Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

DocuSigned by:

Handi Li

CB4D46E7293D431...

Handi Li
Name

10/28/2022 | 4:11 PM EDT
Date

Title   Transparency and Authoritarian Stability: Open Government Information in China

Author   Handi Li

Degree   Doctor of Philosophy

Program   Political Science

Approved by the Committee

Jennifer Gandhi

Advisor

Adam Glynn

Committee Member
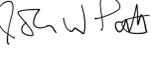
John Patty

Committee Member

Renard Sexton

Committee Member

Yuhua Wang

Committee Member

Accepted by the Laney Graduate School

Kimberly Jacob Arriola, PhD, MPH

Dean, James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Transparency and Authoritarian Stability:
Open Government Information in China

By

Handi Li
Master of Arts, Duke University, 2017
Bachelor of Law, Peking University, 2015

Advisor: Jennifer Gandhi, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science
2022

Abstract

Transparency and Authoritarian Stability: Open Government Information in China

By Handi Li

This three-essay dissertation investigates how transparency influences social contention and legal resistance in autocracies. Focusing on Open Government Information, a popular transparency initiative in the developing world, this dissertation proposes a theory of dual effects of authoritarian transparency. Conventional wisdom holds that transparency in autocracies allows citizens to pull fire alarms when regime agents misbehave, thereby monitoring agents but risking more social contention. The first two papers show that transparency redirects grievances and instead reduces protests. In Essay One, I present two new datasets on the transparency of Chinese local governments measured by a comprehensive index and single-issue information availability, respectively. I find that the number of protests declines with greater transparency in both measurements. Integrating evidence from online and in-the-field survey experiments as well as interviews in China, Essay Two shows that transparency increases citizens' perceived fairness of legal and political institutions and causes them to prioritize institutions over protest when they have grievances against the governments. Essay Three questions the effectiveness of transparency for challenging agents. Because agents can manipulate institutions such as the courts, transparency causes an agent backlash effect that blocks citizens' challenges. Using an original dataset of court judgments and a difference-in-differences design based on a grassroots transparency experiment in China, I find that transparency encourages legal resistance against local governments but makes citizens less likely to win. This perverse effect is driven by local judicial dependence. In sum, this dissertation suggests that while authoritarian transparency improves citizens' confidence in institutions and leads citizens to challenge local agents through institutions, it does not generate accountability in the absence of institutional independence.

Transparency and Authoritarian Stability:
Open Government Information in China

By

Handi Li
Master of Arts, Duke University, 2017
Bachelor of Law, Peking University, 2015

Advisor: Jennifer Gandhi, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science
2022

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is a "dream come true" in my academic journey. Without the help from many people, I would never have reached the milestone. First and foremost, I thank my committee, Jen Gandhi, Adam Glynn, John Patty, Renard Sexton, and Yuhua Wang, for their invaluable feedback and help for my dissertation research as well as other parts of my graduate studies. I am especially grateful to Jen Gandhi, for her generous encouragement, advice, and support over the past five years. My research also benefits from the great comments from many other professors in the department, including Natalia Bueno, Nahomi Ichino, Jack Paine, Miguel Rueda, and Hubert Tworzecki. I also thank our administrative staff, particularly Debbie Allen and Kathy Malanoski, for their effortless work.

I am also indebted to the camaraderie in my department, particularly from Daniel Arnon, Siv Cheruvu, Travis Curtice, Allison Cuttner, Pearce Edwards, Josh Fjelstul, Don Grasse, Abby Heller, Stefano Jud, Jenny Kim, Jiwon Kim, Sinisa Miric, Patrick Pierson, Yumin Hsu Wang, Jian Xu, and Eddy Yeung, who provided great intellectual and spiritual support as well as wonderful friendship during my graduate studies.

Outside Emory and my committee, this dissertation relies on the generous feedback and assistance from many distinguished scholars in my field, including but not limited to Mary Gallagher, Guy Grossman, Dimitar Gueorguiev, James Hollyer, Yue Hou, Haifeng Huang, Jieun Kim, Reed Lei, Xiao Ma, Eddy Malesky, Daniel Mattingly, Melanie Manion, Jen Pan, Arturas Rozenas, Minh Trinh, Rory Truex, and Xu Xu. Their insights have shaped my research agenda.

Furthermore, I am very grateful to people from several anonymous Chinese local institutions, survey firms, and data service firms, which helped me overcome plenty of logistical challenges during the pandemic. I would also like to thank Yumeng Song, Chengyang Zhang, Tian Chen, Junda Li, Marybeth Ehlbeck, Zixuan Liu, and Qingqing Shi, for their excellent research assistantship. I would not have completed this dissertation without their effort.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends outside of the department. To my parents and grandparents, who live on the other side of the Earth but always say they are fine and ask me to focus on my life, who know little about academics but always listen to me and support my decision. To my partner Haosen Ge, who spares no effort to build a space for me to overcome my struggles. And to my best friends Charlotte Yang, Xinzhi Zhao, Ru Jing, and Bruce Liu, for fruitful conversations in my happy days and unwavering support in my darkest hours. We share this achievement together.

Contents

List of Figures

*

List of Tables

*

Introduction

As human activities increasingly rely on information, transparency has become a crucial criterion of governance. Yet governments may not appreciate transparency, as it allows citizens to identify governments' bad performance and misbehavior, which could increase discontent and collective action. Studies show democracies are more likely to develop transparency than autocracies, probably due to greater political competition and electoral accountability (Andreula, Chong and Guillen 2009, Djankov et al. 2010, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2011, Berliner 2014). In contrast, authoritarian governments frequently conceal or censor information to maintain social stability (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2014).

Although authoritarian governments are less transparent than their democratic counterparts in many aspects, many of them have developed transparency initiatives in recent years. Countries such as China, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, and the United Arabic Emirates, adopted transparency laws and institutions while imposing heavy constraints on the flow of information. What are the functions and effects of transparency in these authoritarian countries? Does it generate more protests and resistance to governments? Does it bolster accountability and help citizens protect their rights as it does in democracies? This dissertation investigates these questions with three essays on authoritarian transparency and social stability.

While people usually talk about transparency as a general status of government institutions or social environment (Stiglitz 1999, Hood and Heald 2006), there are varieties of transparency that may produce different outcomes (Hood and Heald 2006, Kosack and Fung 2014). Transparency can be categorized into four types: government budget, policies and institutions, government malfea-

sance, and economic performance. A group of studies on developed democracies focuses on budget transparency, exploring its effect on government spending (Alt and Lassen 2003, 2006, Alt and Lowry 2010, Andreula, Chong and Guillen 2009). The second type of transparency is the proactive disclosure of or permission for citizens to access information about government policies, projects, and institutions regarding public goods or services. These studies are largely conducted in the developing world (Berliner and Erlich 2015, Berliner 2017, Distelhorst 2017, Grossman and Michelitch 2018, Lieberman, Posner and Tsai 2014, Kim et al. 2022, Kosec and Wantchekon 2020). The third type is about corruption and misbehavior of government officials. An example is monitoring initiatives such as auditing and public release of corruption information. The cases involve both democracies and non-democracies (Di Tella and Schargrodsky 2003, Ferraz and Finan 2011, Grossman and Hanlon 2014, Chong et al. 2014, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Arias et al. 2018). Finally, some researchers measure the transparency of macroeconomic performance with the availability of economic statistics (Islam 2006, Williams 2009, Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg 2014, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2011, 2015, 2018).

The three essays of this dissertation focus on Open Government Information (OGI), or Freedom to Information, a popular transparency initiative in the developing world over the past two decades. It is a law with a set of regulations that entitle citizens to the legal right to access government information. Governments are required to proactively publish information, and citizens can request unpublished information as long as it does not harm national security. The content of such transparency usually includes a wide range from personnel change and fiscal budget to economic statistics, from national law and institution to local policy and project. Therefore, it covers multiple types of transparency that are mentioned above. Many countries that adopted OGI do not possess democratic institutions that encourage political competition, ensure separation of power, or protect civil liberty. However, although the specific practices vary, most of these countries have established a complete legal framework along with a technological system to publicize those pieces of information. The studies of authoritarian transparency in this dissertation involve both general transparency and the transparency of a specific issue on local policy and project.

This dissertation proposes a theory of the dual effects of authoritarian transparency. On one hand, when the government misbehaves, transparency can redirect citizens' grievances from the streets to institutions. On the other hand, it may cause more collusion between the government and the institution, which blocks institutional resistance by citizens. The dissertation draws evidence from China, a prototypical case in terms of both the application scale and local variation of this initiative, and provides broader implications for how transparency shapes local governance and social stability in developing countries. The first two essays explore the relationship between OGI and protest in China. They suggest that transparency does not necessarily destabilize autocracies; it may even mitigate the risk of protests by encouraging citizens' interactions with institutions. The third paper shows that while transparency encourages citizens' to challenge local governments through institutions, it does not help them and may even exacerbate their situation due to the institutions' dependence on local governments.

