The Logic of Government's Response to Protests in China
New Evidence from Protests Recorded in Social Media

by

Luyan Chen

Department of Political Science
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

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Melanie Manion

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Daniel Stegmueller

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Melanie Manion

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Bahar Leventoglu

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Scholarship on protests in China, though prolific in recent years, faces serious data issues. Since there is no comprehensive dataset for a systematic analysis of protests in China, previous scholars can only quantitatively study the pattern of repression of protests. Most studies related to the protest outcomes or government responses in China can only use qualitative methods. Drawing on an original dataset of 508 protests I collected from the Wickedonna website, this article offers a systematic analysis of the response pattern to protests in China. My paper shows that domestic media coverage and the government's perception of economic costs are the two significant determinants of the government's response to a protest. While the size of the protest, the disruptiveness of the protest, and the geographical location of the protest have no direct impact on the government's results, they significantly increase the odds of media coverage of a protest. Overall, my paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of daily contentions in authoritarian China.

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1. Introduction

China's rapid development is accompanied by more and more interest groups and conflicts among them. Hence since the 1990s, the number of mass incidents in China has exploded, and this has also led to scholars' high attention to China's contentious politics since the year 2000. Previous research in this area has thoroughly studied why people contend (O'Brien & Li, 2006; Yu, 2004), how people contend (Fu, 2016), and various strategies of contentions and anti-contentions. (Wong and Peng, 2015; Deng and O'Brien, 2013) Each particular type of contentions in China has also been deeply analyzed by scholars, such as peasants' protests (O'Brien & Li, 2006), performance-like contentions (Huang, 2011), anti-demolition protests (Huang, Zheng, and Gui, 2016), and profit-seeking petitions (Tian, 2010).

In total, these previous studies have greatly expanded and enhanced our understanding of the forms, measures, targets, and objects of contentions and anti-contentions in China. Nevertheless, at the same time, the results of contentions or the government responses to these contentions have been long-term neglected by most scholars until the recent decade. However, due to the lack of a comprehensive dataset about contentions and the fact that the contention itself is more newsworthy than its outcome, existing theories related to contentions outcome in China nearly all comes from some qualitative studies or quantitative studies with small sample size. Moreover, a previous study has shown that the pattern of contentious politics in China during Xi's period has changed compared to previous years. (Chen, 2020) Hence

those analyses based on data or cases before Xi's period may not be valid and reliable today. In this light, this paper focuses on protest, one of the most common contentions, and tries to answer the question of what factors shape the government responses to protests in China. One noteworthy thing here is that my paper defines response as the government's reactions to the protesters' demands. Thus repression by the police is not a kind of response.

Drawing data from protests recorded in social media, this paper aims to first time provide a systematic and comprehensive analysis of recent patterns of protest and the government's response in China. Though the data from social media is far from complete and could still be biased, it provides the most comprehensive coverage of Chinese protest events from July 2013 to June 2016, outperforming all other sources in any criteria. My statistical analysis shows that domestic media coverage and the government's perception of a low economic cost will increase the likelihood of a positive response to protesters. On the other hand, while the size of the protest, the disruptiveness of the protest, and the geographical location of the protest have no direct impact on the government's responses, they significantly increase the odds of media coverage of a protest.

Specifically, despite not all my hypotheses and theories being new, my research still attempts to make several contributions to the existing literature in this field. First, it presents the newest pattern of protests in China during the internet era and Xi's era. Second, it empirically tests how well existing theories on social movement can explain the protest outcome or the government's responses in contemporary China.

And finally, it further helps us understand the Chinese government's logic in front of a protest.

This paper proceeds as follows. The next section will briefly review previous scholarship on contentious politics in China. The third section includes my theory and hypotheses. Then I will introduce my dataset and measurements. The sixth and seventh sections introduces my empirical strategy and presents the regression results and discussions. Some conclusions are in the end.

2. Literature Review

There are abundant studies about contentious politics in China. Standing on the ordinary people's side, some scholars analyze why people contend. (Ong and Han, 2019; Tsai, 2020; Zheng and Meng, 2020) Some scholars focus on specific contentious strategies in China. (O'Brien and Li, 2006; Fu, 2016) Standing on the government side, many scholars also look at the government's strategies to address contentions. (Wong and Peng, 2015; Göbel, 2020; Deng and O'Brien, 2013, Li, 2016)

What's more, there is also research that analyzes the general pattern of protests in China. (Chan et al., 2014; Göbel, 2019; Chen, 2020) Some scholars use the game theory model to explain why the central government could tolerate demonstrations and online discussions about it. (Lorentzen, 2013, Chen and Xu, 2017)

Not surprisingly, there are plenty of studies on how contention can succeed or when the government is responsive. By conducting an online field experiment in local government forums, Chen, Pan, and Xu (2015) find that the threats of collective action and threats of tattling to upper levels of government cause county governments to be considerably more responsive to online petitions. Chen (2011) collected 902 government-recorded petitions in a city from 1992 to 2002; he finds that some "troublemaking" tactics like skip-level petitions, public petitions, and persuasive actions effectively force the government to be responsive.

In the sub-field of protests, by comparing different case studies, Sun and Huang (2020) argue that the success of protests is shaped by the tripartite relations between

protest forcefulness, favorable political contexts, and media exposure. Also using a qualitative method, Tang and Cote (2020) emphasize the role of domestic media in affecting the result of land conflict. By adopting fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) on 40 anti-demolition protests in China, Huang, Zheng, and Gui (2016) argue that the co-presence of central government intervention and supportive reports from central state-sponsored media is a sufficient condition for protest success. Using data from large protests recorded in traditional media, Yang (2016) finds that the issue opportunity structure is the key to a protest to success. But the sample size of his research is only 26. The only relatively large sample study is Cai (2010). Cai (2010) collected 266 cases of protests in China from 1994 to 2007 from the newspaper. By considering the interactions among the central government, local government, and the protesters, he argued that the protest outcome is determined by how the protesters could affect the cost and benefits perceptions of the local government. Nonetheless, though Cai (2010) presents some empirical tables in his book, most of his arguments are still based on qualitative analysis.

