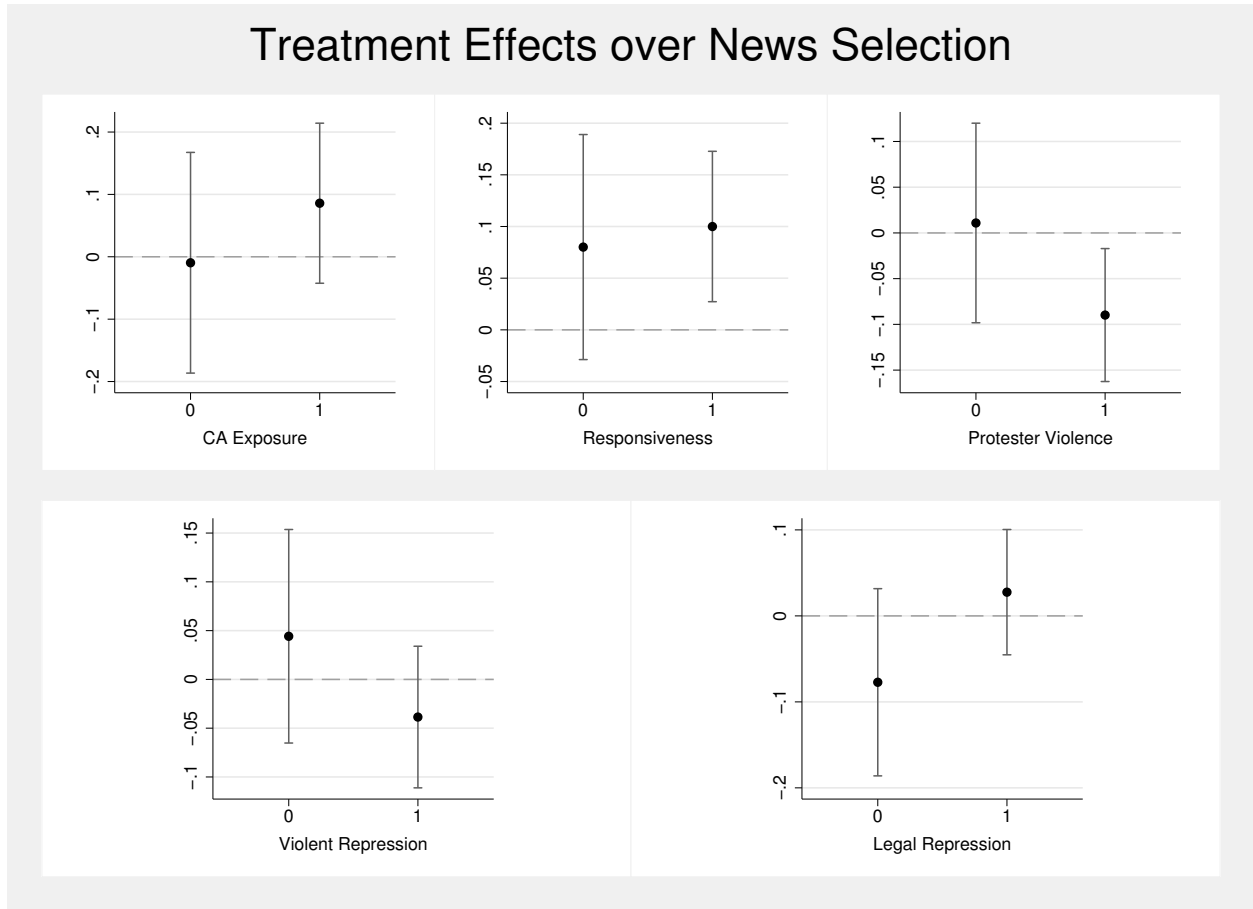


Figure 19: Heterogeneous effects of protest messages over reading interests(recoded)



are not statistically significant.

These findings reject H5.3. They suggest that reading interests cannot moderate the treatments of protest messages. Protest messages exert similar effects on audiences who are actively looking for protest news and those who are accidentally exposed to it.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter discusses how individual audiences' backgrounds affects their interpretation of the protest messages. It explores two potential factors that may matter — their political

trust in the government and their self-selection tendency on policy-oriented protest messages.

While previous literature disagrees on the effects of political trust on political participation, this chapter argues that political trust may play a moderating role when audiences digest the protest messages. Self-confirmation bias lead high-trust audiences to pay more attention to the government behaviors, and low-trust audiences to pay more attention to the protesters. The empirical evidence generally fulfills the expectation except that the government repression has no effects. These findings show that protest messages can affect both the high trust group and the low trust groups, while the influential content (i.e. the government or protester behaviors) differs. As Chapter 3 shows, the government responsiveness is more likely to appear in propaganda outlets. If high-trust audiences read about government responsiveness, their participation willingness increases significantly. However, to those people who lose their confidence in the government, reading protest stories on propaganda outlets may not encourage their participation. Consequently, higher trust gives rise to easier mobilization by protest messages in propaganda outlets. When the government wants to maintain popular supports by responsiveness, the support can lead to an increase of social demands and more protests.

In addition, this chapter fails to find evidence on the moderating effects of reading interests. It suggests that familiarity and interests of domestic protest may not influence the mobilizing effects of protest messages. When a new protest event occurs, people with high or low interests in relevant news are equally encouraged (or discouraged) to participate in protests. Since statistical null finding cannot provide strong confidence on

“no effects,” such explanation remains speculative. Further evidence should be collected on the effects of reading interests on those of protest messages.

The findings in this chapter also include several limitations. The trust manipulation reduces the endogeneity issue, but it is artificial and short-term. Since political trust is usually seen as a long-term political attitude that is unlikely to change swiftly, evidence with longer time-span is needed to further explore the moderating effects of trust. Second, this chapter only tries to theorize two factors that may moderate the interpretation of protest messages. Other attributes of individual audiences, such as their education background or affinity to the regime, may also moderate the effects of protest messages on participation. In the future, more theoretical works can be done on how individuals interpret protest messages.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

In this dissertation, I proposed an information model to explain how protest events are shaped through a partially free media environment, and how they affect audiences' participation willingness in an authoritarian context. The model argues that the most influential factors in a protest message are the behaviors of the government and the protesters — the government's repression and responsiveness, and the protesters' participation and violence. It argues that media selectively report these factors according to their preference. For example, the propaganda outlets highlight the government responsiveness while concealing government repression, opposite to the non-propaganda outlets. By a survey experiment, I find that government responsiveness encourages protest participation, and that protesters' violence reduces participation, while repression has no effects. I further find that political trust can moderate people's attention to these behaviors of the government and the protesters, while reading interests have no effects. To summarize, I find that propaganda outlets may generate an undesirable outcome to the

regime: they encourage protest participation among audiences by demonstrating the responsiveness of the government.

Then, since protest messages may still encourage further protests even they are published and tailored by propaganda outlets, why does the regime still allow them to go into the media? Studies like King et al. (2013) have argued that the regime prefers to censor protests. Yet other studies like Lorentzen (2017) also suggest that the regime may tolerate protests — but not necessarily the news about protest. However, as our empirical data shows, protest messages are still available, although not frequently, on Chinese professional media whose publication needs to undergo strictly political censors.

The Chinese regime may indeed want to keep the volume of protest articles low on media, while it still allows protest messages to be publish. Why? My answer is that reporting protest is helpful for the retaining of popular support. In Shao (2018), I find that the regime tends to censor political challenges (criticism against the regime's legitimacy) rather than performance challenges (criticism against the regime's governance). This result is robust when I included collective action potential into consideration. In other words, if the protest only targets on performance issues, the regime has no incentives to block the public discussion completely. This argument is also consistent with Tang (2016)'s finding that the concerns of popular support drive Chinese officials to “hyper-respond” to citizenry complaints.

## Informational Model: Contributions and Limitations

The information model theorizes the mechanism on how macro-structural conditions transfer into individual citizens participation decisions. It emphasizes the importance of information. It is crucial for citizens to perceive the resources, opportunities, constraints and threats via the information (media) environment. Therefore, citizen participation can be determined by how the media environment shapes the information and how they then perceive and interpret such information. This dissertation focuses on one particular type of information, protest messages, which was widely regarded as “dangerous” for autocrats as it may encourage more protest. However, few studies actually use experimental methods to understand why, or how such messages become dangerous when they reach and are processed by audiences, the ordinary citizens. This dissertation breaks down the protest messages into different behaviors of the government and the protesters. It discusses how these behaviors are selectively reported by media, and for each behavior, what the effect would be on protest participation. At the individual level, it provides experimental evidence of the consequences of reading a domestic protest messages.