Essay One introduces two new datasets of OGI in China for studying authoritarian transparency. The first one is a comprehensive index that measures the overall transparency environment across various issues at the province level. I create the second dataset, the Local Land Transparency in China (LLTC) Dataset, by scraping and labeling disclosed land project documents from local government websites. It measures the availability of specific policy information on land expropriation in prefecture cities. Using the two datasets, I show that protests across various issues decline with a generally more transparent environment in Chinese provinces. Similarly, the transparency of land expropriation policies at the grassroots level decreases land-related protests in cities. Meanwhile, the effect of land transparency does not apply to protests regarding other issues, suggesting it is the actual disclosed information of specific issues that drives the outcome.

Essay Two conducts causal research and investigates the mechanisms for the correlation found in Essay One. It integrates evidence from online and in-the-field survey experiments. The online experiment recruits a large national sample of netizens. The fieldwork involves about 700 rural respondents of low income and education in China. The experiments ask participants to consider a hypothetical situation in which a local land-taking project offers lower compensation than the mar-

ket price. A treatment group is randomly assigned to read an actual OGI document that explicitly outlines the land compensation standard and confirms the local mis-implementation of the policy. The study finds that information about local governments' misbehavior leads citizens to prioritize institutions over protest when they have grievances against the government. Multiple findings suggest that this is because the evidence of local misconduct increases their perceived fairness of institutions for dispute resolution.

Essay Two leaves an open question about the actual effectiveness of transparency-driven institutional resistance against governments. The answer to this question will not only help us understand whether there is a gap between citizens' perception and the actual effect but also contribute to the literature of monitoring theory on authoritarian transparency. A regime may allow more information to facilitate checks on local agents (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Lorentzen 2014, Qin, Strömberg and Wu 2017, Huang, Boranbay-Akan and Huang 2019). When local governments misbehave or underperform, transparency encourages citizens to pull fire alarms through legal institutions, which helps the regime monitor these governments (Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Anderson et al. 2019). However, whether citizens can successfully challenge the agents is questionable, because the latter may block the resistance when they can influence the channels of resistance.

To answer this question, I examine the relationship between OGI and legal resistance in China using observational data in Essay Three. I collect an original dataset of administrative litigation cases about land disputes and use a difference-in-differences design that exploits a regime-mandated transparency experiment across multiple Chinese cities in 2017. The results show mixed effects of transparency on agent monitoring and legal resistance in autocracies. While the transparency mandate encourages legal resistance against local governments, it makes citizens less likely to win. The perverse effect on the winning likelihood is more salient when courts depend more on local governments. Moreover, using the LLTC Dataset, I find that the effect is not driven by the specific policy information disclosed to citizens. Under the transparency mandate, local courts more often collude with local governments and dismiss the cases against the latter, which not only

fails the monitoring mechanism but also prevents citizens from protecting their rights.

In sum, my dissertation theorizes the dual effects of authoritarian transparency on social stability: grievance redirection and agent backlash. It implies that while authoritarian transparency improves citizens' confidence in institutions and encourages them to challenge local agents through institutions, it does not generate accountability in the absence of institutional independence. To citizens in authoritarian countries, transparency brings hope for resolving their grievances against governments. Unfortunately, such an effect is limited because the function of institutions is limited in these countries. To authoritarian regimes, OGI increases their resilience by redirecting citizens' grievances, rather than threatening their survival as certain types of transparency do. Nevertheless, it may not help the regimes monitor and check their agents unless they introduce the separation of powers between the agency and other institutions.

In addition, taking Essays Two and Three together, we can learn that transparency has a significant impact on legal resistance and local judicial politics in autocracies like China. It not only influences citizens' contention behavior, but it also shapes local governments' incentives for judicial manipulation. Exsiting studies in various countries show that multiple types of information that can increase citizens' confidence in legal institutions encourage legal resistance (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011, Whiting 2017, Acemoglu et al. 2020, Hanson 2022). This dissertation suggests that OGI may serve the same function. Furthermore, whether democratic or not, regimes take action to reduce local judicial bias. Essay Three implies that, while restricting government intervention to courts can be effective (Moustafa 2008, Widner and Scher 2008, Wang 2015, Lei and Li 2022), adopting transparency may not produce the desired outcome.

Essay 1

Does Open Government Information Increase Protest?: Evidence from New Datasets in China

1.1 Introduction

Information is crucial to economic and political activities. Transparency improves local governance in many cases worldwide (Stiglitz 1999, Hood and Heald 2006, Kosack and Fung 2014). In the past two decades, the advancement of information technology enabled more developing countries to adopt transparency laws and disclose government information. These laws are often called Open Government Information or Freedom of Information (OGI) Laws. They entitle citizens to the right to access and require governments to publish information concerning government and official profiles, policies and projects, social and economic statistics, and so on.

While transparency is more likely to be developed in democracies with effective elections and sufficient political competition (Djankov et al. 2010, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2011, Berliner 2014), many of the OGI-adopting countries are non-democratic, such as China, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Given the fact that these countries always cen-

sor unfavorable information in fear of mass threats (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2014), does the transparency initiative increase such threats to them?

It is not surprising that transparency increases the challenge to political actors when they misbehave or underperform. In many cases, unfavorable disclosed information dampens public evaluation and support for an incumbent government (Ferraz and Finan 2008, Chong et al. 2014, Ansolabehere, Meredith and Snowberg 2014, Alkon and Wang 2018, Gandhi and Li 2022). Moreover, open information creates a focal point that helps potential protesters solve collective action problem in autocracies (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018).

However, some other studies suggest a different answer. Transparency helps citizens and the regime monitor agents and increase their work quality (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Grossman and Hanlon 2014, Grossman and Michelitch 2018, Anderson et al. 2019) or reduce their misconduct (Ferraz and Finan 2011, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017). Better agent performance can make citizens less likely to experience grievances about government policy or behavior. Therefore, they are less likely to protest in a more transparent environment. Furthermore, transparency may encourage citizens to use institutions to resolve their grievances about government policy or behavior by removing the information blocks (O'Brien and Li 2004, Gallagher 2006, Gallagher and Wang 2011) and providing legal evidence (H. Li 2022).

To test whether OGI increases or decreases protest in an authoritarian country, I introduce two new datasets of OGI in China. The first one is a comprehensive index that measures the overall transparency environment across various issues at the province level. I create the second dataset, Local Land Transparency in China (LLTC) Dataset, by scraping and labeling disclosed land project documents from local government websites. It measures the availability of specific policy information on land expropriation in prefecture cities.[1]

The two datasets are used in this paper to examine the relationship between local transparency and protest. After normalizing protest numbers by population, I analyze the data with OLS models. The zero-inflated negative binomial model is used to check the issues of overdispersion and

---

[1]The replication data and the codebook of the LLTC Dataset will be published at The author's website: https://handi-li.net.

excessive zeros. The results show that protests across various issues decline with a generally more transparent environment in Chinese provinces. Similarly, the transparency of land expropriation policies at the grassroots level decreases land-related protests in cities. Meanwhile, the effect of land transparency does not apply to other protests, implying it is the actually disclosed information of specific issues that drives the outcome.

This paper contributes to the rising literature of OGI in the developing world which focuses on politician competition, elite control, or citizens' demands (Berliner and Erlich 2015, Berliner 2017, Distelhorst 2017, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Berliner et al. 2020, Kim et al. 2022, Kim and O'Brien 2021). It investigates the effect of OGI on protest, an important factor of governance and stability, which draws an implication for policy-making in developing countries. It also provides sub-national observational evidence that certain transparency can decrease mass threats in an authoritarian state, while many other studies argue the opposite (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2014, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018). Future studies may explore the conditions that cause the mixture of effects of authoritarian transparency. The findings in this paper imply that transparency may be a tool that facilitates social control and increases authoritarian resilience.

Moreover, this paper introduces two new datasets of local transparency in China. Although many developing countries, including China, have adopted transparency laws in the past two decades, we still lack a good measure of local transparency, especially at the grassroots level. Extant subnational data primarily captures the adoption (rather than the *de facto* implementation) of transparency law or citizens' requests according to the law, or is early in time (Berliner and Erlich 2015, Distelhorst 2017, Berliner et al. 2020, Kim et al. 2022), or is early in time (Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017). The two datasets in this paper fill the gap by providing a comprehensive measure of local transparency environment and a specific measure of the transparency of a single policy issue across Chinese localities. In addition to transparency, the LLTC Dataset can also be used to investigate questions about land taking and a variety of other local political economy issues influenced by the land market in China. The method used to create the dataset can be applied to other countries and issues with comparable information disclosure criteria across localities. For

example, we can measure the transparency of fiscal budgets, legislative bills, personnel transition, and certain projects in China in a similar way.