If we look outside China, social movements studies in Western democracies also provide many interpretations of social movements outcomes. Gamson (1990) samples the universe of challenging groups that existed in America between 1800 and 1945 and argues that bureaucratized, centralized, and unfractionalized organizations with the use of disruptive tactics are more likely to succeed. In contrast, Piven and Cloward (1979) contend that formal organizations may undermine the gains of the poor's protest, while the size of the protests and the use of disruptive measures will improve

the outcomes. Focusing on black civil rights movements, Olzak and Ryo (2007) find that tactical diversity increases the likelihood of achieving the desired policy outcome. Looking at the business protest, Banerjee and Case (2019) find that only market disruption provides protests with leverage, while media coverage and reputation damage have no use. In addition, Herbert P. Kitschelt (1986) argues that more open political opportunity structures and greater political capacities covary with the choice of more adversarial or more cooperative movement strategies in anti-nuclear protests in four Western countries. Shortly, in the Western scholar field, size, organizational structures, tactics, and political opportunities are the most discussed factors which could shape a protest's outcome.

In summary, existing research has identified various factors which could make the government responsive. However, contentious politics in China is fundamentally different from Western social movements. Many daily protests in China neither have formal organizational background nor seek radical political targets. Hence, Western theories are not necessarily adapted to the Chinese situation. Meanwhile, most of the Chinese-specific studies are qualitative research. Those limited quantitative studies either use very early data or only contain a small sample. There is a lack of a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the recent pattern of protest and the government's response in China. This is what my paper is trying to contribute.

3. Theory and Hypothesis

Contentions in China happen in various formats, such as a skip-level petition, a suicide show, or purchasing a Weibo hot search. This paper only focuses on protest, defined as "a usually organized public demonstration of disapproval" in Webster's dictionary. The public nature of a protest has made it relatively more troublesome and noteworthy for the government than other contentions. However, case studies show that the government still often ignores some peace and non-disruptive protests. (Lorentzen, 2017) So when does a protest get a positive and active response from the government? By "a positive and active response," I refer to the government at least satisfying some protesters' demands.

Previous studies generally identify the protest's intensity and the cost of concessions as the two fundamental factors behind the government's responses. Due to the task of maintaining stability and in fear of potential punishment from a higher-level government, the local government has an interest to moderate intense protest and make a concession when it faces a low cost of concessions. Based on this logic, in this section, I establish three categories of potential factors behind the government's responses to a protest. The first one is the protesters' subjective tactics which directly affect the intensity of a protest, including the size of the protest, the use of disruptive actions, and the location of the protest. The second category is the government's willingness to respond to protests. In another language, this category refers to the government's political and economic cost of being responsive. The last

category is some objective facts about the protests, which includes the domestic media coverage and the administrative level of the place of the protest. These two factors could impact the protest's intensity and the cost of concessions at the same time.

Before introducing my hypotheses, I must emphasize that this paper only focuses on the daily local protests in China. Religious protests, ethnic political protests, or direct protests against the central government are not my research interests and are not included in my dataset. To me, those protests are fundamentally different from other daily mass movements in China; thus, they should be treated and studied separately from other protests.

3.1 The Protester's Tactics

Increasing the size of the protest is the most straightforward way to make a protest more troublesome for the government, though the size is not always something the protesters can control. Larger protests are always more threatening. Various research has also shown that the number of protesters is strongly associated with concessions. (Chen, 2012; Cai, 2010)

What is more, the use of disruptive actions is another troublemaking method for protesters. In China, violent protesters often destroy public facilities, attack government properties, and have conflicts with police. Undoubtedly, their violent

behavior will lead to the government's repression and often put them in prison, but the government's repression is beyond this paper's scope.

However, previous scholars have reached no common agreement on the effectiveness of violence. Cai (2010) finds that violent protests are less likely to succeed, but in his data source, violent protests are highly overlapped with protests with higher costs for the government to solve. In contrast, Yang (2016) finds that violence is a necessary but insufficient condition for non-environmental protest.

Finally, the protesters can always choose the location of the protest. There is no doubt that protests located at government buildings and main traffic roads are more troublesome, exerting more pressure on the government, and are more likely to attract social attention. Therefore, I argue that protests at these sensitive locations are more likely to get responses than protests on regular roads, residential areas, and other common public spaces. In summary, my hypothesis will be:

H1: All else equal, protests which use these tactics (larger sizes, more disruptive actions, sensitive locations) are more likely to get the government's response.

3.2 The Government's Relative Cost of Being Responsiveness

As many previous studies have argued, standing on the side of the local government, the relative cost of being responsive is the most critical reason for being responsive. (Cai, 2010; Yang, 2016) Such a cost includes economic and political costs to address an issue. If the economic cost of concession is high, the government will be

less willing to be responsive. Supposing a protest attracts huge social attention and may cause intervention from a higher-level government, the low-level government will have a large political pressure to address the issue adequately.

H2: All else equal, protests which could cause a high cost for the government are less likely to get the government's response.

3.3 Objective Facts of the Protest

When a media reports a protest, whether it picks a side or not, it helps the protest get social attention, increases the chance of an intervention from a higher level of government, and thereby exerts more pressure on the local government to address the issue. Many scholars have pointed out that the exposure of the protest on social media or traditional media and the support from the media could all affect the result of the protest. (S. Chen, 2012; HESS, 2014; Huang, 2016; Tang and Côté, 2020; Yang, 2016) What is more, while whether a protest gets the media's report is the most intuitive indicator of the protest's social influence, it is also an essential mechanism for how previous factors (size, violence, location) could be more troublesome for the local government and attract the central's attention.

On the other hand, the geographical location of the protest is a good indicator of the government's capacity. A city government usually has more decision-making power and budgets to address an issue than a county or village government. Also,

urban protests are more likely to attract the media's attention; thus, the urban government has more pressure to address a protest.

So here are my two hypotheses:

H3: All else equal, protests which attract media reports are more likely to get the government's positive responses.

H4: All else equal, urban protests are more likely to get the government's positive responses.

4. Data Selection

Any scholars who study this field face the issue of no comprehensive dataset for a systematic analysis of protests in China. Besides many qualitative studies, most scholars need to create their own datasets. Li (2017) chooses news reports from an anti-communist website Boxun. Chen (2012) uses a dataset from the protests in a single city. Yang (2016) only focuses on large-scale protests which LexisNexis records. Cai (2010) collects his 266 protests through newspapers and still did a more qualitative study. Chen (2020) collects newspaper reports from 2000 to 2019. Some studies used an extremely small sample size. (Meng and Wu, 2010; Yang, 2016) Finally, in recent years, social media data has become more popular among scholars.