By discussing the effects of protest messages, this dissertation also provides new evidence on how protests spread, via an information environment, to audiences (or potential new protest participants). It shows that the micro mechanism of protest diffusion relies on a process of political communication — how media outlets shape the messages and how audiences interpret them. It finds that at the information level, some factors, such as government repression, become less effective for protest diffusion. This finding expands the literature on protest diffusion that emphasizes the role of media (Andrews and Biggs 2006;

Kern 2011). The former literature explained the role of media by its function of informing and cultural linkages (Gerbaudo 2013; Myers 2000), while this dissertation proposes that media report helps citizens to recognize the socio-political environment and assess the costs and benefits of protest participation. The studies of protest diffusion focus on the aggregate level or event level. For example, Kern (2011) compared the East German regions that had and had not received West Germany television stations. Zhang (2015) analyzed the role of protest leadership across protest events in China. González-Bailón et al. (2013) explored the social networks that diffuse the protest event. These studies address how protest information is spread. On the other hand, this dissertation focuses on how individuals process such information and turn it into their own participation when they receive relevant messages from various channels. Furthermore, this dissertation examines the diffusive elements in a protest message in detail and tests which element of protest messages is most influential to the diffusion process.

The findings of this dissertation also contribute to the studies of public opinion in China by providing new evidence to the “dictator dilemma” — the perverse cycle of government responsiveness and increasing demands from the society. The concept of dictator dilemma was derived from the information problem of dictators — when their power and cruelty expand, they have less information about the potential threats to their throne (Wintrobe 1998). This dilemma was expanded in the Chinese context by Dickson (2016), who argued that the Communist Party’s strategies for survival might also bear its demise. Benign behaviors to citizens encourage citizens to demand more rights and freedoms from the regime. Opening public consultation and cultivating civil society nurture higher demand



from the citizens to the regime and thus the potential opposition emerges (Dickson 2016, pp. 302-303). The findings of this dissertation provide evidence of dictator dilemma from the aspect of responsiveness to policy-oriented protests. While Dickson (2016) does not specify the mechanism, this dissertation provides evidence that government responsiveness increases perceived efficacy of protest, rather than grievances or political trust, and then encourages more participation. The government addressed protesters' concerns by making concession, while more concessions inform citizens that protests are an effective to obtain desirable policy outcomes. Thus, citizens are more likely to choose the same strategy of participation when they disagree with the regime's policy. Consequently, protests proliferate.

Similarly, the findings of this dissertation can also make a conversation with Tang (2016)'s "populist authoritarianism." Similar to Dickson (2016), Tang (2016) argues that the regime is eager to maintain popular support; although, Tang emphasizes the importance of the "mass-line campaign" engraved in the Communist Party's working principle. The "mass-line campaign" requires the government to "hyper-respond" to citizenry grievances. It encourages party cadres to circumvent the institutional procedures to directly address the governance problems. Chinese citizens also get used to such governance style — rather than using institutional procedures, they would rather go to a protest and directly voice their concerns to the government leadership. This is why the governance in China contains a "populist" element. Consequently, Tang believes that populist authoritarianism can be unstable once the government fails to meet citizens' expectation. This dissertation agrees that the major concerns of the regime to be responsive is for popular support. Different

from Tang, I show that citizens' protest participation should not be regarded as a simple story of political trust (or support). Citizens strategically choose their behavior according to the information they obtain. Rather than following their trust in the government, they estimate the likelihood of success of protest before decide what to do. Political trust works as a moderator to affect citizens' interpretation of what they read, but the final determinant is their estimated probability of success.

The exploration of the information model in this dissertation was limited on the types of information that I can examine. Protest messages are not the only type of information that audiences use to determine their future protest participation. Other types of information include the regime's propaganda, the related information about the target policies, and the protest messages in foreign countries. These types of information have different elements that can mobilize audiences, and change audiences' participation willingness via different mechanisms. In the future, it is worth studying how other types of protest-relevant information can change people's decision to participate in protest.

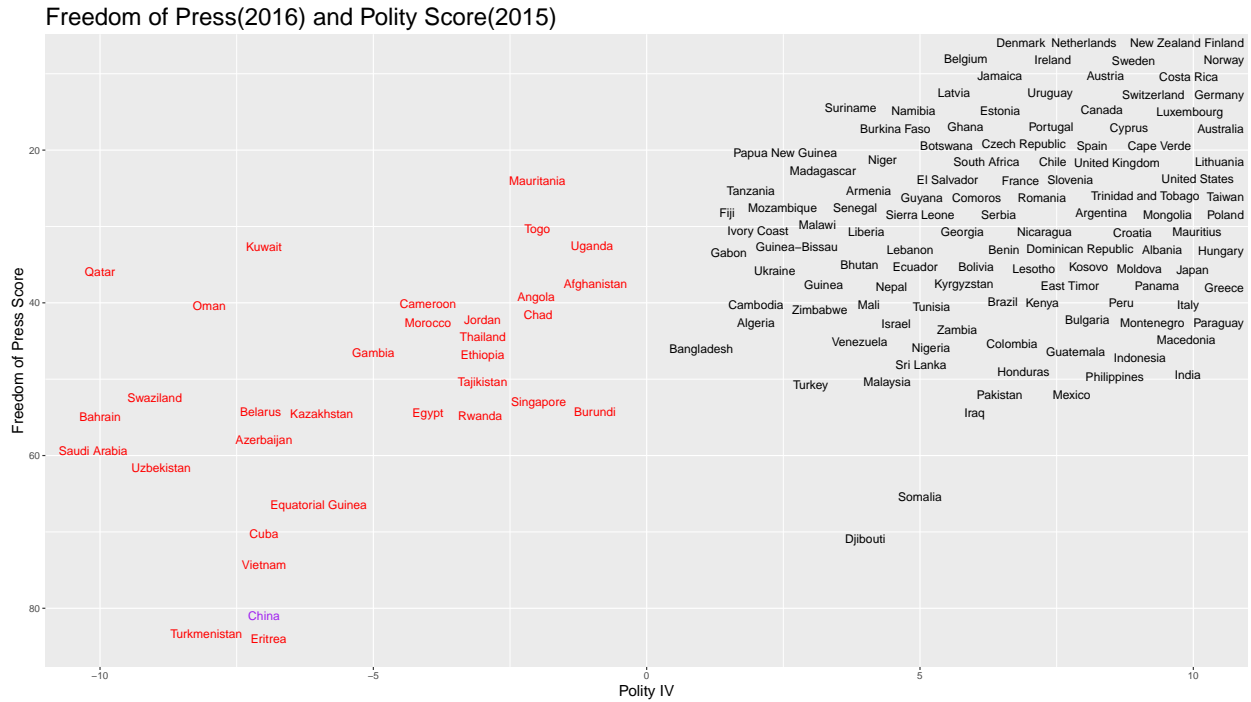
The information model assumes that audiences are rational actors who can process the protest messages rationally and calculate their benefits and losses according to the information they obtain. Their behavioral outcome is a function of cost-benefit analysis. However, protest participation can also be affected by factors irrelevant to rationality. For example, Stürmer and Simon (2009) suggest anger may increase participants' willingness to protest. Similar findings showed that the effects of anger require certain conditions, such as the generation of collective claims or interaction with ideology, instrumentality and identity (Stekelenburg et al. 2011; van Troost et al. 2013). Jasper (1998) suggests that emotions on

protest participation are reactions to information and events. Saab et al. (2015) suggest that moral outrage and sympathy is an alternative path for protest participation outside political efficacy. In future studies, it is also worth studying how information, such as protest messages, stimulates audiences' emotions that facilitates or impair their participation.

This dissertation only explores two types of personal background that may cause heterogeneous interpretation of protest messages. Further studies should be conducted to explore other variables that may affect the effects of protest messages onto protest participation.