1.2 Does Open Government Information Increase or Decrease Mass Threats?

Does OGI increase mass threats in authoritarian countries? When transparency is enforced, citizens can learn negative information about politicians and governments, which generates grievances and nurtures dissent. Studies across regimes have shown that the disclosure of malfeasance decreases public evaluation and support for incumbent government (Ferraz and Finan 2008, Chong et al. 2014, Gandhi and Li 2022). More importantly, transparency helps citizens solve the collective action problem and increase the likelihood of protest. A theory of censorship argues that dictatorships may block information flows to prevent collective actions (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2014). Studies suggest that the disclosure of macroeconomic statistics increases protest and leads to the demise of authoritarian regimes because it creates a focal point for potential protesters to coordinate (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018).

Although transparency may increase challenges from citizens, an authoritarian regime may have incentives to adopt it. Freedom of information should increase the likelihood of protest, but the regime can use these protests to identify problems before they turn into revolutions (Qin, Strömberg and Wu 2017, Huang, Boranbay-Akan and Huang 2019). An autocracy can also open more information to induce relatively low-risk protests, which helps the regime check local agents (Lorentzen 2013, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017). The potential mass threat raised by transparency may also counter elites who could commit a coup against the regime (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2019).

Therefore, because transparency exposes governments' misconduct and solves the collective action problem for citizens, OGI may increase protests in an authoritarian country.

H1: Better performance of Open Government Information is correlated with more protests.

However, some other existing studies suggest a different answer to the question. Evidence in electoral countries shows that although transparency makes misbehaving parties less popular, it does not necessarily increase their actual challenge through voting (Chong et al. 2014, Arias et al. 2018). In both electoral and non-electoral regimes, transparency helps citizens and the regime monitor agents such as officials or subordinate governments, thereby raising their general work quality (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Grossman and Michelitch 2018), increasing their compliance with central mandates (Anderson et al. 2019), or reducing their misconduct (Ferraz and Finan 2011, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017). Better agent performance improves governance, reducing citizens' chance of experiencing grievances about government policy or behavior. Consequently, they are less likely to protest in a more transparent environment.

It is also possible that OGI facilitates citizens' use of institutions to address their grievances about government policy or behavior. This is especially important in developing countries, where institutions are less established and citizens have less knowledge about using them. The legal resistance literature suggests that the lack of policy information severely limits citizens' use of legal institutions to resolve disputes (O'Brien and Li 2004, Gallagher 2006, Gallagher and Wang 2011). OGI provides legal evidence of government misconduct, which increases citizens' confidence in using the institutions (H. Li 2022). In this vein, OGI may serve the function of legal mobilization, which is crucial to legal resistance in developing countries (Gallagher 2017, Whiting 2017). When citizens have grievances, increased use of institutions may decrease the likelihood of protest.

For the above two reasons, OGI may also reduce protest by reducing citizens' grievances or channeling the grievances to institutions. Therefore, I also test a hypothesis that is opposite to H1:

H2: Better performance of Open Government Information is correlated with fewer protests.

1.3   Data and Analysis

This paper introduces two new transparency datasets to test the hypotheses. They can also be used to investigate other questions related to transparency in China. Qualitative reports indicate that

there has been substantial variation in the degree to which local governments have implemented the center's transparency directives. While most transparency data sets are cross-country or in developed democracies, few data source can capture sub-national variations in developing countries or autocracies. One such source is introduced in the study by Berliner and Erlich (2015), who record the adoption time of the OGI Law across Mexican states without directly measuring the actual implementation. Another existing dataset is collected by Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev (2017). The data captures Chinese provincial government transparency using website archives in the years 2001–2011. It includes three aspects of OGI: government power structure, decision-making process, and policy outputs. Other existing data related to OGI focuses on citizens' requests of information rather than the governments' proactive disclosure of information (Distelhorst 2017, Berliner, Bagozzi and Palmer-Rubin 2018, Kim et al. 2022).

The datasets in this paper cover different aspects of the actual transparency in recent time periods, with a focus on governments' proactive information disclosure. The first one is a comprehensive OGI index issued by an institution affiliated to a central-government department and independent to local governments. It measures the overall transparency environment across various issues at the province level. The second dataset is originally collected from local government websites and measures the availability of specific policy information on a single issue. It is focused on land expropriation at the prefecture-city level.

1.3.1   A Comprehensive Transparency Index

For the comprehensive index, I collect data on local government transparency from annual reports by a center affiliated with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology in China. Each year, the center visits government websites, calculates a transparency score for each of them, and completes an evaluation between September and November. They also take into account random monitoring of some websites before they start the data collection process. Scores of those websites which rank higher are published at the beginning of the following year. I take from the reports an index of the local websites' openness on a series of government, public policy, and project is-

sues stipulated in the OGI Law. These issues include government budget and spending, policy and regulations, lists of government's administrative power and responsibility, information regarding projects and public welfare, profiles of government and party leaders, as well as statistics of economic and other policy performance. Therefore, the index provides a comprehensive snapshot of OGI performance in Chinese provinces.

The data spans the years 2005–2018 across 31 provinces.[2] The time window captures the pattern of transparency and governance since the ruling of President Xi Jinping. This data also better captures the welfare and policy issues of public concern. These issues have been found to receive the highest demand for transparency by citizens in other developing countries (Berliner, Bagozzi and Palmer-Rubin 2018). Figure 1.1 shows that the general transparency environment increases over time since the adoption of the OGI Law in 2007. The trend of comprehensive index by province is displayed in Appendix A.4.
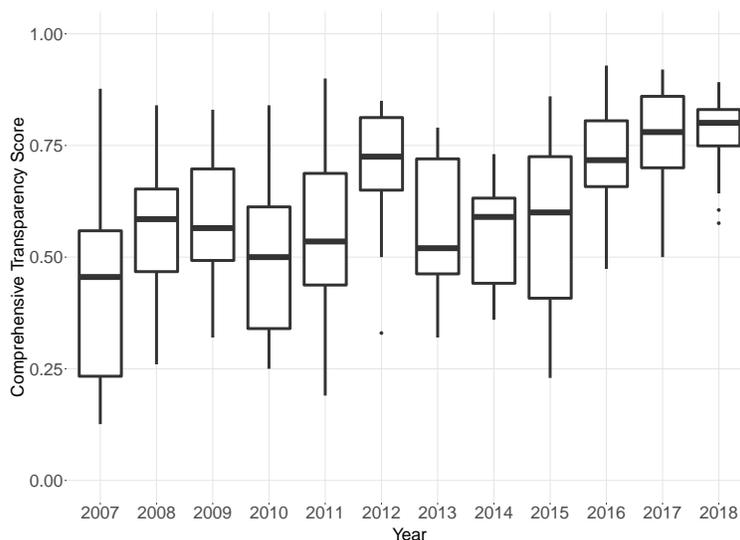
Figure 1.1: Trend in Comprehensive Transparency Score (2007–2018)

---

[2]The center also issues scores for transparency of prefecture-level cities and counties. The county-level data is of different random samples by each year and does not cover all county-level administrative regions in China. Unfortunately, the center only provides data for city and county governments of very top rankings. To avoid this strong selection bias, I focus on the comprehensive transparency at the province level.

1.3.2 Measuring Local Transparency of A Single Issue

The comprehensive index is a compound evaluation of local government transparency. It includes different types of transparency which could influence protest differently. For example, while the literature suggests that the availability of macro-economic statistics should increase protests in autocracies (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018), the effect of local policy transparency on citizens' opinion and behavior is unclear (Raffler, Posner and Parkerson 2019, Kosec and Wantchekon 2020, Arkedis et al. 2021). As a consequence, although the comprehensive index provides a general picture of transparency, it is a less precise measurement than one that focuses on the transparency of a single issue. Therefore, now this paper narrows the scope to the policy transparency of land expropriation and examines how it influences protest related to this issue. I choose the issue of land expropriation because it has been one of the major sources of rebellions and instabilities in authoritarian countries for its high frequency and salience (Cai 2003, Tian et al. 2014, Jiang and Zeng 2020, Hanson 2022).

To measure the transparency of land expropriation policies, I collect an original dataset from government websites and create the Local Land Transparency in China (LLTC) Dataset. The OGI Law in 2007 asks Chinese provincial governments to maintain internet platforms that publish information about local land expropriation. Specifically, five types of information should be open to the public: legal approval of the project, pre-approval notification to residents, a specific plan about the land-taking procedure, an announcement before the project starts, and compensation and settlement measures based on the land law.[3] I scrape 21 government platforms of Mainland China that cover 228 prefecture cities' land-taking projects during 2007–2020. I code a binary variable for each type of information of each project and then calculate an average score for each project. Finally, I average the scores across city-years, generating a transparency score between 0 and 1 for each city in each year.