Wickedonna is a dataset of social media posts covering 74,425 protest events between July 2013 and June 2016 created by two journalists Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu. Comparing to other social media data source in the similar period like the CASM dataset created by Pan and Zhang (2019) though online data mining in Sina Weibo, though the CASM includes more counts of events, Wickedonna collected their events from more social media platforms like Tencent Weibo or Qzone before censorship and ensured that those protests really happened in reality rather than oral protests online. Also, Wickedonna did a great job in keeping snapshots of social media records, which allows us to identify some characteristics of the protests, such as size, location, time, issues, and the response of the police. Moreover, Wickedonna is a relatively new dataset under Xi's era; thus, I can provide a fairly latest analysis of the

government's repression and responsiveness. As Chen (2020) finds out, the Chinese government's response to mass movement changes significantly between the Hu-Wen and Xi periods. In summary, I have confidence that Wickedonna is the most appropriate data source for me, which captures the population of daily mass protests in China from July 2013 to June 2016 to the maximum extent compared to other datasets. The next section will provide more discussion on the validity and representativeness of the data.

But the Wickedonna data still does not provide a response from the government. Foreign media or websites are not likely to report the end of those protest stories. Meanwhile, China's domestic media is undoubtedly being censored, which makes it hard to find related protest news from several years ago. However, some large-scale protests are impossible to cover. And I find that though the domestic media or government websites will not report the protests, they will describe the story differently and report what actions the government takes to address the issue behind the protest. Sometimes I need to be clever on what keywords should be used to find related information, like do not search for protest but search the issue directly.

For a short example, the Wickedonna recorded an environmental protest in Kunshan in 2015. While I cannot find any related information about the protest online, when I searched for the polluting factory directly, I found a Commission for Discipline Inspection report in 2016 which recorded the protest and how the local government reacted to it.

However, for any research, it is very dangerous to use social media datasets directly. With a close look at the dataset, I find these social media data inevitably include many repeated cases, ambiguous cases, and totally unrelated cases. For example, if a protest lasts for a period, it could appear in the Wickedonna more than ten times. If a Weibo user only took a photo of many police cars and wrote: "there are lots of police cars here, could there be a protest?" the Wickedonna could record it as a real protest. If many people queue up in front of a store and affect the traffic, then the police come to maintain order; the dataset could also include it. Thus, scholars must be very careful when they select Wickedonna as their data source.

As a result, for my own research, I manually randomly select 508 protests from the Wickedonna dataset, record their details, and look for the government responses through multiple means. There are two kinds of information in the Wickedonna dataset: breaking news and others. I only select from breaking news since only "breaking news" provides clear information (time, location, size) about protests. There is no need to worry that these "breaking news" are more noticeable than the others. Most "breaking news" is merely a summary of other news, and this category still covers many small size or rural cases. What's more, even though I only select from the "breaking news," I still have to drop many repeated cases, ambiguous cases (the title and content do not match), and totally unrelated cases (some pure conflicts or single side violence). Since I only focus on local protests, I also drop some direct protests to the central government, which nearly do not exist in the dataset.

4.1 Validity and Representativeness of the Data

Since there is no information on how exactly Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu collected these events, there are plenty of reasons to worry about the representativeness of the data. However, the Wickedonna data has its advantage, and some previous research could reassure me that the result from Wickedonna is valid.

First of all, social media data provides the largest quantity and is less biased geographically compared to other data sources. These datasets from social media cover much more rural protests than any other resource. (Pan&Zhang, 2019; Gobel, 2020) The most common concern for social media data is that it may cover fewer events from areas with low degrees of internet penetration and mobile use density. However, as China kept investing in basic infrastructure building, the network coverage area and the number of rural netizens in China expanded dramatically in the past decade. (McDonald, 2016) Furthermore, by regressing the log number of protests in a city against a dummy variable for each province and the city-level broadband penetration rate, Gobel (2019) finds that the broadband penetration and the provincial dummies have no significant impact on the log number of protests when controlling for many structural variables[1]. As a result, geographical selection bias caused by different social media usage is not likely to happen in this dataset.

Second, could there be selection bias when Lu and Li collect the data? For example, could they be interested in collecting one particular type of protest from

[1] Structural variables include gross regional product (GRP) per capita, contribution of the primary sector and foreign direct investments to GRP, government expenditure per capita, population density, average wage level, banking deposits per capita, enrolment in pension, medical and unemployment insurances.

certain areas? By comparing the Wickedonna database to the CASM, we can find that although 35 percent of collective action events identified by the Wickedonna dataset are not in the CASM, the two datasets are relatively similar in their events' geographical distribution and distribution by grievance, as shown in the following tables and figures.

Table.1 Comparison (%) of Issues Motivating Collective Action (January 1–June 30, 2016). Data source: Pan and Zhang (2019)

	CASM	Wickedonna	CLB	GDELT	WiseNews
Unpaid wages	29	35	69	19	17
Homeowner/property conflicts	26	27	7	0	61
Rural/land conflicts	17	12	0	4	6
Educational dispute	8	6	3	8	0
Medical dispute	7	7	.90	0	0
Taxi	5	3	13	0	0
Fraud/scams	3	4	1	7	11
Environmental	3	2	.67	15	6
Pension/welfare	1	2	5	0	0
Ethnic/religious	.45	.45	.53	40	0
Veterans	.45	.35	0	0	0

Note: CASM = collective action from social media; GDELT = Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone; CLB = Chinese Labor Bulletin.

Table.2 Comparison (%) of the Form of Collective Action (January 1–June 30, 2016). Data source: Pan and Zhang (2019)

	CASM	Wickedonna	CLB	GDELT	WiseNews
Conventional	43	47	36	26	28
Disruptive	25	30	52	44	55
Violent	32	23	13	30	17

Note: CASM = collective action from social media; CLB = Chinese Labor Bulletin; GDELT = Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone.

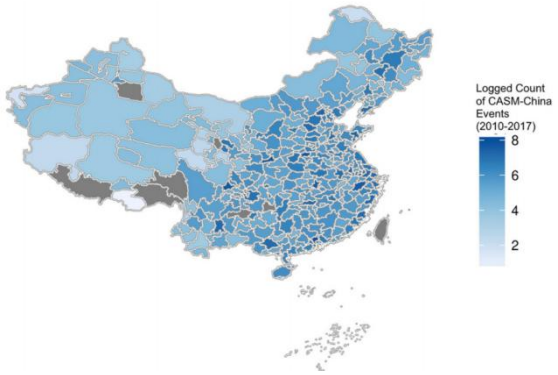

Figure.1 Log Count of CASM-China Events by Prefecture (January 2010–June 2017). Data source: Pan and Zhang (2019)