The major empirical work of this dissertation comes from China, although my research question asks how protests may perform in an authoritarian context, which is broader than just one country. Then, how does the information model travel outside the Chinese context? To understand this, we need to understand the conditions that the information model assumes. First, the information model requires a partially-free media environment in which 1) citizens are able to obtain socio-political information from both propaganda and non-propaganda outlets, and 2) the government has certain capacities to block the free flow of information. In this way, citizens can be exposed to heterogeneous stories of the same protest event. Second, citizens should have confidence in the government' willingness to address their grievances so that policy-oriented protests do not always escalate to politics-oriented ones. In other words, it requires a chance, or some space within the institutional or political atmosphere, for citizens to "win" in their opposition of a policy decision. According to these two conditions, the information model can be applied to

Figure 20: Scatter plot of countries over Freedom of Press and Democracy



authoritarian regimes that have equal or slightly higher media freedom than China, and those which are more democratic (as a signal of responsiveness) than China.

Figure 20 shows the scatter plot of freedom of press and polity score.<sup>31</sup> The countries in red have a polity score lower than zero and are coded as “authoritarian.” China was highlighted in purple. Among 33 authoritarian regimes in 2015, only seven countries have polity score lower than China, and two countries have a lower freedom of press score lower than China. In other words, information model can be at least applied to the rest of the 24 countries labeled as authoritarian. It can also be applied to countries that are conventionally believed as authoritarian but labeled with somewhat “democratic” elements in polity scores, such as Pakistan, Somalia, Turkey, Venezuela, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Russia and Cambodia, etc. These countries vary from China because of a different degree

<sup>31</sup>Source of freedom of press data: <http://bit.ly/2tnniot>; source of polity score: <http://bit.ly/2tk6i2M>. North Korea was excluded. The position of points were randomly jittered for display purpose.

of media environment heterogeneity, different levels of responsiveness and different levels of distinction between policy-oriented and politics-oriented grievances. However, the domestic protest messages should go through a similar mechanism to affect audiences in these countries.

This dissertation proposes the information model to explain how protest messages affects individuals' participation. The model indicates that what we perceive will have a strong effect on what we choose to do. This implication does not only work in authoritarian contexts. Unfortunately, fragmentation of media exposure and polarization of media stance also exist in the democracies (Druckman et al. 2013; Prior 2013; Webster and Ksiazek 2012). It imposes a challenge to our understanding of the utility of information freedom and the standard to become an informed and responsible citizen. A healthy public opinion should overcome the heterogeneous media environment, no matter the institutional context, or at least be aware of the possibility of limited or biased policy information available in the media. Citizens, ideally, should collect more comprehensive messages, including the ones they do not favor, before they form any policy preferences and political actions. The information model indicates tremendous challenges to practitioners who work on expanding or maintaining the media freedom and an informed public. It also suggests that to become an informed citizen for political decisions is tough in nowadays within our fragmented media environment.

# Appendix A

## Appendices for Chapters

### A.1 Survey Questions and Treatments in Chinese

For the order of this section, see Table 5.

#### A.1.1 Demographic Questions

1. 您的性别? (Your gender?)

(a) 男(Male)

(b) 女(Female)

2. 您的年龄段? (Your age?)

(a) 18岁以下(Under 18)

(b) 18-25

- (c) 26-30
- (d) 31-40
- (e) 41-50
- (f) 51-60
- (g) 60以上(Above 60)

3. 您的学历是? (Your Education?)

- (a) 初中及以下(Junior high or Below)
- (b) 高中或中专(Senior high or similar)
- (c) 大学本科或专科(College or similar)
- (d) 研究生及以上(Graduate or above)

4. 请问您的年收入在哪个区间? (Your annual income (in RMB)?)

- (a) 2万元以下(>20K)
- (b) 2万-3万(20K-30K)
- (c) 3万-6万(30K-60K)
- (d) 6万-15万(60K-150K)
- (e) 15万-50万(150K-500K)
- (f) 50万以上(>500K)

5. 您是否是共产党员? (Are you a CCP member? )

- (a) 是(Yes)

(b) 否(No)

6. 您在哪里工作? (如果目前没有工作或已退休, 请填写此前工作过最长时间的机构) (Where do you work? If you are unemployed or retired, answer the workplace that you work for the longest)

(a) 我是学生(Student)

(b) 私营企业(Private Firms)

(c) 外企或国外机构(Foreign firms or agencies)

(d) 政府部门(Government)

(e) (非国有)社会组织(NGO)

(f) 务农(Farming)

(g) 国有事业单位(科教文卫) (State-owned non-profit (Science, Education, Culture, Health))

(h) 个体户(Self-employed)

(i) 国有企业(State-owned Enterprises)

(j) 其他(Other)

7. 你的身体健康状况是? (How is your health)

(a) 非常健康Very healthy

(b) 比较健康Somewhat healthy

(c) 一般So-so

(d) 比较不健康Somewhat unhealthy



- (e) 非常不健康Very unhealthy
8. 总体而言，你对你所在城市的环境污染状况的感觉是： In general, how do you feel about the pollution in your city?
- (a) 丝毫不担心Not worried at all
- (b) 不担心Not worried
- (c) 一般So-so
- (d) 担心Somewhat worried
- (e) 非常担心Very worried
9. 你居住的省份（包括自治区或直辖市）是？（如果你现在居住在海外，请选择你的家乡省市） Which province/Autonomous Zone/Municipal do you stay? If you do not live in China now, please write down your home province.

### **A.1.2 Treatments of Trust (Section 5.3)**

1. High Trust 1: 你觉得政府的哪一个政策措施让你最满意？请用一句话写下来.字数不限.
2. High Trust 2: 下面有十个政策议题，请选出你认为政府实施过程中让人很满意的政策，可多选.你最少可以选0个，最多可以选5个.
- 空气质量改善(air condition improved)
  - 互联网服务越来越快(Internet getting faster)
  - 金融服务有保障(Financial service guarantee)

- 交通路桥越来越方便(Transportation convenient)
- 就业机会多( Abundant employment oppourtunities)
- 看病越来越容易(Easy for Seeing a doctor)
- 房价可以接受(Acceptable Housing price)
- 外交捍卫我国尊严(Diplomats defend the dignity of our countries)
- 食品安全让人放心(Reliable food safety)
- 物价不高(Mild inflation)

3. Low Trust 1: 你觉得政府的哪一个政策措施让你最不满意? 请用一句话写下来.字数不限

4. Low Trust 2:下面有十个政策议题, 请选出你认为政府实施过程中让人不满意的政策, 可多选.你最少可以选0个, 最多可以选5个.

- 空气污染严重(air pollution serious)
- 互联网网速太慢(Internet speed too slow)
- 金融服务效率低(Financial service inefficient)
- 交通堵塞(Traffic too much)
- 就业机会减少( Not enough employment oppourtunities)
- 看病排队太久(Too long the line for doctor visit)
- 房价太高(Inaffordable housing price)
- 护照免签国家太少(Too few no-visa countries)
- 食品安全不放心(Worrisome food safety)

- 物价上涨太快(High inflation)

5. Trust Manipulation Check 1(S1): 总体而言, 政府总是试图在做正确的事

6. Trust Manipulation Check 1(S2): 总体而言, 我对政府的表现很满意

### **A.1.3 Question of Reading Interest (Section 5.3)**

假设你在浏览一个新闻网站, 上面有以下五条新闻, 按照平时的阅读习惯, 你会选择哪一条来阅读? (Assumed that you were reading a news website. There are five articles.