---

[3]The data also includes the availability of the records of hearings. However, the information about hearings is not required to be published by the OGI Law, and a hearing is not required during land expropriation. As a result, we cannot tell whether a place holds a hearing from the data. Nor can we know how transparent a place is regarding held hearings.

The legal approval of a land project is an official document that certifies the approval of the project from legal review. According to the land law in China, all local land projects including their objectives, significance, areas, budget, and plans for running must be reviewed by governments that is at least one-level superior to the proposing government. The specific plan, while being submitted to the superior government for review, also needs to be open to public. The pre-approval notification lets residents know that a land-taking project may be launched in a specific area. It also lets citizens know a rough compensation and settlement plan. The OGI regulation regarding land expropriation stipulates that the notification must be published once the project is submitted for review. After the project is approved, the local government that proposes the project must publish the approval along with the plan and two other documents—the announcement that the project will start and a document that specifies the compensation and settlement measures based on the law. The announcement includes the project's start date, term, area, compensation and settlement standard, as well as institutional channels for citizens to submit questions and disagreement. The compensation document contains similar information to the announcement, with a focus on the compensation and settlement part. In short, all five documents contain important information about the land project and can help citizens identify whether the local government misbehave during the project. However, three documents—pre-approval notification, announcement, and compensation document—are most relevant to citizens' rights as they contain the information about compensation and settlement. Appendix A.5 shows examples of these three types of documents.

The following two figures summarize some patterns of land transparency in cities with the LLTC data. Figure 1.2 shows that, since the adoption of OGI Law in 2007, land transparency increases over years, but the change was not significant until 2014, when the central government first issued a document regularizing Open Government Information of land expropriation at the grassroots level. A sharp increase in transparency occurred in 2017, when China launched a transparency experiment to 100 counties and scheduled a strict deadline for them to complete a set of transparency requirements.[4] According to the law, all government online platforms should publish

---

[4]The State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2017). *Plan for Grassroots Transparency Experiment*. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-05/22/content_5195775.htm

all five types of information for each land-taking project. Each city government is responsible for providing the information. However, the transparency of these projects varies considerably across provinces and cities. Figure 1.3 shows a bi-modal pattern of land transparency skewed to the left: most cities are either highly transparent or not transparent at all in each type of information criterion, and the highly transparent cities are significantly fewer than the not transparent ones. Across the five criteria, city governments are least willing to disclose the compensation information but most likely to be transparent about legal approval of land-taking projects.
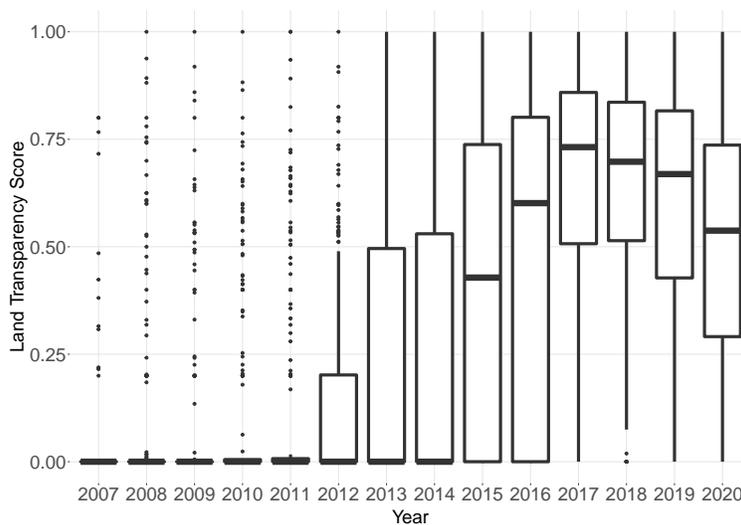
Figure 1.2: Trend in Local Land Transparency Score (2007–2020)

1.3.3 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is the number of protests. I calculate the number in each province or prefecture city in each year with the a dataset of Chinese protest events, Collective Action from Social Media (CASM), between 2011–2016 by Zhang and Pan (2019). The dataset is generated with a deep learning approach from Weibo reports of offline protests and has been found little influenced by online censorship and therefore reliable for identifying protest events in China. Compared to event data collected from traditional media reports, such as Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) or Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) Dataverse, this dataset covers more small-scale or grassroots-level protest events that did not catch
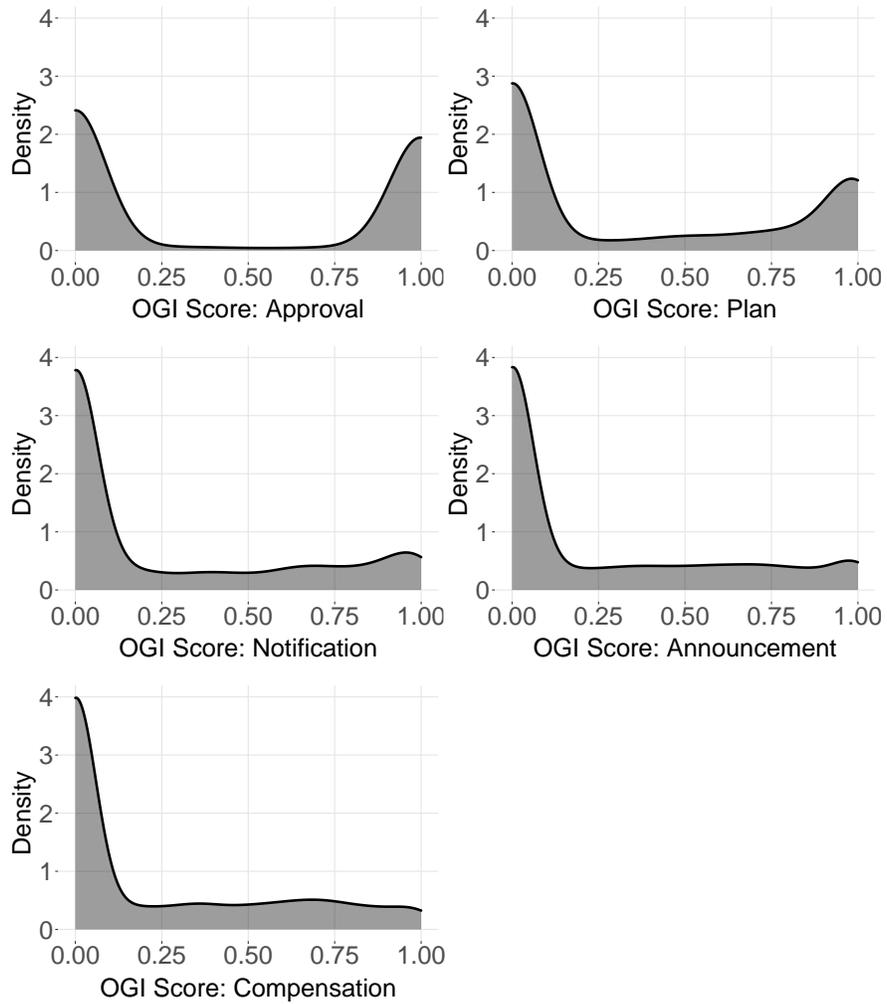
Notes: This figure shows the score density of each criterion of land OGI during 2007–2020. The distributions are similar if the time window is set between 2010 and 2016.

Figure 1.3: Land Transparency by Information Criteria

the attention of news media. In addition to total number of protests, I also count the numbers of violent protests, home-related protests, and land-related protests, respectively, and then normalize them by population. Figure A.1 and A.2 in the appendix show the change of protest number by year and the share of protest by issues in the CASM dataset, respectively.

1.4   Results

This section discusses results both from comprehensive transparency in provinces and land transparency in cities. The results are estimated with OLS models regressing the number of protests per million people against OGI performance in the previous year. For analyses with comprehensive transparency at the province level, I control for province and year fixed effects because of the significant variations across region and time. Controlling for a series of variables including provincial GDP, built area, the share of land taken by the government, Internet coverage, unemployment, and illiterate rate does not change the result. Table A.2 in the appendix and Figure 1.4 shows the results across regression models with standard errors clustered at province-level: a 0.1 increase in the transparency score is correlated with a reduction of around 0.6 protest per million people in a province in the next year. It is also correlated with about a 0.3, 0.2, and 0.2 decline in demolition-related, land-related, and violent protests per million people, respectively. In 2019, the median population of provinces in mainland China was around 39 million. This means that, for a median province, OGI is correlated with around 23 fewer protests in total per year, and close to 10 fewer for each of the three categories of protests.