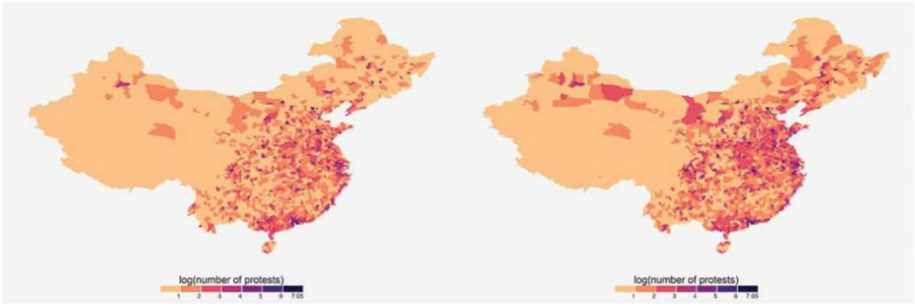

Figure.2 Log Count of the Wickedonna Events by Prefecture (year 2014 on the left, year 2015 on the right). Data source: Tsai (2020)

Figure.3 Count of the Protests Events by Province. Data source: my dataset

As we can see, compared to other data sources based on the news report, the Wickedonna and CASM exhibit relatively high similarities in many aspects. Protests in China take place mainly on the southeastern. The cases they collected are more evenly distributed than other datasets, and their quantity also outweighs others.

Regarding the differences between the two datasets, first, Sina Weibo is not the only source of the Wickedonna. Second, it seems that Lu and Li collected their sources day by day while the CASM is created at a later time point; hence many collective actions are not identified because the posts are no longer found on Weibo due to censorship. Third, Lu and Li did a great job in filtering out purely online protests, while the CASM included many online protest posts that are not clear whether they happened in reality.

Third, how could censorship in China affect this dataset? Recent studies on social media and censorship in China point out that censorship of protest reports in the media has significantly loosened up from the Hu-wen period to the early Xi period. (Qin, Bei, and Wu, 2017; Steinhardt, 2014; Steinhardt, 2015) The central government could also have incentives to tolerate such information online. (Lorentzen, 2013; Qin, Bei, and Wu, 2017) Given that both the CASM and the Wickedonna still collected many various types of protests about different issues, it is not likely Weibo really adopted strict censorship on protest-related information or that censorship systematically affected the data. Also, as I mentioned above, many of Wickedonna's data are collected before censorship.

Nonetheless, ethnic, religious, or direct protests against the central government are still less likely to be included in CASM and the Wickedonna since such information suffers the most severe censorship online. But I argue that those kinds of protests are intrinsically different from other daily mass movements in China and should be studied independently. Therefore, as my research focuses on those ordinary daily protests in China, such a selection bias will not threaten my paper.

In the end, the Wickedonna is far from a complete database for all protests from 2013 to 2016. While it gains certain internal validity by compared with other datasets, I could never check its external validity. However, since my research only focuses on the result of protests, the dataset is good enough as long as it contains plenty of protests distributed in many areas and issues during Xi's period. By randomly selecting cases from this dataset, I have confidence that my analysis relying on social media data will not lead to the common problem of selection bias in the outcome.

5. The Selection of Variables and Measurements

5.1 Dependent Variable

As I wrote, I define response as the government's reactions to the protesters' demands. Therefore, repression by the police is not a kind of response in my paper. There will be four mutually exclusive categories: "3" means the government satisfy all the protesters' demand. "2" means the government stands on the protesters' side but does not satisfy all the demand. In many situations, the government simply could not solve the issues for the protesters. Like in many fraud cases, the government can only seizure and auction off criminals' property, but they can't pay the victims money back immediately. "1" means the government refuses the demand but try to persuade the protesters. "0" means the government clear rejects all demands or make no response.

Among 508 cases I collected, I find responses for 55 percent of them. As figure.7 shows, among the protests which I could find a result, the government stands on the protesters' side for 65 percent. Most responses I collected come from media's reports, protesters' self-statements on social media, or government's official response.

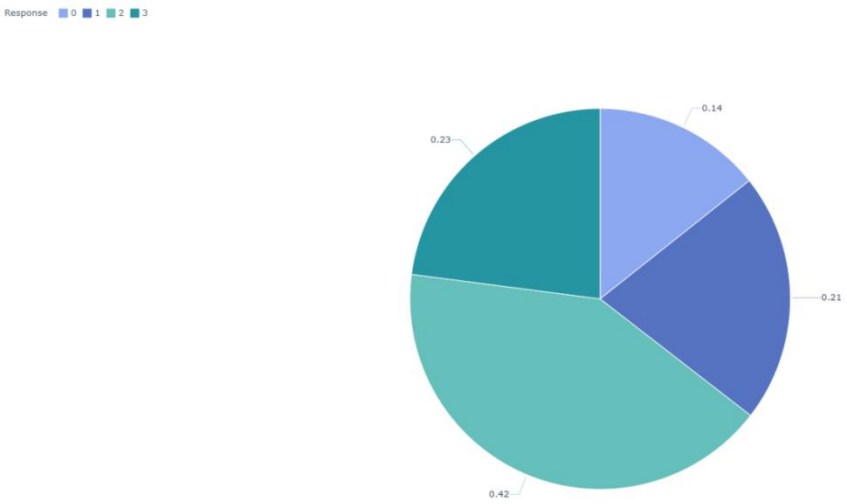

Figure.4 The Distribution of the Government's Response to Protests for Protests I can Find a Response. Data source: my dataset, N=279.

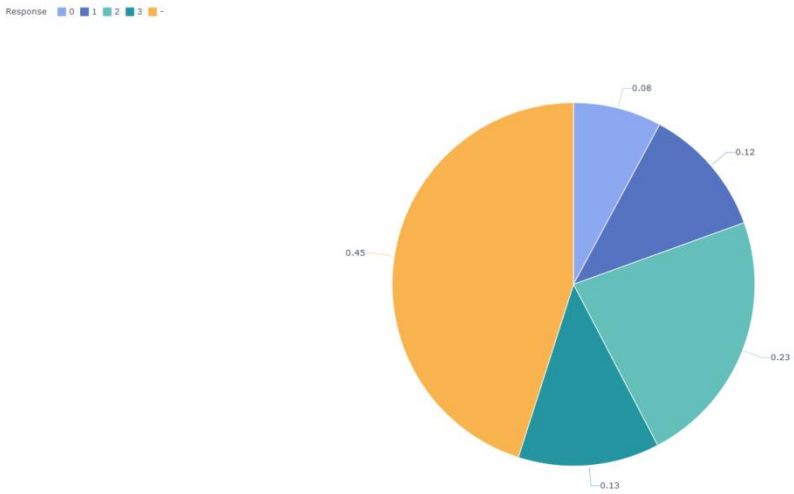

Figure.5 The Government's Response to Protests for the whole Dataset. Data source: my dataset, N=508 (Note: the orange area represents no response can be found.)