According to your reading habits, which one would you choose to read? )

(a) 化学工业如何在环保和发展中取得平衡(Cheical Industry: How to make balance between environment and development )

(b) 王俊凯鹿晗微博流量破世界纪录(Microblogs of Wang Junkai and Luhan reached record-breaking traffic)

(c) 阿根廷媒体批评梅西缺乏雄心(Argentine media criticized Messi's lack of ambition)

(d) 某地市民上街反对化学工厂项目(Citizens went on the street against chemical plant project)

(e) 环保部制定新的信息公开规定(Ministry of Environment announced new rules for transparency)

### **A.1.4 Protest Message Treatment in Section 4.3**

2012年7月1日, 数百名学生聚集在四川什邡市政府大楼前抗议铅铜冶炼厂项目, 抗议者携带横幅, 上面写

有“团结起来，为下一代保护环境”、“保卫家园，反对化工厂建设”或“我们可以牺牲，我们是90后”等字样.第二天，参与人数达到数千人. [CA Exposure]

有市民情绪激动，强行冲破警戒线，进入市委机关，砸毁一楼大厅8扇橱窗玻璃、3个宣传栏，4个宣传展板. [Protester violence]

警方使用催泪弹和震爆弹驱散民众. [Violent repression]

当地政府发布《关于严禁非法集会、游行、示威活动的通告》，并最终拘捕了27人. [Legal repression]

2012年7月3日下午，什邡市委书记接受媒体采访时表示，什邡今后不再建设钼铜项目.[Government responsiveness]

### **A.1.5 Protest Exposure Outlets in Section 3.3)**

以下是一些信息获取渠道，哪个渠道中你得到最多有关环境群体性事件的消息？

- (a) 国内报纸、电视台或新闻网站
- (b) 政府网站、政务微博或微信
- (c) 好友私下交谈、微博网友或微信朋友圈转发
- (d) 外国新闻媒体或网站

### **A.1.6 Protest Participation and Perception**

#### **Participation in Section 4.3**

你的地方政府要在你居住地郊区建一个钼铜冶炼厂.这个计划在你的邻居和朋友圈内引起了激烈的讨论.有些市民认为该计划能促进经济发展，有些市民则企图向政府表达他们的反对意见.对化学工厂的计划，假如你要反对，可能会采取什么行动？请选择“肯定参加”，“倾向参加”，“倾向不参加”或“肯定不参加”

## Perception in Section 4.3 and Section 3.3

下面是一些有关环境群体性事件的陈述.请按照自己日常观察体会,选择“非常同意”,“同意”,“不同意”或“非常不同意”.

1. Detain: 在我听说的这些事件里,参与市民很可能会被政府拘留
2. Responsiveness: 在我听说的这些事件里,大多数参与市民都能得到满意的结果
3. Violence: 在我听说的这些事件里,参与市民很可能会遭受暴力

### A.1.7 Grievances

1. Air quality drop: 这个项目会严重降低我们的空气质量
2. Chemical Harmful: 我觉得钨铜冶炼厂对民众很有害
3. My Life Threatened: 我觉得我的生命安全受到威胁.

### A.1.8 Efficacy

1. Gov.Concede: 如果很多人上街反对这个计划,政府将不会坚持实施.
2. Media Coverage: 如果我们的抱怨被媒体报道了,政府将会停止计划的实施.
3. Superior Gov.: 如果我们表达反对,上级省(直辖市)政府会站在我们一边.
4. Protest Efficacy: 在市中心主马路集体“散步”最有可能改变政府的决定.

### A.1.9 Trust

1. Policy Trust: 我信任政府制定的政策方针
2. System Trust: 我国现有的体制符合我国现有国情
3. Response Trust: 只要民众提出要求,我们的政府就会尽量满足.

## A.2 Appendix for Chapter 2

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics of CGSS2010

	mean	sd	min	max
Exposure to Protest	0.123	0.328	0	1
Voting	0.487	0.500	0	1
Help Community	0.089	0.285	0	1
Suggest to Community	0.135	0.342	0	1
Petition	0.014	0.116	0	1
Co-Letter	0.007	0.085	0	1
Report to Media	0.012	0.107	0	1
Report to Gov.	0.030	0.170	0	1
Protest	0.007	0.085	0	1
Reading Newspaper[1-5]	2.087	1.346	1	5
Internet Use[1-5]	2.032	1.581	1	5
Male	0.482	0.500	0	1
Age[1-4]	2.690	0.984	1	4
Education[1-4]	2.371	0.896	1	4
Religious	0.130	0.336	0	1
Ethnic Minority	0.130	0.336	0	1
Log Income	7.077	4.067	0	16
CCP Member	0.124	0.330	0	1
Depress[1-5]	2.146	1.025	1	5
Health[1-5]	3.615	1.115	1	5
Trust to Center	4.378	0.794	1	5
Trust to Local	3.685	1.096	1	5
Gov. Treat Me Bad	0.091	0.288	0	1
Observations		11783		

Table 10: The effects of protest exposure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Voting	Help Community	Suggest to Community	Petition	Co-Letter	Report to Media	Report to Gov.	Protest
Exposure to Protest	-0.14** (0.07)	0.30*** (0.11)	0.32*** (0.09)	2.78*** (0.24)	2.00*** (0.27)	0.84*** (0.24)	0.87*** (0.16)	2.91*** (0.29)
Reading Newspaper[1-5]	-0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.20** (0.09)	0.31*** (0.09)	0.19*** (0.05)	0.04 (0.10)
Internet Use[1-5]	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.18** (0.09)	0.05 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.09)	-0.10* (0.06)	-0.24* (0.15)
Male	0.20*** (0.04)	0.02 (0.08)	0.20*** (0.06)	0.26 (0.22)	-0.03 (0.25)	0.47** (0.21)	0.14 (0.13)	0.01 (0.26)
Age[1-4]	0.27*** (0.03)	0.10** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.09)	0.19 (0.14)	0.07 (0.15)	0.14 (0.12)	0.09 (0.09)	0.08 (0.17)
Education[1-4]	-0.21*** (0.03)	-0.06 (0.06)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.23 (0.16)	-0.13 (0.18)	0.08 (0.18)	0.15 (0.10)	-0.23 (0.23)
Religious	0.02 (0.07)	0.27** (0.11)	0.25*** (0.09)	0.07 (0.26)	0.29 (0.31)	0.37 (0.28)	0.32* (0.19)	0.58* (0.30)
Log Income	0.02*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)	0.07** (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	0.05 (0.04)
CCP Member	0.10 (0.07)	1.25*** (0.11)	0.77*** (0.09)	0.50 (0.35)	0.32 (0.34)	0.07 (0.29)	0.64*** (0.18)	0.37 (0.41)
Depress[1-5]	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)	0.19* (0.10)	0.05 (0.12)	0.11 (0.11)	0.12* (0.07)	0.20 (0.13)
Health[1-5]	-0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	0.14 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.14)	0.04 (0.12)	0.00 (0.07)	0.19* (0.10)
Trust to Center	0.09*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.06)	0.14*** (0.05)	0.05 (0.11)	0.15 (0.12)	-0.20* (0.12)	0.05 (0.08)	0.00 (0.13)
Trust to Local	0.16*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.23** (0.09)	-0.16 (0.12)	-0.13 (0.11)	-0.17*** (0.06)	-0.07 (0.12)
Gov. Treat Me Bad	0.20** (0.08)	0.29** (0.13)	0.65*** (0.10)	1.31*** (0.21)	1.55*** (0.26)	0.83*** (0.27)	1.11*** (0.15)	1.44*** (0.26)
Constant	-1.11*** (0.22)	-3.60*** (0.39)	-3.97*** (0.33)	-6.19*** (0.90)	-7.05*** (1.14)	-5.84*** (1.00)	-5.02*** (0.61)	-7.08*** (0.90)
Observations	11552	11559	11555	11557	11554	11550	11546	11544
Pseudo R-squared	0.070	0.046	0.049	0.248	0.176	0.077	0.080	0.245
Log Likelihood	-7480.10	-3247.09	-4329.75	-582.49	-426.74	-594.62	-1369.71	-404.30
Chi-Square	858.02	279.94	387.08	352.20	211.86	115.63	241.18	273.68

Logit estimator was used with robust standard errors, reweighted with the Weight provided by the survey. \* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

Table 11: Internet Exposure and Protest Participation

	Get Together		Petition		Protest	
	(1) Base	(2) Control	(3) All	(4) Base	(5) Control	(6) All
Internet Consumption	0.113*** (0.023)	0.009 (0.037)	0.171*** (0.033)	0.098* (0.054)	0.128*** (0.043)	0.006 (0.074)
Interests in Political News		-0.054 (0.060)		0.056 (0.106)		-0.009 (0.123)
Interests in Politics		0.237** (0.094)		0.125 (0.146)		-0.096 (0.159)
Politics Discussion		0.354*** (0.109)		0.320* (0.168)		0.375* (0.217)
Government Trust		-0.073 (0.078)		-0.163 (0.129)		-0.259** (0.124)
Perception of Democratic-ness		0.034 (0.097)		0.160 (0.153)		0.454** (0.192)
Confidence on System		-0.024 (0.080)		-0.014 (0.132)		-0.424*** (0.161)
Male		0.272** (0.136)		0.374 (0.230)		0.334 (0.275)
Age (1-5)		-0.120** (0.056)		-0.029 (0.090)		-0.006 (0.117)
Married		0.013 (0.169)		-0.052 (0.267)		-0.666** (0.305)
Education (1-4)		-0.043 (0.031)		0.068 (0.043)		-0.019 (0.055)
Religious		-0.041 (0.195)		-0.072 (0.314)		-0.056 (0.388)
Social Status (1-10)		-0.055 (0.039)		0.061 (0.059)		-0.082 (0.082)
Income (1-5)		-0.014 (0.083)		0.163 (0.143)		-0.158 (0.166)
Urban		0.053 (0.137)		-0.182 (0.218)		0.973*** (0.292)
Social Trust (3qs)		0.106 (0.106)		0.252 (0.202)		-0.022 (0.231)
Traditionalism		-0.054 (0.109)		0.053 (0.198)		0.490** (0.202)
Constant	-2.161*** (0.080)	-2.069*** (0.438)	-3.400*** (0.129)	-5.273*** (0.817)	-3.772*** (0.156)	-2.914*** (0.768)
Observations	3411	1790	3409	1792	3402	1789