Using the LLTC data and the protest events calculated at the city level, I test the correlation between land transparency and protests. I control for the same set of potential confounding variables excluding two—land taken by the government and Internet coverage, because these variables contain too many missing values at the prefecture level. Even so, adding Internet coverage do not change the results. The illiterate variable is also excluded due to the lack of data source at the prefecture level. Because the OGI score is the average of transparency across land-taking projects,
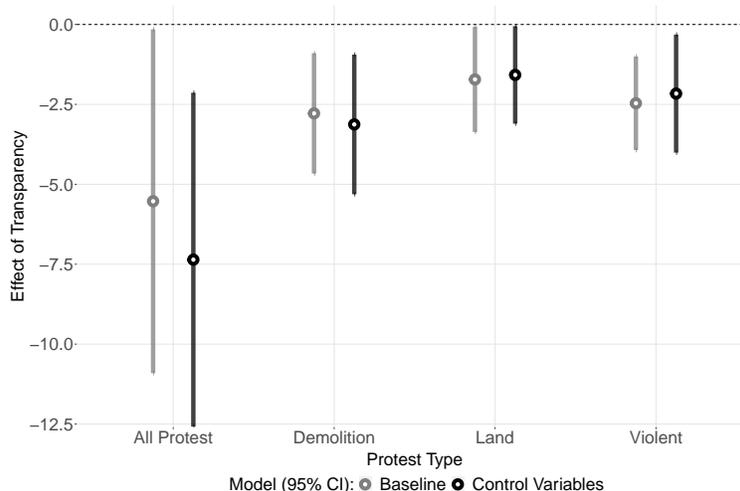
Figure 1.4: Coefficients of Comprehensive Transparency on Protest (Per million People)

I include the number of projects to control for the variance of transparency scores introduced by this variable. Instead of province fixed effects, I control for city fixed effects. The results do not change with province fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province-year level.

Similar to the analysis with comprehensive transparency index, I find that protest related to land expropriation is negatively correlated with land transparency in the previous year. Table 1.1 displays the OLS results with fixed effects or lagged dependent variable, including control variables or not. It shows that 0.1 point increase in the land transparency score reduces about 0.4 protest per million people related to land expropriation. In 2016, the median population of a prefecture-level city is 0.93 million. Again, for a median city, land OGI is correlated with around 0.4 (10 percent) fewer land-related protests per year.

Figure 1.5 shows the coefficients of land transparency on protest of different issues. While the number of protests related to land expropriation declines with land transparency, I do not find any significant effect on the protests of two popular and commonly studied issues—environment protection and unpaid wages. Similarly, I replicate the test on several other issues (veteran, religion or ethnic, medical, and education) and do not find any significant results. This provides further evidence that the change of protests is an outcome of the content of disclosed information rather than the overall transparent environment in a city.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
			DV: Land Protest			
protest$_{t-1}$		0.50***			0.48***	
		(0.07)			(0.07)	
land OGI$_{t-1}$	−3.93*	−4.77**	−4.46*	−3.63†	−4.70**	−3.37†
	(1.86)	(1.73)	(1.88)	(1.94)	(1.76)	(1.77)
No. land projects	−0.36	−0.01	0.15	−0.20	0.10	0.49
	(0.43)	(0.40)	(0.34)	(0.49)	(0.44)	(0.40)
area				−1.80**	−1.29†	−6.94*
				(0.63)	(0.69)	(3.16)
GDPPC				−1.46**	−1.14**	−0.19
				(0.45)	(0.43)	(0.69)
unemployed				0.00*	0.00†	0.00*
				(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization				15.63**	10.81*	23.51**
				(4.91)	(5.41)	(7.01)
constant	13.46***	7.42***		9.96***	5.66***	
	(1.00)	(1.01)		(1.23)	(1.13)	
Prefecture FE	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.01	0.28	0.41	0.06	0.31	0.44
nobs	1270	1056	1270	1253	1040	1253

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{†}p < 0.1$. Standard errors are clustered at province and year levels.

Table 1.1: Transparency and Protest Related to Land Expropriation (Per million People)
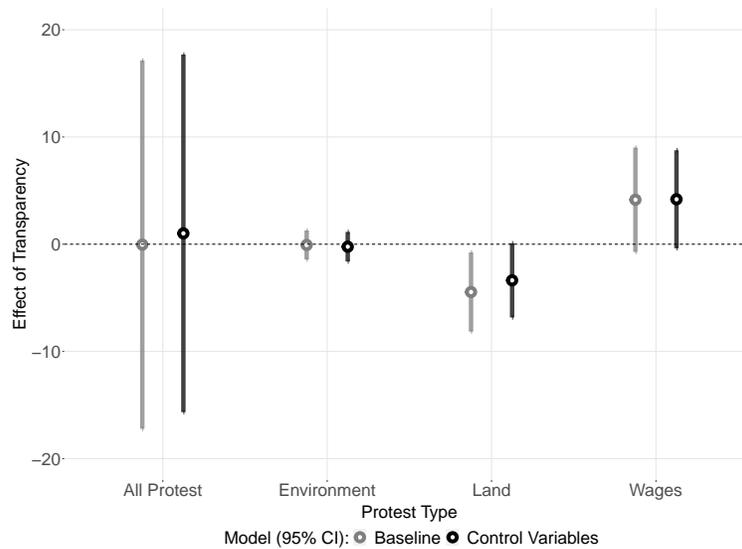
Figure 1.5: Coefficients of Land Transparency on Protest (Per million People)

In short, the results from both comprehensive transparency in the provinces and land transparency in the prefecture cities of China supports H2—better performance of OGI is correlated with fewer protests. This suggests that OGI does not necessarily induce mass threats to authoritarian regimes as certain types of transparency do in certain contexts.

1.5   Robustness Checks

This section presents a series of tests for the robustness of the findings. First, the results are robust to a couple of selections to the dataset, including the removal of municipality cities which have special political and economic conditions, or 2010, the first year in the dataset when the number of protests are significantly low due to the low popularity of Weibo at that time.

Another concern is, the number of protest events is overdispersed and contains plenty of zeros. The linear model of protest per million people partially correct for overdispersion but cannot address the two issues. Therefore, I check the results with a zero-inflated negative binomial model that synthesizes the zero and count data-generating processes. Table A.4 in the appendix shows that the expected count of protests is negatively correlated with land OGI in the previous year, which is consistent with our main result.

Moreover, because the land OGI score is calculated by averaging the availability of five information criteria, we may want to understand whether the effect is similar across these criteria and if not, which types of information drive the effect. I replicate the test for each type of information, and find that only the transparency of three documents that contains compensation and settlement information, i.e., the pre-approval notification, the announcement, and the compensation document, has a negative effect on the number of land protest. The results with legal approval and plan information are not significant. The effect of the compensation document is smaller in size and significance, probably because its content is similar to the announcement document, and some local government only publish the latter. Table 1.2 displays the results. This finding implies that not all types of information regarding land expropriation can reduce protest. The decrease in land

protest is driven by the transparency of compensation information.

	DV: Land Protest				
	Approval	Plan	Notification	Announcement	Compensation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
land OGI$_{t-1}$	−2.25	−1.81	−3.43*	−3.76*	−3.04†
	(1.47)	(1.38)	(1.70)	(1.64)	(1.73)
No. land projects	0.52	0.41	0.45	0.49	0.39
	(0.43)	(0.40)	(0.38)	(0.39)	(0.38)
area	−7.17*	−7.15*	−6.84*	−6.96*	−6.95*
	(3.18)	(3.20)	(3.16)	(3.17)	(3.19)
GDPPC	−0.26	−0.26	−0.17	−0.16	−0.22
	(0.72)	(0.73)	(0.68)	(0.68)	(0.70)
unemployed	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization	23.88***	23.95***	23.24**	23.35**	23.50**
	(6.91)	(6.92)	(7.03)	(7.02)	(7.01)
Prefecture FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.44	0.43	0.44	0.44	0.44
nobs	1253	1253	1253	1253	1253

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$. Standard errors are clustered at province and year levels.

Table 1.2: The Effect of Transparency by Type of Information

1.6 Discussion

Using two new datasets, this paper investigates whether the recent popular transparency initiative, Open Government Information, increases or decreases protests in an authoritarian context. I find that a comprehensive measurement of the transparency environment is correlated with the decline in various of protests in China. Furthermore, a specific measurement of single-issue transparency is negatively correlated with only protests about that issue. Although existing literature contends that transparency exposes political actors to citizens' challenges, OGI does not necessarily increase protests in an autocracy. In fact, it could decrease protests and stabilize the society. It is likely that transparency can be a device for improving authoritarian resilience.