There are several standards I used when I collect the responses. First, the responses and protests have to be close in time, and I use 6 months as a criterion. For example, in many environmental protests, the government makes a concession immediately after the protest but restart the program few years later. When I collect

the result, I will not consider any government's behavior 6 months later as a response to the protest. Second, verdicts from local courts cannot be considered as a result. Even in authoritarian China, court and government are still two independent institutions. Court's verdicts are neither a response to a protest nor a representation of the government.

Another worth noting thing is that government's responses are not the results of protests. The results of protests are not the interests of my research. Also, in many real estate or fraud related protests, the protesters could never achieve the results they want no matter how responsiveness the government is.

5.2 Independent variable

I use the size, the use of disruptive actions, and the location of the protest as indicators of the protesters' tactics. Domestic media coverage and the administrative level of the place of the protest are the two objective facts of the protest. Moreover, I use economic cost, political threat, and repression to measure the relative cost of responsiveness.

5.2.1 Size of the Protests

Although the Wickedonna provides data on the size of the protest, its data could be biased since protesters have incentives to exaggerate their numbers on social media. Some scholars just ignored this issue (Li, 2017). Gobel (2020) used photo

analysis technology to estimate the size of the protest. Given that there is no way to get the accurate number of protesters, I make the size of the protest into a categorical variable and assume that those social media resources won't exaggerate the number of protesters too much, like describing a 100 people protest as a 1000 people one.

By the standards provided the Wickedonna itself, there will be four mutually exclusive categories: (1)10000-99999 people; (2)1000-9999 people; (3) 100-999 people; and (4) 0-99 people.

5.2.2 Disruptive Actions

I use Li (2017) 's method to measure whether protests are disruptive. "Protest violence" will be classified into violent actions (for example, attacks and riots), peaceful disruptive actions (such as strikes or blocking the traffic), and other peaceful non-disruptive actions.

5.2.3 Location

The Wickedonna also provide an accurate location of the protest. “Location sensitivity” is a binary variable. It takes the value 1 if the protest happens at significant traffic roads or government buildings.

5.2.4 Domestic Media Coverage

"Domestic Media coverage" is a binary variable in my dataset. It takes the value 1 if domestic media report or mention the protest. Domestic media includes traditional newspapers (I use Wisenews databank), popular online media (like Sina, NetEase, Tencent), some industry-specific online media, central government owned media (like CCTV-NEWS), and local media. Due to censorship, this variable can also be called "whether I can still find protest related news today." I certainly underestimate the real size of domestic media coverage, which could affect the result of analysis and I will discuss this later.

Moreover, I do not measure whether the media support the protest since I cannot collect all relative reports on that protest due to censorship at present. For the same reason, I also could not measure the actual impacts of these media reports at that time. During the data collection process, most reports I can find only simply mention the protest.

5.2.5 Urban or Rural Protest

In the dataset, "Location geofraphical" records the administrative level of the place of the protest. "0" means it is a rural protest. "1" means it happens in a county-level city."2" means it happens at a prefecture-level city."3" means it happens at a provincial capital, municipality, and 5 cities under separate state planning(Dalian, Qingdao, Ningbo, Xiamen, Shenzhen). These categories are decided by the Chinese

government based on the economic structure, population, and basic infrastructure at that area. To some extent, it is a good reflector of the economic and political power of the local government.

5.2.6 The Relative Cost of Being Responsiveness

For simplicity, I create two binary variables to measure the government's relative cost: (1) "Eco cost" takes the value 1 if the government's economic cost (including opportunity economic cost) to solve the issue is high. (2) "Political threat" takes the value 1 if the local government suffers high political pressure to address the issue properly, especially when a protest causes social discussion or social disturbance. My coding criteria is still highly dependent on the type of protests which I will introduce later. I also consider the size of the protest and the social impact the protest could cause when I code this variable.

5.2.6 Repression

How could repression be an indicator of the relative cost of being Responsiveness? As I have found, previous studies often explain repression as a function of cost/benefit calculations by local officials; it will be used when it is more beneficial for them than making concessions. (Cai, 2010; Gobel, 2019) Li (2017) also argues that protests in cities generate a higher cost for the government to repress than protests in rural areas. Hence the city government is more likely to be responsive to a

protest. In this light, if a government decides to repress a protest violently, it should mean it has a relatively higher cost to be responsive. However, previous studies have yet to collect data about whether the government makes a concession when they make such an argument. Hence by incorporating repression as a measurement of the relative cost of the government, I am also testing this previous theory about repression and responses.

I define repression as police reactions to protest. There will be three mutually exclusive categories: “2” means the police hits or arrests someone. “1” means the police only shows up to maintain order. “0” means no police comes. Unlike Li (2017), I do not distinguish between arrest and violence, since in most cases I collect, arrest and violence happen together.

Overall, in my dataset, the government only tolerates 31 percent of protests and violently repress 69 percent of protests. Among those cases which I can find a result, the distribution is similar. Such a result is very different from previous research.

Using the Wickedonna dataset, Gobel (2019) estimated only 15 percent of protests received violent repression. This estimation is highly biased since the original Wickedonna dataset includes too many ambiguous cases which can hardly be called a protest or only limited information are included.

Li’s data (2017) found that 59 per cent of protest events were tolerated and 41 percent of protest events were met with coercive measures. However, Li (2017) collected data from Boxun website from 2001 to 2002 which is before Xi’s period. Chen (2019) argued that under Xi’s rule, the regime has been relying on increasing

repression to squash protest activities and police have also been more inclined to arrest protesters. Also, according to Li's description, it seems her data include some online protests which the police could never show up. As a result, the difference between my dataset and Li's is understandable to me.

In summary, previous research do not reach a common finding on how many protests are tolerated in China. Though my data is different from all previous research, I have confidence that my result is still relatively unbiased and valid.

5.3 Control Variables

Many variables I introduced above are not independent of each other. For example, the size of the protests could be correlated with the government's response and the domestic media coverage together. As a result, when I test each hypothesis, these variables serve as control variables for each other, sometimes as confounding variables and sometimes as extraneous variables.

Nevertheless, I still include the type of protest and the local GDP as two new control variables.