Data source: ABS3(China). Rare-Event Logit estimator was used with robust standard errors, reweighted with the Weight provided by the survey. \* p<0.1, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01



## A.3 Appendix for Chapter 3

Table 12: Phrases for Baidu News

Phrase	Translation
昆明民众与城管冲突事件	Kunming people and urban management conflict
警民冲突	Clashes with police
群体冲突	Group conflict
市民散步反对	Residents walk against
市民上街反对	Citizens took to the streets against
市民游行	Citizens marched
居民请愿	Residents petition
江苏示威家长	Jiangsu demonstration parents
工人示威	Workers protest
下岗工人维权	Laid-off workers' rights
出租车罢工	The taxi strike
集体维权	The collective rights
群体事件	Mass incidents
宁波px事件	Ningbo px
婴儿维权西安	Baby activist in xi 'an
群体上访	Group petition
围堵政府	Their government
法院门口抄党章	At the gate of the court Copy the party constitution
成都px	Chengdu px.
市民示威	Public demonstrations
冲击政府	Impact of the government
抗议安宁PX炼油项目.	Peaceful protest PX refinery project.
冲击国家机关	The impact of a state organ
集体上访	Collective petitions
连云港游行	Lianyungang parade
集会游行	rally
集体游行	Collective demonstrations
集体示威	Collective demonstrations
山东游行	Shandong parade
群体性事件	Mass incidents
金山px	Jinshan px.
织里聚集	Zhili gathered
抗议堵路	Protest against the wall road
示威散步	A demonstration for a walk