There are another two interesting findings with the TLLC data. One is that the effect of transparency centers on the issue that the information is about. Second, during the conflicts regard-

ing land expropriation, it is the transparency of compensation policy, not other types of information, that dominates the negative correlation with land protests. These two findings imply that the conflict-specific information matters most during individual conflicts with local governments, even though the test with the comprehensive OGI index shows that the general transparency environment plays an important role, too.

It is worth noting that this study has several limitations. First, the results are not intended for making any causal claims, as the tests for correlations may suffer endogeneity issue. It is entirely possible that a confounder exists beyond the list of control variables. Better causal identification is necessary to understand whether OGI leads to fewer protests. Second, although the protest data reported by social media covers more events than other data sources from traditional media, it is still selective to the region and population with access to communication channels. Controlling for Internet coverage cannot fully address this selection problem.

Finally, if OGI reduces protests in authoritarian countries, what are the mechanisms? Is it because transparency helps the regime monitor and regularize its local agents, so that citizen-government conflicts are less likely to occur? Is it due to citizens shifted preference from protest to formal institutions in resolving their conflicts with the government? Or perhaps transparency raises the regime's legitimacy and increases citizens' satisfaction with governments? These are important questions for future research to explore concerning the relationship between transparency and mass threats in autocracies.

Appendices

A.1 Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Min	Median	Mean	St. Dev.	Max
year	2,898	2,009	2,013	2,013.24	2.49	2,017
number of all protests	2,186	1	34	60.45	83.54	769
number of demolition protests	2,186	0	5	14.44	26.36	235
number of land protests	2,186	0	6	12.35	18.68	232
number of wage-related protests	2,186	0	8	15.10	23.31	258
number of environment protests	2,186	0	1	1.94	4.40	64
number of conventional protests	2,186	0	10	19.18	27.79	265
number of disruptive protests	2,186	0	7	14.94	23.14	189
number of violent protests	2,186	0	11	19.47	29.28	350
approval information	1,824	0	0	0.34	0.46	1
plan information	1,824	0	0	0.26	0.40	1
notice information	1,824	0	0	0.17	0.31	1
announcement information	1,824	0	0	0.18	0.31	1
compensation information	1,824	0	0	0.17	0.30	1
number of land projects	1,824	0	0	41.77	90.39	1,094
average OGI score	1,824	0	0	0.22	0.32	1
area	1,821	13	1,867.12	2,864.47	5,668.02	85,035
population	1,820	0.0003	0.93	1.55	2.43	24.78
built urban area	1,820	0.25	72.50	130.03	177.13	1,419.66
land requisition	1,235	0.01	3.10	6.82	10.86	154.79
GDPPC	1,729	6,457	38,552	47,770.34	32,845.10	467,749
internet users	1,544	37,100	470,000	808,761	1,096,763	15,351,743
unemployed population	1,707	930.84	17,503.07	21,163.22	20,920.39	544,523.90
urbanization	1,820	0.0004	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.93

Table A.1: Summary Statistics
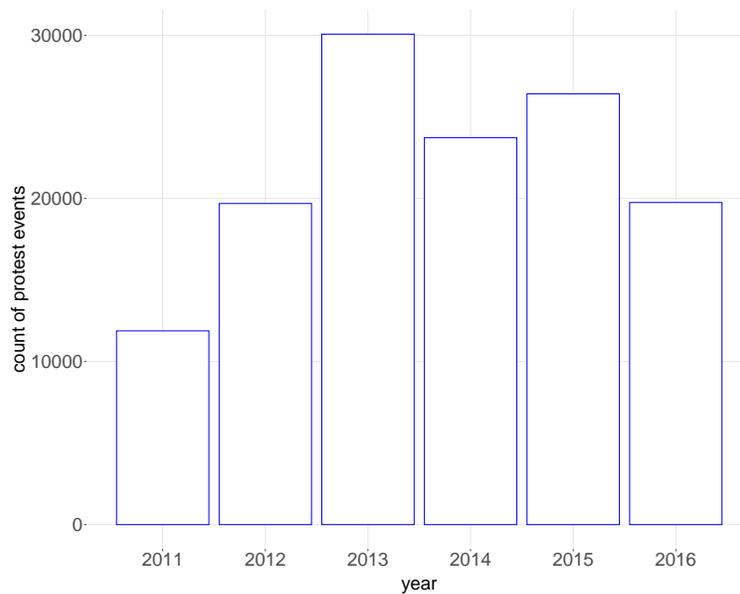
Note: Calculated from CASM dataset of social-media reported protest events.

Figure A.1: Year Distribution of Protests in China, 2011-2016
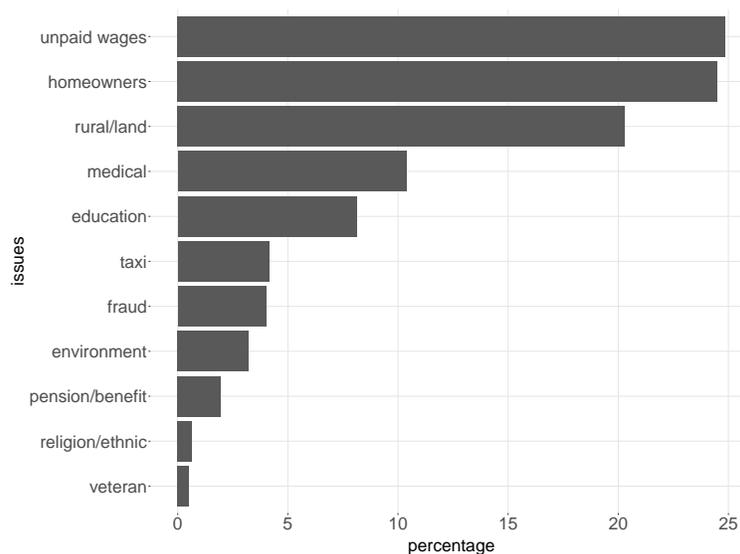
Note: The figure lists the percentage of all categories of protest causes that are calculated from the CASM dataset.

Figure A.2: Issues of Protests in China from Social Media Report, 2010–2017

A.2 Regression Results for OGI Indices and Protest by Issues

	Total Protest			Violent Protest			Protest: Demolition			Protest: Land		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
transparency$_{t-1}$	$-5.53^{\dagger}$	-7.36^{*}	$-3.98^{\dagger}$	-2.46^{*}	$-2.16^{\dagger}$	$-2.31^{\dagger}$	-2.78^{*}	-3.13^{*}	-1.96	$-1.72^{\dagger}$	$-1.58^{\dagger}$	$-1.82^{\dagger}$
	(2.74)	(2.66)	(2.19)	(0.75)	(0.94)	(0.98)	(0.96)	(1.11)	(1.00)	(0.84)	(0.78)	(0.77)
GDP		$-0.00^{\dagger}$	-0.00^{*}		$-0.00^{\dagger}$	$-0.00^{\dagger}$		$-0.00^{\dagger}$	$-0.00^{\dagger}$		-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
built area		0.01	0.01		$0.00^{\dagger}$	0.00		$0.00^{\dagger}$	0.00		0.00	0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
taken land share		0.01	$0.01^{\dagger}$		0.01	$0.01^{\dagger}$		0.00	0.00		0.01	0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
unemployment rate		-0.20	-0.34^{**}		-0.09	-0.11		$-0.14^{\dagger}$	-0.19^{*}		$-0.11^{\dagger}$	$-0.12^{\dagger}$
		(0.14)	(0.11)		(0.06)	(0.06)		(0.06)	(0.06)		(0.04)	(0.04)
illiteracy rate		-0.50	$-0.79^{\dagger}$		-0.12	-0.12		-0.14	-0.10		-0.10	-0.12
		(0.47)	(0.46)		(0.22)	(0.26)		(0.18)	(0.14)		(0.11)	(0.14)
Internet coverage		0.04	0.02		$0.02^{\dagger}$	$0.01^{\dagger}$		$0.02^{\dagger}$	0.01		0.00	-0.01^{*}
		(0.03)	(0.03)		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.01)	(0.00)
protest$_{t-1}$			0.43^{*}			0.10			0.28^{*}			0.01
			(0.17)			(0.17)			(0.08)			(0.15)
Control	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.74	0.81	0.82	0.78	0.80	0.79	0.76	0.77	0.75	0.81	0.81	0.83
Num. obs.	192	180	151	192	180	151	192	180	151	192	180	151
AIC	1108.89	956.32	770.54	684.77	616.23	527.03	607.99	560.30	462.30	524.51	490.56	410.59
BIC	1232.67	1093.62	900.29	808.55	753.53	656.77	731.78	697.60	592.04	648.30	627.85	540.34
Log Likelihood	-516.44	-435.16	-342.27	-304.38	-265.12	-220.52	-266.00	-237.15	-188.15	-224.26	-202.28	-162.30

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$. Province and year fixed effects are controlled. Standard errors clustered at province and year levels.