The type of protest means the issues which are being protested. As I wrote, it is my important criterion to estimate the government's potential political threat and economic cost. At the same time, the type of protest could also affect the government's responses since some types of protest can more easily attract the media or the central government's attention. So, I still include the types of protest as a

confounding variable when I test the hypothesis about the relative cost of being responsive.

The local GDP may also affect the government's perception of the relative cost of being responsive. Governments of cities with higher GDP tend to have more tax income and budgets; thus, they may have better abilities to satisfy the demands. Since I do not consider the local GDP when I code the variable "economic cost," it is an extraneous variable I need to control when I analyze the relative cost of being responsive. Also, I use the administrative level of the place of the protest as a reflector of the political and economic power of the local government. However, since some county governments in economically developed areas could be much richer than a city government in less developed areas, controlling the local GDP in the model could help me fix such an issue.

5.3.1 The Type of the Protest

The Wickedonna data include 11 different types of protest: labour, real estate, fraud, land grab, eviction, medical issues, education, transport, corruption, police brutality, and pollution. Based on these types, I create 7 categories for protests in my datasets: labour, real estate, crime, land, education, environment, and governance. Each of them is a binary variable in my dataset. One case can belong to multiple categories at the same time.

Here is a general introduction to each category and how they could affect the government's potential political threat and economic cost. The examples I provide in each category also nearly summarize all protests in the Wickedonna dataset.

(1) "Labour" includes any labour strikes or protests for wage issues or compensation issues. This category not only includes workers' protests, if teachers, nurses, or government employees also protest for wage issues, their protests also belong to these categories.

(2) "Real estate" includes real estate owners' protests for property developers' issues such as fake propaganda, fraud, delayed handover, and poor governance.

In most of the time, companies and property developers are the target of protest in these two categories, which means the government face low political threat and economic cost to address the issue. But there are few exceptions. Doctors', taxi drivers', or teachers' strikes and protests could cause large social impact. In these cases, the government will face high political pressure to solve the issue. Also, in those government employees' labor protests, the government will also burden high economic cost to address the issue.

(3) "Land" includes any protests caused by land disputes. In most of time, these disputes happen between the government and the rurals. Given that land resource is the foundation of economic development and most land sales revenue is the government's main source of income, most land protests mean high political threat and high economic cost for the government.

(4) “Education” includes any protests initiated by parents, students or teachers. The government’s political threat and economic cost in education protests varies a lot. For instance, public school teachers’ protest for salary issues means high economic cost. Parents’ protest for education policy means high political threat.

(5) “Crime” includes any protests caused by a crime. Most cases in this category are initiated by the victims of illegal fund-raising. Since such investment scams are usually committed by private actors, the government usually face low political threat and economic cost to address the issue.

(6) “Environment” includes any protests caused by environmental issues. Villagers and citizens often protest for existing or to-be-built potential environmental damaging facilities. These facilities includes factories, waste incineration plants, sewage treatment plants, and substations. The government’s political threat and economic cost in education protests also varies. For example, if the citizens protest a private polluting factory, this usually means low economic cost and political threat. But if the citizens protest a government facility, then the situation becomes high economic cost and political threat. The second circumstance is more common in my dataset.

(7) “Governance” includes any protests in which the government is the main object of protest. People often protest when the government expropriates land, decides to build a potential environmental damaging facility, or behaviors poorly on governance. In most of time, the government faces a high political threat when they become the target of protest, since it could seriously affect the higher-level

government's evaluation of them. The government's economic cost of this category depends on the specific content of the protest.

In the original dataset, around 43 percent of protest events are labor protests, land grabs account for 10 percent, 6 percent of all protests are against evictions, real-estate related grievances motivate 21 percent of all protests, medical treatment accounts for 6 percent, fraud-related issues accounts for 5 percent, education and pollution each account for 2.5 percent. In my dataset, land account for 17 percent, 20 percent of them are environmental protests, 16 percent are real-estate related grievances, crime-related issues accounts for 3 percent, education issues accounts for 5 percent, and the rest 14 percent are governance issues. Such a difference between the two datasets is not surprising. First, I combine land grab and eviction, and put transport, corruption, and police brutality into the governance category. Second, when villagers or real estate owners protest for environmental issues, the Wickedonna dataset may put them into land grab or real estate category, but I will put them into environment category. Third, the percent of labor protests decreases since this category includes lots of ambiguous cases in the original dataset. In short, if I do not change the category, the distributions of the two datasets are similar.

5.3.2 Local GDP

In addition, I control the local government's capacity by GDP per capita at the city or county level. Since many protests happen at rural level which does not have

statistical data, the GDP data in those places will use county level data. The data is from various statistic databank.

6. Empirical Strategy

This study mainly employs a Cumulative Logit Model to estimate coefficients. This model uses cumulative probabilities up to a threshold, making all ordinal categories binary. Compared to other models like Baseline-Category Logit Model or Polytomous (Multinomial) Logistic Regression, this model is specially designed for an ordinal categorical independent variable. Hence it also produces fewer parameters and more interpretable coefficients than other models.

However, this model heavily relies on the proportional odds assumption, which implies that the differences between each category of the outcome variable are the same across all categories. In the context of my research, it means I am assuming that the difference across "0 (no response)," "1 (refuses but tries to persuade the protesters)," "2 (stands on the protesters' side but does not satisfy all the demand)," and "3 (satisfy all the protesters' demand)" are the same. As these categories are only numbers transformed from concepts, this assumption cannot be explained by reality. This is my research's main defect in adopting the Cumulative Logit Model. Nonetheless, Cumulative Logit Model is still my best choice when other regression models produce unexplainable coefficients. Also, since my research is not targeted at finding the exact impact of each factor on the government's response, such a defect is acceptable as I can still identify which factors are significant.

For simplicity, I do not include any interaction terms or quadratic terms in the analysis. Although it is possible that the impact of disruptive actions will be

reinforced by the size of the protest, I am only interested in each variable's independent impact on the responses. It is also beyond my paper's capacity to figure out the exact formulation behind the government's logic.

In the field of contentious politics, the results from such an empirical analysis, while describing the general pattern, are also certainly limited in practicality. In reality, each protest has its unique factors, like the local leaders' characteristics or the intervention from the higher-level government, which are nearly impossible to measure. Case studies are still vital in this field to better understand the role of each factor in a protest. But as I wrote, since there is no empirical analysis of government responses or protest outcomes in China, this quantitative research is still valuable by offering a comprehensive analysis of contentions in China.

7. Results and Discussion

Table.3 below presents my regression results. In this paper, I adopt the conventional level of statistical significance ($p<.05$).

Table.3 Cumulative Logit Model Predicting the Government's Response in China, 2013 to 2016.