## Top words of structural topic modeling (K= 15)

### Topic 1 Top Words:

Highest Prob: 门口, 市政府, 上访, 横幅, 县政府, 聚集, 大门

FREX: 市政府, 门口, 上访, 区政府, 横幅, 县政府, 县委

Lift: 县委, 市政府, 门口, 区政府, 省政府, 热闹, 信访局

Score: 县委, 门口, 市政府, 上访, 县政府, 横幅, 区政府

### Topic 2 Top Words:

Highest Prob: 维权, 广场, 维护, 投资, 权益, 诉求, 现场

FREX: 广场, 车主, 投资, 维权, 银行, 权益, 诈骗

Lift: 车主, 银行, 诈骗, 集资, 广场, 骗子, 客户

Score: 车主, 维权, 广场, 投资, 银行, 诈骗, 艰难

### Topic 3 Top Words:

Highest Prob: 农民工, 工资, 血汗钱, 讨薪, 拖欠, 民工, 回家

FREX: 农民工, 讨薪, 民工, 工资, 拖欠, 血汗钱, 工钱

Lift: 讨债, 农民工, 过个, 工钱, 年关, 讨薪, 民工

Score: 农民工, 工资, 讨债, 讨薪, 拖欠, 血汗钱, 民工

### Topic 4 Top Words:

Highest Prob: 罢工, 出租车, 司机, 示威, 公交车, 公交, 出租

FREX: 出租车, 罢工, 司机, 示威, 公交, 大罢工, 出租

Lift: 出租车, 司机, 罢工, 大罢工, 公交, 出租, 示威

Score: 出租车, 罢工, 司机, 大罢工, 公交, 示威, 出租

#### **Topic 5 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 政府, 老百姓, 人民, 百姓, 领导, 解决, 门前

FREX: 老百姓, 政府, 门前, 百姓, 做主, 人民政府, 人民

Lift: 门前, 父母官, 说理, 老百姓, 政府, 百姓, 办事

Score: 门前, 政府, 老百姓, 百姓, 人民, 做主, 人民政府

#### **Topic 6 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 村民, 农民, 土地, 拆迁, 强行, 强拆, 镇政府

FREX: 村民, 征地, 土地, 拆迁, 农民, 强拆, 村里

Lift: 村官, 耕地, 村干部, 征地, 强征, 村民, 强占

Score: 村民, 村官, 土地, 农民, 征地, 强拆, 拆迁

#### **Topic 7 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 小区, 业主, 物业, 花园, 车位, 收费, 电梯

FREX: 物业, 车位, 小区, 花园, 电梯, 供暖, 物业公司

Lift: 车位, 物业公司, 物业, 物业费, 供暖, 电梯, 暖气

Score: 车位, 业主, 小区, 物业, 花园, 供暖, 电梯

**Topic 8 Top Words:** Highest Prob: 警察, 打人, 特警, 城管, 殴打, 群众, 老人

FREX: 打人, 城管, 警察, 特警, 武警, 抓人, 动手

Lift: 城管, 打人, 动手, 协警, 人民警察, 特警, 警察

Score: 城管, 警察, 打人, 特警, 殴打, 执法, 暴力

### **Topic 9 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 公司, 员工, 工人, 老板, 有限公司, 集团, 职工

FREX: 员工, 职工, 有限公司, 公司, 工人工资, 工人, 老板

Lift: 工人工资, 员工工资, 员工, 厂里, 倒闭, 职工, 煤矿

Score: 工人工资, 员工, 工人, 公司, 有限公司, 老板, 职工

### **Topic 10 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 学校, 孩子, 学生, 老师, 家长, 教师, 小学

FREX: 老师, 学生, 教师, 学校, 家长, 学院, 中学

Lift: 教师, 老师, 学院, 学生, 教育局, 中学, 学校

Score: 老师, 学校, 学生, 教师, 家长, 孩子, 小学

### **Topic 11 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 医院, 家属, 派出所, 民警, 死亡, 说法, 医生

FREX: 家属, 医院, 医生, 死者, 死亡, 民警, 死者家属

Lift: 医生, 死者家属, 死者, 家属, 尸体, 医院, 父亲

Score: 医生, 医院, 家属, 死者, 死亡, 尸体, 死者家属

### **Topic 12 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 市场, 商户, 人员, 项目, 现场, 群众, 行为

FREX: 市场, 商户, 经营, 依法, 租金, 商场, 律师

Lift: 市场, 商户, 商场, 依法, 房租, 租金, 经营

Score: 市场, 商户, 租金, 项目, 经营, 商场, 活动

**Topic 13 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 抗议, 居民, 生活, 垃圾, 家园, 污染, 社区

FREX: 垃圾, 污染, 幼儿园, 家园, 社区, 健康, 环境

Lift: 幼儿园, 健康, 污染, 垃圾, 社区, 家园, 环境

Score: 幼儿园, 居民, 污染, 垃圾, 抗议, 家园, 社区

**Topic 14 Top Words:**

Highest Prob: 业主, 开发商, 维权, 房子, 交房, 国际, 房地产

FREX: 交房, 开发商, 楼盘, 地产, 售楼, 房地产, 欺诈

Lift: 公馆, 烂尾, 烂尾楼, 交房, 延期, 欺诈, 售楼

Score: 业主, 公馆, 开发商, 交房, 维权, 房子, 售楼

**Topic 15 Top Words:** Highest Prob: 堵路, 闹事, 大道, 车辆, 交通, 拦路, 路口

FREX: 堵路, 拦路, 大道, 路口, 马路, 绕行, 堵死

Lift: 交叉口, 绕行, 堵路, 十字路口, 堵死, 马路, 拦路

Score: 交叉口, 堵路, 拦路, 大道, 绕行, 交通, 车辆

Table 13: Outlet Exposure and Perception

	Detain		Responsiveness		Violence	
	(1) OLS	(2) OLogit	(3) OLS	(4) OLogit	(5) OLS	(6) OLogit
Propaganda Outlet	-0.13*** (0.03)	-0.37*** (0.08)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.37*** (0.08)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.20** (0.08)
CA Exposure	0.00 (0.06)	0.05 (0.15)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.28* (0.15)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.15)
Responsiveness	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.08)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.09)	0.03 (0.03)	0.08 (0.08)
Protester Violence	0.06** (0.03)	0.17** (0.08)	0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.08)	0.08** (0.03)	0.21** (0.08)
Violent Repression	0.05 (0.03)	0.15* (0.08)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.09)	0.06* (0.03)	0.17** (0.08)
Legal Repression	0.22*** (0.03)	0.64*** (0.09)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.18** (0.09)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.31*** (0.08)
Male[0-1]	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.08)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.08)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.08)
Age[1-3]	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.11* (0.06)	0.02 (0.02)	0.07 (0.06)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.14** (0.06)
College[0-1]	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.17* (0.09)	-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.24*** (0.09)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.15 (0.09)
Income>60K[0-1]	0.03 (0.03)	0.08 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.07 (0.09)	0.02 (0.04)	0.05 (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]	0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.10)	0.13*** (0.04)	0.36*** (0.10)	-0.00 (0.04)	0.03 (0.10)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.11 (0.11)	0.01 (0.04)	0.05 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.16 (0.10)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.19)	0.07 (0.06)	0.19 (0.18)	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.20 (0.18)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.06)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.06)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	0.03** (0.02)	0.09** (0.04)	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.17*** (0.04)	0.04** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.62*** (0.13)	-2.89*** (0.36)	2.21*** (0.12)	-2.22*** (0.35)	2.58*** (0.13)	-2.54*** (0.34)
cut2		-0.32 (0.35)		0.85** (0.34)		-0.14 (0.33)
cut3		2.51*** (0.36)		3.46*** (0.35)		2.42*** (0.34)
Observations	2401	2401	2401	2401	2401	2401
(Pseudo) $R^2$	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.01
Log Likelihood	-2546.33	-2528.22	-2469.92	-2450.56	-2701.09	-2684.27
Chi-Square		104.24		112.65		55.39

## A.4 Appendix for Chapter 4

Table 14: Linear Regression Results

	Separate Regression		Combined Regression	
	(1) OLS	(2) OLogit	(3) OLS	(4) OLogit
CA Exposure	0.04 (0.06)	0.12 (0.14)	0.04 (0.06)	0.12 (0.14)
Responsiveness	0.10*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.08)	0.10*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.08)
Protester Violence	-0.06* (0.04)	-0.14* (0.08)	-0.06* (0.04)	-0.14* (0.08)
Violent Repression	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.08)		
Legal Repression	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.08)		
Total Repression			-0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.06)
Male[0-1]	0.07** (0.04)	0.15* (0.08)	0.07** (0.04)	0.15* (0.08)
Age[1-3]	0.07*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.06)	0.07*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.06)
College[0-1]	-0.09** (0.04)	-0.17* (0.09)	-0.09** (0.04)	-0.17* (0.09)
Income >60K[0-1]	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]	0.05 (0.04)	0.12 (0.10)	0.05 (0.04)	0.12 (0.10)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.08* (0.05)	-0.20* (0.11)	-0.08* (0.05)	-0.20* (0.11)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.22 (0.19)	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.22 (0.19)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.06)	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)	0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.00*** (0.15)	-0.95*** (0.33)	2.00*** (0.15)	-0.95*** (0.33)
cut2		1.16*** (0.33)		1.16*** (0.33)
cut3		3.03*** (0.34)		3.03*** (0.34)
Observations	2354	2354	2354	2354
(Pseudo) R-squared	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01
Log Likelihood		-2828.34		-2828.34
chi2	124	41.05		40.96



Table 15: Perception after Treatments

	Detain		Responsiveness		Violence	
	(1) OLS	(2) OLogit	(3) OLS	(4) OLogit	(5) OLS	(6) OLogit
CA Exposure	-0.01 (0.06)	0.03 (0.15)	-0.09* (0.05)	-0.25* (0.15)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.11 (0.14)
Responsiveness	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.08)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.08)	0.03 (0.03)	0.08 (0.08)
Protester Violence	0.06** (0.03)	0.16* (0.08)	0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.08)	0.08** (0.03)	0.20** (0.08)
Violent Repression	0.05 (0.03)	0.15* (0.08)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.09)	0.06* (0.03)	0.18** (0.08)
Legal Repression	0.23*** (0.03)	0.65*** (0.08)	-0.06** (0.03)	-0.20** (0.09)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.32*** (0.08)
Male[0-1]	0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.08)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.08)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.08)
Age[1-3]	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.12** (0.06)	0.03 (0.02)	0.09 (0.06)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.14** (0.06)
College[0-1]	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.17* (0.09)	-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.24*** (0.09)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.15 (0.09)
Income >60K[0-1]	0.03 (0.03)	0.09 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.09 (0.09)	0.03 (0.04)	0.05 (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]	0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.10)	0.13*** (0.04)	0.36*** (0.10)	-0.00 (0.04)	0.03 (0.10)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.11 (0.11)	0.02 (0.04)	0.06 (0.11)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.17 (0.10)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.19)	0.07 (0.06)	0.17 (0.17)	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.19 (0.18)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.06)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.06)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	0.03** (0.02)	0.08* (0.04)	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.17*** (0.04)	0.04** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.58*** (0.13)	-2.78*** (0.36)	2.25*** (0.12)	-2.32*** (0.35)	2.55*** (0.13)	-2.47*** (0.34)
cut2		-0.21 (0.35)		0.73** (0.34)		-0.07 (0.33)
cut3		2.59*** (0.36)		3.33*** (0.35)		2.48*** (0.34)
Observations	2401	2401	2401	2401	2401	2401
(Pseudo) R-squared	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01
Log Likelihood		-2538.88		-2460.77		-2687.38
Chi-Square		89.89		95.24		49.64

Table 16: Mechanism Test:Political Grievances

	Air Quality Drop		Chemical Harmful		My Life Threatened	
	(1) OLS	(2) OLogit	(3) OLS	(4) OLogit	(5) OLS	(6) OLogit
CA Exposure	0.16*** (0.05)	0.45*** (0.15)	0.12** (0.05)	0.36** (0.15)	0.06 (0.06)	0.13 (0.15)
Responsiveness	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.09)	0.02 (0.03)	0.07 (0.08)
Protester Violence	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.09 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.09 (0.09)	0.03 (0.03)	0.06 (0.08)
Violent Repression	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.09)	0.00 (0.03)	0.03 (0.09)	0.00 (0.03)	0.02 (0.08)
Legal Repression	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.09)	0.03 (0.03)	0.09 (0.08)
Male[0-1]	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.11 (0.08)
Age[1-3]	0.01 (0.02)	0.06 (0.06)	0.01 (0.02)	0.05 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.06)
College[0-1]	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.10)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.18* (0.09)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.09)
Income >60K[0-1]	0.06* (0.03)	0.19** (0.09)	0.08** (0.03)	0.24** (0.10)	0.07* (0.04)	0.21** (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]	-0.08** (0.04)	-0.20** (0.10)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.10)	0.08** (0.04)	0.20** (0.10)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.11)	0.02 (0.04)	0.07 (0.11)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	0.08 (0.06)	0.23 (0.19)	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.20)	0.00 (0.08)	0.04 (0.20)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	0.03 (0.02)	0.10 (0.06)	0.02 (0.02)	0.08 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	0.11*** (0.01)	0.33*** (0.04)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.22*** (0.04)	0.05*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.56*** (0.12)	-2.21*** (0.37)	2.64*** (0.12)	-2.79*** (0.36)	2.49*** (0.13)	-2.47*** (0.34)
cut2		0.01 (0.35)		-0.20 (0.35)		0.02 (0.33)
cut3		2.70*** (0.35)		2.51*** (0.35)		2.40*** (0.33)
Observations	2344	2344	2344	2344	2344	2344
(Pseudo) $R^2$	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Log Likelihood	-2429.99	-2354.45	-2417.81	-2377.08	-2661.51	-2642.66
Chi-Square		80.89		42.47		27.25