Table A.2: Provincial Comprehensive Transparency and Protest (Per Million People)

	Total Protest			Protest: Land			Protest: Environment			Protest: Wages		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
OGI_{t-1}	−0.04	1.01	−14.41†	−4.46*	−3.37†	−5.20**	−0.08	−0.24	−0.37	4.15†	4.19†	0.81
	(8.76)	(8.51)	(7.41)	(1.88)	(1.77)	(1.87)	(0.69)	(0.71)	(0.72)	(2.48)	(2.33)	(2.31)
No. land projects	1.31	1.88	2.34	0.15	0.49	0.30	0.19	0.18	0.15	−0.02	0.01	0.47
	(1.81)	(2.00)	(1.75)	(0.34)	(0.40)	(0.50)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.53)	(0.55)	(0.51)
area		−19.31*	−29.99*		−6.94*	−8.79*		−0.42	−0.73		−2.82	−5.86†
		(9.71)	(13.07)		(3.16)	(4.30)		(0.54)	(0.72)		(2.31)	(3.07)
GDPPC		7.95*	1.24		−0.19	−1.00		0.39**	0.21*		3.52*	2.08***
		(3.52)	(2.59)		(0.69)	(1.24)		(0.14)	(0.10)		(1.44)	(0.54)
unemployed		0.00*	0.00*		0.00*	0.00*		0.00	0.00		0.00*	0.00**
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization		109.29**	110.42**		23.51**	23.80**		0.78	0.50		37.31**	42.29**
		(35.30)	(39.48)		(7.01)	(7.93)		(3.39)	(3.37)		(11.83)	(13.84)
$protest_{t-1}$			0.08			−0.01						0.05
			(0.07)			(0.07)						(0.07)
Control	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Adj. R²	0.57	0.60	0.69	0.41	0.44	0.47	0.18	0.19	0.23	0.42	0.45	0.53
nobs	1270	1253	1040	1270	1253	1040	1270	1253	1040	1270	1253	1040
AIC	12658.40	12418.65	10135.46	9892.16	9704.76	8066.47	6668.64	6582.66	5536.33	9793.81	9601.86	7905.90
BIC	13764.95	13542.84	11223.79	10998.71	10828.95	9154.81	7775.19	7706.85	6624.66	10900.36	10726.05	8994.24
Log Likelihood	−6114.20	−5990.32	−4847.73	−4731.08	−4633.38	−3813.24	−3119.32	−3072.33	−2548.16	−4681.90	−4581.93	−3732.95

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.1$. City fixed effects are controlled. Standard errors clustered at province and year levels.

Table A.3: City Land Transparency and Protest Related to Various Issues (Per Million People)

A.3 Robustness Checks

	Count Model					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
protest$_{t-1}$		0.03***			0.02***	
		(0.00)			(0.00)	
land OGI$_{t-1}$	−0.24*	−0.51***	−0.10	−0.38***	−0.45***	−0.25**
	(0.12)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
No. land projects	0.11**	0.06**	0.05†	−0.01	0.02	0.04†
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
area				−0.29***	−0.20**	−0.15
				(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.17)
GDPPC				0.03	−0.01	0.08*
				(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)
unemployed				−0.00	−0.00	0.00
				(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization				1.56***	0.98***	0.25
				(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.43)
constant	2.66***	2.24***	4.83***	2.49***	2.23***	5.77***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.24)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.82)

	Zero Model					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
protest$_{t-1}$		−0.60**			−0.26***	
		(0.19)			(0.05)	
land OGI$_{t-1}$	−2.39	0.23	−1.82†	−13.57*	0.02	−16.00**
	(160.35)	(0.97)	(0.95)	(5.61)	(1.16)	(5.10)
No. land projects	0.46	−0.44	0.01	0.87	0.03	0.96
	(7.51)	(0.46)	(0.18)	(0.78)	(0.44)	(0.73)
area				0.21	−1.89	2.28***
				(2.17)	(2.19)	(0.53)
GDPPC				−0.51	0.54*	−1.44
				(1.16)	(0.26)	(1.32)
unemployed				−0.00	−0.00	−0.00
				(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization				−2.69	−0.91	2.41
				(15.17)	(7.11)	(8.15)
constant	−13.23	−1.86***	−3.00***	−2.09	−2.39†	−2.83*
	(68.75)	(0.35)	(0.19)	(1.53)	(1.43)	(1.34)
Prefecture FE	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
Num. obs.	1472	1241	1472	1253	1155	1253

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^†p < 0.1$

Table A.4: Transparency and Protest Related to Land Expropriation (Zero-Inflated Negative-Binomial Model)

A.4 Trend of Comprehensive Transparency Index by Province
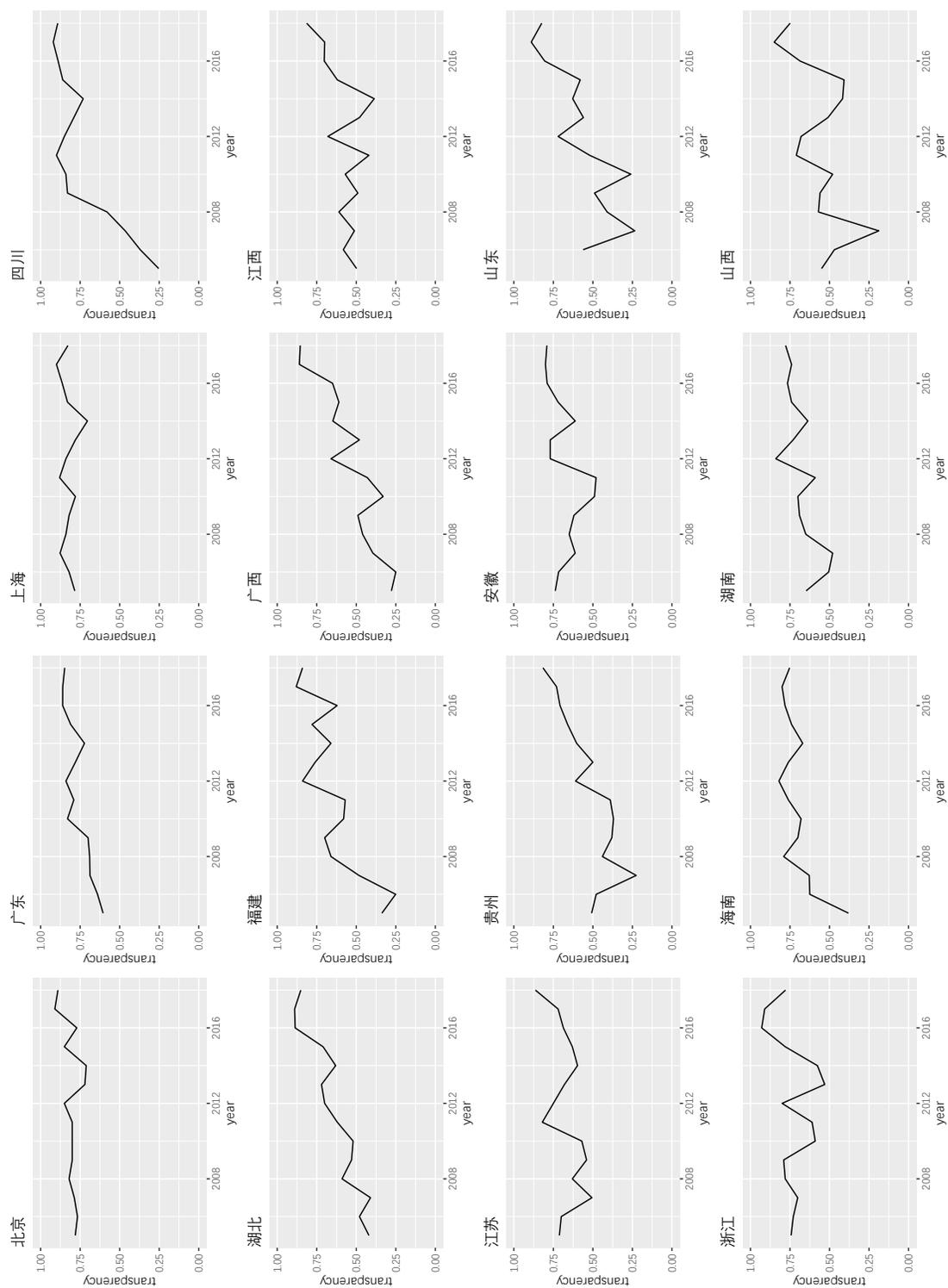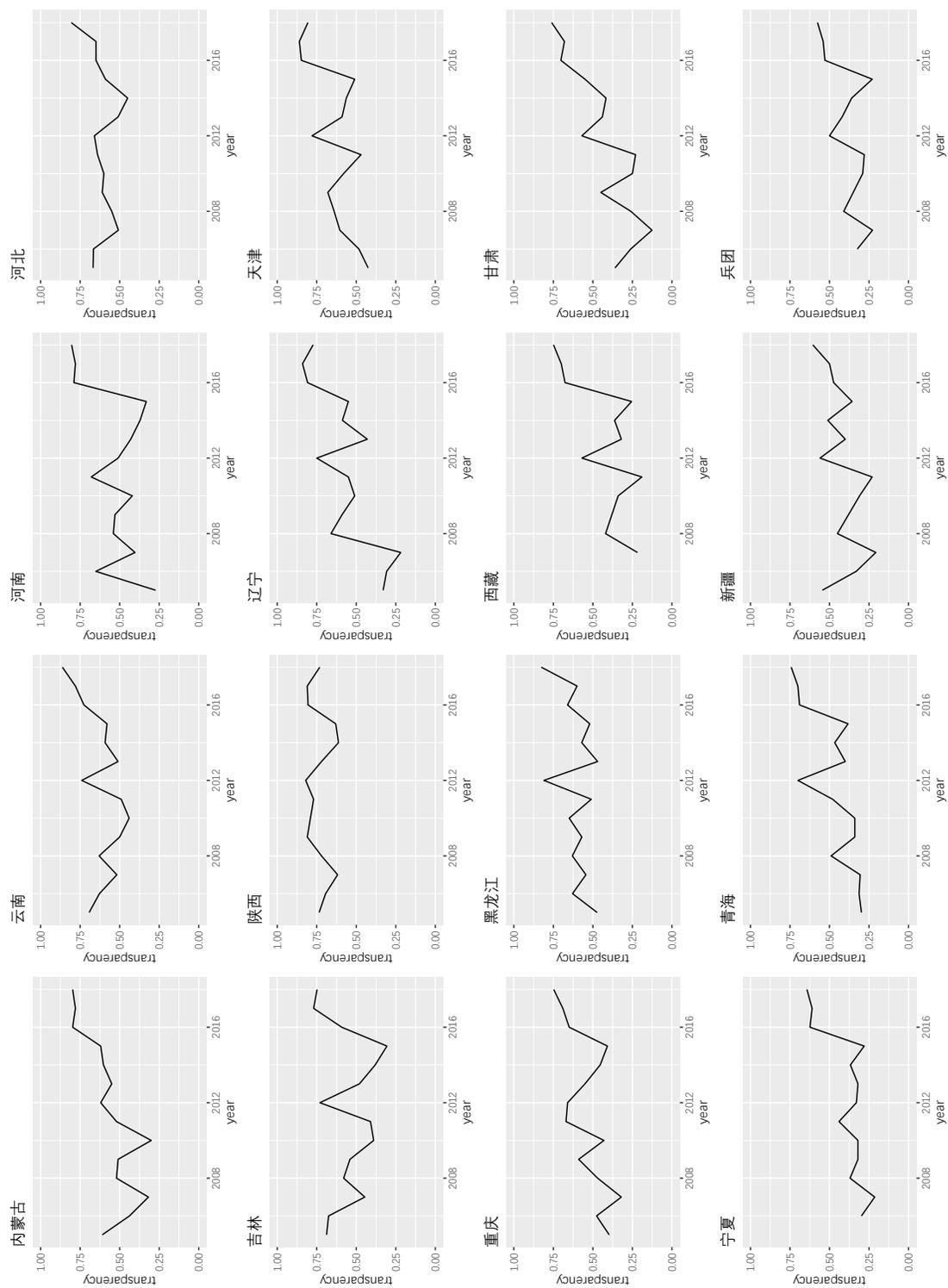
A.5　Example OGI Documents