	Dependent variable:				
			Response		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
y> =1	3.455	3.095	3.041	3.913*	3.945*
	(2.158)	(2.145)	(2.175)	(2.187)	(2.209)
y> =2	2.206	1.823	1.754	2.563	2.592
	(2.155)	(2.142)	(2.172)	(2.182)	(2.205)
y> =3	0.324	-0.089	-0.190	0.495	0.513
	(2.148)	(2.137)	(2.167)	(2.173)	(2.196)
size	0.382**	0.337*	0.317*	0.305	0.276
	(0.175)	(0.176)	(0.183)	(0.186)	(0.191)
disruptive	-0.281	-0.375*	-0.383*	-0.214	-0.235
	(0.203)	(0.206)	(0.207)	(0.216)	(0.217)
Location.sensitivity	0.061	0.148	0.121	0.482*	0.435*
	(0.229)	(0.232)	(0.235)	(0.249)	(0.253)
location.geofraphical	0.196*	0.136	0.126	0.128	0.140
	(0.117)	(0.119)	(0.126)	(0.133)	(0.134)
gdplog	-0.197	-0.181	-0.185	-0.120	-0.147
	(0.193)	(0.191)	(0.195)	(0.199)	(0.203)
political.threat			0.539*		0.467
			(0.292)		(0.343)
eco.cost			-0.536**		-0.241
			(0.254)		(0.304)
Media.coverage.domestic		0.659***	0.629***	0.721***	0.693***
		(0.243)	(0.243)	(0.248)	(0.250)
land				-0.713*	-0.635
				(0.379)	(0.395)
governance				-0.961***	-0.976***
				(0.289)	(0.323)
labour				-1.013**	-0.880**
				(0.416)	(0.428)
education				0.318	0.384
				(0.505)	(0.510)
crime				-0.348	-0.391
				(0.457)	(0.460)
real.estate				-0.800**	-0.672*
				(0.363)	(0.377)
Environment				0.425	0.450
				(0.374)	(0.382)
repression				-0.405*	-0.386*
				(0.212)	(0.213)
Observations	279	279	279	279	279
R2	0.058	0.085	0.107	0.180	0.188
chi2	15.444*** (df = 5)	22.891*** (df = 6)	29.068*** (df = 8)	51.079*** (df = 14)	53.500*** (df = 16)
Note:					*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

7.1 Size, Disruptive Actions, Location, and Domestic Media Coverage

As we can see from the regression table, from model 2 to model 5, size, disruptive actions, location sensitivity, and geographical location have no significant effect on governments' reactions, which apparently rejects my first and fourth hypothesis. These protest tactics and the administrative level of the place of the protest have no impact on the government's responses at the first glance.

Among all models, domestic media's report always has a significant impact on the government's response. The output shows that for protests who received the media's report, the odds of receiving a positive government response is around 2 (exp (0.693)=1.999) times that of protests without the media's report. This output confirms my third hypothesis and aligns with many previous qualitative studies that emphasize the role of media in the protests' success.

7.2 Political Threat and Economic Cost

When I only include political threat and economic cost into the model, the economic cost significantly impacts response, but the political threat is not significant at 0.05 level. For protests which could cause a high economic cost for the government, the odds of receiving a positive government response is around 0.585 (exp (-0.536) $\approx$0.585) times that of protests which could not. However, when I include the types of protest, political threat, and economic cost in the model together, both the political threat and economic cost no longer significantly impact responses.

Since I code the variables "political threat" and "economic cost" by my own standard and highly depending on the type of protests, such a result is understandable to me; different categories affect the government's response by affecting the government's perception of economic cost and political threat. Therefore, economic cost loses its significance when I control different types in the model.

For political threat, first, my subjective assumption may not accurately estimate the government's real perception of threat in front of a protest. After all, the political threat is much more difficult to perceive than the economic cost. Second, political threat means the lower level of the government has pressure to respond to the protest properly but not positively. In some cases I have collected, it is clear that the logic and demand of the protesters are unreasonable. Therefore, a high political threat here may only induce the government to repress such a protest. As a result, my analysis shows that political threat does not significantly impact the response. This finding partially objects to my second hypothesis and previous theories about the relative cost of being responsive (Cai, 2010; Yang, 2016). While economic costs undoubtedly affect the government's calculation of being responsive, the political threat may not necessarily require the government to make a positive response.

7.3 Repression and Responses

At last, using the conventional level of statistical significance ($p<.05$), repression does not significantly impact the odds of a positive response. This finding rejects one

previous argument, which states that repression is a function of cost/benefit calculations by local officials; it will be used when it is more beneficial for them than making concessions. (Cai, 2010; Gobel, 2019)

When previous scholars make such an argument, case studies are the only method they use. Thereby, maybe in some particular protests, the local government considers using violence to replace concessions. Nonetheless, in the general pattern, my results prove that the government's repression of a protest in China is more like the police's natural response to mass incidents and is unrelated to the government's responses to a protest. After all, according to the *Rally, Procession, and Demonstration Law* in China, any protests without the government's approval are illegal, not to mention most of these protests are disruptive and have already affected the order of society. In short, the local government certainly is doing cost/benefit calculations in facing a protest, but the calculation is unrelated to whether the local police repress the protests or not. For future studies, a larger sample size is necessary to retest this argument, and scholars should be cautious when they discuss the government's repression and response together. They should be treated as two independent sub-fields of contentious politics in China.

7.4 The Control Variables

No matter in which model, the local GDP has no impact on the government's responses. When I control the types of protests in the model, we can see that

governance and labor protests are less likely to get a positive response in models 4 and 5. For governance protests, the odds of receiving a positive government response is around 0.38 (exp(-0.961)≈0.3825) times that of other protests. For labor protests, the odds of receiving a positive government response is around 0.36 (exp(-1.013)≈ 0.36) times that of other protests. Real estate protest is only less likely to get a positive response in model 4. Its odds of receiving a positive government response is around 0.44 (exp(-0.8) ≈ 0.44) times that of other protests. The logic behind the governance protest is simple: when the government is the object of the protest, a positive response to the protest means that the government always has to sacrifice some of its interests, no matter the economic cost and the political threat is high or low. Hence governance protests are less likely to get a positive response.

On the other hand, real estate and labor protests are mainly economic conflicts between citizens and businesses. Thereby, the government usually faces low political threats and economic costs in front of such protests. Meanwhile, there are not many things the government can do in response to such a protest; they cannot spend their funding to satisfy the protesters' economic demands. During the data collection process, I saw some real estate and labor protests were solved privately without the government's intervention. For the rest protests where the government refused the protesters' demands, I found many conflicts were solved through formal lawsuits sometime after the protest. To sum up, these facts explain why real estate and labor protests are less likely to get a positive response from the government.