Table 17: Mechanism Test: Political Efficacy

	Gov. Concede (1) OLS	(2) OLogit	Media Coverage (3) OLS	(4) OLogit	Superior Gov. (5) OLS	(6) OLogit	Protest Eff. (7) OLS	(8) OLogit
CA Exposure	0.00 (0.05)	0.02 (0.15)	0.05 (0.05)	0.20 (0.15)	0.05 (0.05)	0.16 (0.15)	-0.25 (0.21)	-0.15 (0.13)
Responsiveness	0.11*** (0.03)	0.35*** (0.09)	0.07** (0.03)	0.20** (0.09)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.30*** (0.09)	0.40*** (0.12)	0.25*** (0.08)
Protester Violence	0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.08)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.05 (0.08)
Violent Repression	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.11 (0.08)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.15* (0.09)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.05 (0.08)
Legal Repression	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.14* (0.08)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.15* (0.09)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.13 (0.09)	0.12 (0.12)	0.08 (0.08)
Male[0-1]	0.08*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.08)	0.07** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.08)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.30*** (0.08)	0.26** (0.12)	0.16** (0.08)
Age[1-3]	0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.04* (0.02)	0.14** (0.06)	0.02 (0.02)	0.07 (0.06)	0.04 (0.09)	0.01 (0.06)
College[0-1]	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.17* (0.09)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.09)	0.10 (0.13)	0.07 (0.08)
Income >60K[0-1]	0.01 (0.03)	0.07 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.11 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.09)	0.16 (0.14)	0.12 (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]	0.08** (0.03)	0.25** (0.10)	0.06* (0.03)	0.17* (0.10)	0.14*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.10)	0.02 (0.14)	0.01 (0.09)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.15 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.11)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.15 (0.16)	-0.11 (0.10)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	0.07 (0.07)	0.20 (0.20)	0.06 (0.07)	0.12 (0.20)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.19)	0.27 (0.27)	0.19 (0.16)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	0.04* (0.02)	0.10 (0.06)	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.06)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.16** (0.06)	-0.16* (0.09)	-0.10* (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.10** (0.04)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.04)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.48*** (0.12)	-2.95*** (0.35)	2.47*** (0.12)	-3.24*** (0.36)	2.30*** (0.12)	-2.63*** (0.35)	5.40*** (0.51)	-2.82*** (0.33)
Observations	2352	2352	2352	2352	2352	2352	2452	2452
(Pseudo) $R^2$	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.00
Log Likelihood	-2414.67	-2410.00	-2366.04	-2357.21	-2408.44	-2385.36	-6029.01	-5673.22
Chi-Square		51.19		35.94		74.26		27.93

Table 18: Mechanism Test: Political Trust

	Policy Trust		System Trust		Response Trust	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	OLS	OLogit	OLS	OLogit	OLS	OLogit
CA Exposure	0.03 (0.05)	0.12 (0.16)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.16)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.08 (0.15)
Responsiveness	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.09)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.08)
Protester Violence	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.09)	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.10)	0.02 (0.03)	0.06 (0.09)
Violent Repression	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.10 (0.10)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.15* (0.09)
Legal Repression	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.12 (0.09)	0.01 (0.03)	0.05 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.13 (0.09)
Male[0-1]	0.02 (0.03)	0.07 (0.09)	0.02 (0.03)	0.12 (0.09)	0.03 (0.03)	0.09 (0.08)
Age[1-3]	0.06*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.07)	0.04** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.08)	0.04* (0.02)	0.09 (0.06)
College[0-1]	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.17 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.11)	-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.26*** (0.09)
Income >60K[0-1]	0.03 (0.03)	0.10 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.07 (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]	0.03 (0.03)	0.13 (0.10)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.19* (0.11)	0.06* (0.04)	0.22** (0.10)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.21* (0.11)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.16 (0.12)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.15 (0.11)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	0.08 (0.05)	0.24 (0.17)	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.19)	0.13** (0.06)	0.37** (0.17)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	0.11*** (0.02)	0.37*** (0.06)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.07)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.19*** (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.54*** (0.11)	-2.82*** (0.39)	2.82*** (0.11)	-3.04*** (0.41)	2.52*** (0.13)	-3.12*** (0.36)
cut2		-0.02 (0.37)		-0.95** (0.39)		-0.05 (0.35)
cut3		3.13*** (0.37)		2.60*** (0.40)		2.47*** (0.35)
Observations	2324	2324	2324	2324	2324	2324
(Pseudo) $R^2$	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.02
Log Likelihood	-2197.97	-2176.03	-2058.21	-1986.68	-2461.32	-2449.71
Chi-Square		82.30		36.18		76.36

## A.5 Appendix for Chapter 5

Table 19: Treatment effects over political trust

	(1) OLS	Simple (2) OLogit	With_Control (3) OLS	(4) Ologit
CA Exposure	0.13 (0.09)	0.33* (0.19)	0.15* (0.09)	0.36* (0.19)
Responsiveness	0.03 (0.05)	0.05 (0.12)	0.03 (0.05)	0.05 (0.12)
Protester Violence	-0.12** (0.05)	-0.28** (0.11)	-0.12** (0.05)	-0.26** (0.12)
Violent Repression	0.00 (0.05)	0.02 (0.11)	0.01 (0.05)	0.04 (0.12)
Legal Repression	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.12)
Political Trust	0.03 (0.10)	0.08 (0.22)	0.03 (0.10)	0.07 (0.22)
CA Exposure × Political Trust	-0.21* (0.13)	-0.49* (0.28)	-0.21* (0.13)	-0.47* (0.28)
Responsiveness × Political Trust	0.14* (0.07)	0.33** (0.16)	0.13* (0.07)	0.32* (0.17)
Protester Violence × Political Trust	0.12 (0.07)	0.24 (0.16)	0.12 (0.07)	0.23 (0.17)
Violent Repression × Political Trust	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.16)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.14 (0.17)
Legal Repression × Political Trust	0.05 (0.07)	0.13 (0.16)	0.05 (0.07)	0.12 (0.17)
Male[0-1]			0.07** (0.04)	0.14* (0.08)
Age[1-3]			0.08*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.06)
College[0-1]			-0.08** (0.04)	-0.17* (0.09)
Income >60K[0-1]			-0.05 (0.04)	-0.08 (0.09)
CCP Member[0-1]			0.05 (0.04)	0.12 (0.10)
State Employee[0-1]			-0.08* (0.05)	-0.21* (0.11)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]			-0.10 (0.08)	-0.22 (0.19)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]			0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.06)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]			0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.04)
Constant(cut1)	2.13*** (0.07)	-1.20*** (0.15)	1.98*** (0.15)	-0.92*** (0.34)
cut2		0.91*** (0.15)		1.20*** (0.34)
cut3		2.76*** (0.17)		3.06*** (0.35)
Observations	2354	2354	2354	2354
(Pseudo) R-squared	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.01
Log Likelihood		-2836.56		-2823.58
Chi-Square		20.41		52.91

Table 20: Treatment effects over reading interest

	Three Points		Two Points	
	(1) OLogit	(2) OLS	(3) OLogit	(4) OLS
CA Exposure=1	0.02 (0.24)	-0.01 (0.11)	0.02 (0.24)	-0.01 (0.11)
Responsiveness=1	0.15 (0.15)	0.08 (0.07)	0.15 (0.15)	0.08 (0.07)
Protester Violence=1	0.05 (0.15)	0.01 (0.07)	0.05 (0.15)	0.01 (0.07)
Violent Repression=1	0.10 (0.15)	0.04 (0.07)	0.10 (0.15)	0.04 (0.07)
Legal Repression=1	-0.20 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.20 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.07)
News Selection=1	-0.57** (0.24)	-0.25** (0.11)	-0.37* (0.22)	-0.16 (0.10)
CA Exposure=1 × News Selection=1	0.22 (0.32)	0.11 (0.14)	0.21 (0.30)	0.10 (0.13)
CA Exposure=1 × News Selection=2	0.14 (0.39)	0.06 (0.17)	0.09 (0.18)	0.02 (0.08)
Responsiveness=1 × News Selection=1	0.10 (0.20)	0.03 (0.09)	-0.28 (0.18)	-0.10 (0.08)
Responsiveness=1 × News Selection=2	0.05 (0.22)	0.01 (0.10)	-0.18 (0.18)	-0.08 (0.08)
Protester Violence=1 × News Selection=1	-0.17 (0.20)	-0.04 (0.09)	0.25 (0.18)	0.10 (0.08)
Protester Violence=1 × News Selection=2	-0.46** (0.22)	-0.19** (0.10)		
Violent Repression=1 × News Selection=1	-0.21 (0.20)	-0.10 (0.09)		
Violent Repression=1 × News Selection=2	-0.13 (0.22)	-0.05 (0.10)		
Legal Repression=1 × News Selection=1	0.30 (0.20)	0.13 (0.09)		
Legal Repression=1 × News Selection=2	0.18 (0.22)	0.07 (0.10)		
Male[0-1]	0.18** (0.08)	0.09** (0.04)	0.18** (0.08)	0.09** (0.04)
Age[1-3]	0.19*** (0.06)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.06)	0.08*** (0.03)
College[0-1]	-0.17* (0.09)	-0.08** (0.04)	-0.16* (0.09)	-0.08** (0.04)
Income >60K[0-1]	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.04)
CCP Member[0-1]	0.16 (0.10)	0.06 (0.04)	0.13 (0.10)	0.05 (0.04)
State Employee[0-1]	-0.19* (0.11)	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.18* (0.11)	-0.07 (0.05)
Sichuan Resident[0-1]	-0.17 (0.19)	-0.08 (0.08)	-0.17 (0.19)	-0.09 (0.08)
Self-perceived Health[1-5]	0.03 (0.06)	0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.03)
Anxiety on Pollution[1-5]	0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)
Constant(cut1)	-0.93*** (0.36)	1.99*** (0.16)	-1.04*** (0.36)	2.04*** (0.16)
cut2	1.21*** (0.36)		1.08*** (0.36)	
cut3	3.08*** (0.37)		2.95*** (0.37)	
Observations	2354	2354	2354	2354
(Pseudo) R-squared	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02
Log Likelihood	-2814.82		-2821.32	
Chi-Square	67.90		56.47	

# Appendix B

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Zimmerman, Marc A. (1989). “The Relationship Between Political Efficacy and Citizen Participation: Construct Validation Studies”. *Journal of Personality Assessment* 53.3, p. 554.

# Appendix C

## Biographical Data

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## Education

- **Syracuse University**

- Ph.D., Political Science, May 2019

- \* Major: Comparative Politics; Public Policy and Public Administration

- M.A., Political Science, 2015

- **University of California at Berkeley, 2012**

- M.A., Asian Studies

- **Renmin University of China 2010**

- B.A., Journalism



## Research Interest

Comparative Politics, Politics in China, Political communication, Political behavior, Public opinion, Survey Experiments

## Publication

- Shao, L., & Liu, D. (2019). The Road to Cynicism: The Political Consequences of Online Satire Exposure in China. *Political Studies*, 67(2), 517-536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321718791373>
- Huang, H., Wang, F., & Shao, L. (2018). How Propaganda Moderates the Influence of Opinion Leaders on Social Media in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 12(0), 23.
- Shao, L. (2018). The Dilemma of Criticism: Disentangling The Determinants of Media Censorship in China. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 18(3), 279–297. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2018.19>
- Shao, L. (2017). China's crony capitalism: the dynamics of regime decay. *Journal of Chinese Governance*, 2(3), 343–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23812346.2017.1342404> (Book Review)

## Working Papers

- Categorical Censorship: The Climate Change in Information Control in China, with Rongbin Han (Under Review)
- Blurring the Lines: Rethinking Censorship Under Autocracy, with Dimitar D. Gueorguiev and Charles Crabtree
- Crisis of Confidence: Measuring trust with experiments in China, with Dimitar D. Gueorguiev
- Everyday not resistance: motivation of satirists in China, with Dongshu Liu
- Efficacious Legitimacy in China, with Dimitar D. Gueorguiev (Under Review)
- How Propaganda encourages voluntary regime support in China, with Dongshu Liu

## Chinese Publication

- 邵立, 龚喜谜缘(2015). 政务微博对报纸媒体的议程设置报告. 《中国新闻传播的发展: 现状与趋势报告: 2013~2014》, ISBN: 978-7-5161-5767-1

- 黄河,王芳菲,邵立(2016). 公众新媒体接触行为对政府形象构建的影响—基于北京市居民的网络调查分析. 《国际新闻界》2017 Vol. 39 (5): 109-128

## Additional Training and Appointment

- Visiting Student Grant for Oversea Doctorate Students, School of Communication and Design, Sun Yat-sen University, 11/2018
- Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 06/2016
  - MLE, Multivariate, Causal Inference, Structural Equation Modeling

## Conferences and Invited Talks

- “How Propaganda encourages voluntary regime support in China, ”
  - Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 2019
  - Harvard Experimental Political Science Graduate Conference, March 28-29, 2019
  - East Asian Program series, Moynihan Institute, Maxwell School, Syracuse NY, March 21, 2019
  - South Political Science Association, Austin, Texas, 17-19, 2019
  - The 7th Xiamen University International Workshop on Experimental Economics, Decenmber 15-16, 2018
  - School of Government, Sun Yat-sen University, December 5, 2018
  - School of Communication and Design, Sun Yat-sen University, December 5, 2018
- “How Chinese media report collective actions, ”
  - South Political Science Association, Austin, Texas, 17-19, 2019
  - 5th Big Data Communication Conference, Sun Yat-sen University, November 18, 2018
  - School of Government, Sun Yat-sen University, November 14, 2018
- “Efficacious Legitimacy: Performance and Protest in the PRC, ” American Political Science Association, Boston, August 30-September 3, 2018
- “Blurring the Lines: Rethinking Censorship Under One-party System,” Chinese Political Science Research Workshop, Shanghai, China July, 14, 2018
- “Opinion Leaders’ effects on Policy Approval,” Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication(AEJMC), Chicago, August 9-12, 2017
- “Road to Cynicism: Political Satire’s Effects in China,”

- Chinese Internet Research Conference, Fort Worth TX, June 3-4, 2017  
(*Honorable Mention* in the Best student paper competition);
- Association of Chinese Political Science, Tianjin China June 10-11, 2017
- “Everyday not resistance: motivation of satirists in China,”
  - Moynihan East Asian Program Speaker, Syracuse NY, November 28, 2016
  - Association of Chinese Political Science, Monterey CA, Oct 12-14, 2016
  - Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago IL, April 7-10, 2016
- “Crisis of Confidence: Measuring Political Trust in China,”
  - Xiamen University, May 12, 2018
  - Asian Methodology, Beijing China Jan 3-4, 2016;
  - South Political Science Association, San Juan PR, Jan 7-9, 2016
- “Disentangling the Determinants of Media Censorship in China,” Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago IL, April 16-19, 2015

## Teaching Interests

- Undergraduate: Comparative Politics, Politics of China, Political Communication and Media Politics, Research Design, Quantitative Methods, Political Institutions, Democratization, Development of Political Economy, Authoritarian Regimes
- Graduate: Comparative Politics, Politics of China, Research Design, Political Institutions, Democratization, Authoritarian Regimes, Survey and Experiments

## Teaching Experience

- Syracuse University:
  - Instructor, Intro to Political Analysis, Summer 2018
  - Teaching Assistant, Intro to Comparative Politics, Spring 2014-Spring 2015, Fall 2016-Fall 2017
  - Teaching Assistant, Intro to Political Analysis, Fall 2015-Spring 2016
  - Teaching Assistant, Politics of Russia, Fall 2013
- UC Berkeley:
  - Teaching Assistant, Chinese 1X-10X, Fall 2011-Spring 2012

## Awards & Fellowships

- Prestage-Cook Travel Award, Southern Political Science Association, 2019
- Dissertation Completion Fellowship (competitive for students completing their dissertation in their final year), 2018
- Roscoe-Martin for Dissertation Research, Maxwell School, 2014, 2016, 2017
- Thorson Award for ICPSR workshop attendance, 2016
- Meiklejohn Award, Maxwell School, for researches' commitment to open and just public life, 2017
- East Asian Summer Grant, Moynihan Institute, 2017
- 国家社会科学基金项目(17BXW055)课题组成员

## Service

- **Conference Chair or Discussant:** MPSA 2019;
- **Reviewer:** International Communication Association, Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications;
- **Campus Service:**
  - Student Representative of Promotion and Tenure Committee, 2016, Political Science, Syracuse University
  - Interpreter, China Executive Program, Maxwell School(2016-2019)
- **Social Service:**
  - CN Politics(2012-), Blogger on educating social science to Chinese general audiences, [cnpolitics.org/author/shaoli/](http://cnpolitics.org/author/shaoli/)

## Language & Skills

- Chinese (native), English (Proficient)
- Stata, **R**, L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, Qualtrics