7.5 Are the Protesters' Tactics Really Useless?

From the regression table above, it seems that protesters' tactics (size, disruptive actions, location sensitivity) have no impact on governments' reactions. Is this really true? By using domestic media's report as the dependent variable and running a binary logistic regression model, I find that size, disruptive actions, and geographical location significantly increase the possibility of domestic media coverage. In details, a larger size protest increases the natural log of odds of domestic media report by 0.144, a more disruptive protest also increases the natural log of odds by 0.144, and a protest in larger cities increases the natural log of odds by 0.088. On the other hand, location sensitivity, GDP, and different types of protest have no significant impacts on media coverage. The results are presented in Table.4.

From this point of view, different protesters' tactics seem not necessarily worthless. If these tactics successfully attract the media's attention, their protests still have more chance to receive the government's active response. This finding also provides evidence that urban protests are more likely to get active responses since they are more likely to attract the media's attention.

Table.4 Binary Logistic Regression Model Predicting the domestic media's coverage of protest in China.

	Dependent variable:		
	Media.coverage.domestic		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
size	0.175***	0.146***	0.142***
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.036)
disruptive	0.065*	0.141***	0.152***
	(0.036)	(0.041)	(0.042)
Location.sensitivity		-0.022	-0.019
		(0.045)	(0.046)
location.geofraphical		0.088***	0.083***
		(0.022)	(0.026)
gdplog		0.015	0.018
		(0.039)	(0.040)
land			-0.099
			(0.074)
governance			0.039
			(0.055)
labour			-0.040
			(0.075)
education			0.091
			(0.099)
crime			-0.029
			(0.096)
real.estate			0.005
			(0.076)
Environment			0.042
			(0.076)
repression	-0.005	0.010	0.012
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.036)
Constant	0.168**	-0.172	-0.209
	(0.076)	(0.431)	(0.436)
Observations	508	508	508
Log Likelihood	-350.503	-339.465	-335.977
Akaike Inf. Crit.	709.007	692.931	699.953
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

My dataset certainly cannot cover all potential tactics people can use in a protest since such information could not be identified in the Wickedonna. In reality, people often kneel for supplication, sing revolutionary songs, wear strange costumes, and use many other eye-attracting manners to protest. In an environmental protest in Zhejiang, protesters even held a "funeral" for the local leader. (O'Brien and Deng, 2014) Such performance-like actions often attract the media's attention and make the protest more troublesome for the government.

Moreover, from model 1 in the table.3 above, we can see if I do not control for the media's coverage, the size of the protests has a significant impact on the government responses. A larger size protest increases the natural odds of a positive response by 0.382. If I choose to use a more relaxed significance level of 0.1, protests in larger cities are also more likely to get a positive response than a county or village protest. Also, the sample size I used to analyze the results is still relatively small (508). If future research can increase the sample size and collect more government responses, we can further verify the relationship between different tactics and the government's responses.

7.6 Underestimation of Domestic Media Coverage

As I have pointed out, I unavoidably underestimate the real size of domestic media coverage due to censorship, and domestic media coverage is my vital source of the government's response. But as figure.9 shows different categories have no

significant impacts on media coverage. Repression and disruptive actions also have no impact on media coverage. Hence there is no evidence that censorship in China deliberately blocks specific types of protests or more violent protests. The censorship over protests is strict but also random. As a result, I have confidence that such an underestimation of the actual size of domestic media coverage would cause a systematic negative or positive bias on domestic media coverage's coefficient.

8. Conclusion

Although there is plenty of research studying when and why the Chinese government violently represses or tolerates a protest, the determinants of the government's responses to a protest remain heavily understudied. Due to the limitation of data, previous scholars can only use qualitative methods or quantitative analysis with extremely small sample sizes. Based on the Wickedonna dataset, I collected 508 daily protests from 2013 to 2016 and identified the government's responses for 279 of them. With this newest dataset in Xi's period, I tested a series of hypotheses about the determinants of the government's responses to a protest.

The results presented in this paper show that domestic media coverage is the most vital factor that forces the government to respond positively. This outcome confirms previous qualitative research, which emphasizes the role of media in a successful protest.

Furthermore, the government's potential high economic cost to address the issue significantly reduces the odds of a positive response. On the other hand, political threat does not have a significant impact on the response. This result only partially supports Cai (2010) 's theory that protest outcome is determined by how the protesters could affect the cost and benefits perceptions of the local government. While economic cost undoubtedly affects the government's calculation of being responsive, political threat affect the government’s consideration but not necessarily require them to make a positive response.

While the size, geographical location, and the disruptiveness of the protest have no impacts on the government's response ostensibly, they significantly increase the possibility of media's coverage of the protest, which means urban protest and some protest tactics could still affect the government's response to a protest.

Although the main theme of my paper is the government's response, my results challenge one previous argument that repression will be used when it is more beneficial for the government than making concessions. (Cai, 2010; Gobel, 2019) My results prove that the government's repression to a protest in China is the police's natural response to mass incidents and is totally unrelated to the government's responses to a protest. In this light, repression and and responses to a protest should be studied independently from each other in the future.

It should be noted that the determinants of the government responses included in this paper are undoubtedly incomplete. By common sense, the local leaders' characteristics and the truth of the protests are the two other essential factors that could decide the government's response to a protest. Nonetheless, it is nearly impossible to collect such information. Like in a land protest, from today's point of view, we could never know whether the government embezzles the villagers' compensation or merely that the villagers want to blackmail the government for more compensation.

Again, I have to empathize that this paper only focuses on those daily local protests in China. My dataset does not include any religious protests, ethnic political protests, or direct protests against the central government. Those protests should be

treated and studied separately from other protests.

One final word, no response or more repression are not necessarily bad things. In many lands, real estate, and labor protests I collected, even though the government refused the protesters' demands or no responses could be found, I still see these people protect their interests through formal lawsuits. In recent years, China is continuously improving its legal framework. The new labor law was published in 2008. Administrative Litigation Law was implemented in 2015. The number of labor litigation and administrative litigation kept increasing before Covid-19 came. The petition system was also reformed in 2014. Although there is no detailed data to support it, it seems that the Chinese government is guiding people to protect their rights through the more institutionalized methods step by step by adopting more strict control and censorship of protest. This argument is waiting for future research to verify.

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