<div align="center">

征 地 告 知 书

安县自然资征告字〔2019〕第 38 号

</div>

吕村镇李寨村村委会：

　　安阳县人民政府为实施安阳县土地利用总体规划和 2019 年度土地利用计划，拟征收你村集体土地，现将有关情况告知如下：

　　一、拟征收土地用途：公共管理与公共服务。

　　二、拟征收土地范围：吕村镇李寨村。

　　三、地类及面积：拟征收吕村镇李寨村集体土地 0.2865 公顷，其中水浇地 0.2828 公顷，农村道路 0.0037 公顷。

　　四、征地补偿标准：

　　1、土地补偿标准：按照河南省征地区片综合地价标准吕村镇李寨村为 151.8 万元/公顷，其中包括征地补偿安置费用 88.5 万元/公顷、社会保障费 63.3 万元/公顷。

　　2、青苗补偿标准：依照安政办〔2016〕72 号文件进行核算。

　　3、地上附着物补偿标准：合法合规的地上附着物依据安政〔2016〕32 号文件及安阳县（示范区）相关文件，据实补偿。

　　五、安置途径：

　　1、货币安置：征地补偿安置费按时足额支付给被征地农村集体经济组织，由农村集体经济组织依法依规分配；青苗补偿费和地上附属物补偿费按时足额支付给其所有者。

　　2、社会保险安置：社会保险补贴对象的范围确定及补贴标准、程序按照豫人社〔2019〕1 号文件、豫人社规〔2019〕2 号文件执行。

　　六、自此告知书之日起，凡被征收集体土地农民和其他权利人在拟征土地上抢栽、抢种、抢建的地上附着物和青苗，征收土地时一律不予补偿。

　　特此告知

<div align="right">

安阳县自然资源局

2019 年 9 月 2 日

</div>

<div align="center">

Figure A.3: (Pre-approval) Notification for Land Taking in Anyang County

</div>

长春市双阳区人民政府 2019 年第 4 批次

征收土地公告

〔2020〕第 04 号

根据《中华人民共和国土地管理法》、《中华人民共和国土地管理法实施条例》、《长春市双阳区人民政府关于公布双阳区耕地平均年产值和征地补偿标准的通知》有关规定，以及《关于长春市双阳区人民政府 2019 年第 4 批次农用地转用和土地征收的批复》，按照《征用土地公告办法》，现将本次征地内容和有关事项公告如下：

一、批准征地项目基本情况

1、 批准机关：吉林省人民政府

2、 批准文号：吉自然资耕函 [2020] 337 号

3、 批准时间：2020 年 6 月 2 日

4、 批准用途：公共管理与公共服务和住宅。

二、被征收土地所有权人、位置、地类和面积

1、被征收土地所有权人：双阳区奢岭街道办事处奢岭村。

2、位置：详见勘测定界技术图

3、被征收土地地类和面积：集体土地 35.0701 公顷，农用地 34.7354 公顷（耕地 31.1651 公顷）；建设用地 0.1800 公顷；未利用 0.1547 公顷。

三、被征收土地补偿标准

奢岭街道办事处奢岭村　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　单位：公顷、万元

地类	面积	前三年平均年产值	土地补偿费（倍）	安置补助费（倍）
旱地	31.1651	1.42	8	15
有林地	2.8400	1.42	8	15
坑塘水面	0.7303	1.42	8	
农村宅基地	0.1800	1.42	8	
荒草地	0.1547	1.42	8	
合计	35.0701			

四、农业人口安置途径

以一次性货币补偿的方式安置。

五、办理征地补充登记的期限和地点

被征收土地范围内的土地所有权人、使用权人或者其他权利人应在本公告发布之日起 20 日内，持土地权属证书或有关证明材料，双阳区奢岭街道办事处奢岭村村民委员会办理补偿登记手续，请相互转告。

六、其他

被征收土地的所有权人、使用权人或者其他权利人在规定期限内不办理征收土地补偿登记手续的，其补偿内容以自然资源部门的调查结果为准。

特此公告。

长春市双阳区人民政府

2020 年 6 月 11 日

Figure A.4: Announcement of the 4th Land Taking in 2019, Shuangyang District of Changchun

东莞市人民政府征收土地补偿安置方案公告

（28）〔2020〕第 7 号

为实现土地集约利用，保证土地成片开发建设，提高区域土地利用效益，东莞市人民政府拟征收谢岗镇稔子园股份经济联合社、谢岗镇曹乐格塘股份经济合作社的集体土地 3.8683 公顷。具体征收范围以征地地形图红线圈定和坐标标定的位置为准（见征地范围红线图）。根据《中华人民共和国土地管理法》第 47 条规定，现拟定了《征收土地补偿安置方案》，并将有关内容和事项公告如下：

一、 土地补偿安置标准（万元/公顷）

被征地农村集体经济组织	耕地	园地	林地	养殖水面	其他农用地（不含养殖水面）	建设用地	未利用地
东莞市谢岗镇稔子园股份经济联合社	/	/	/	/	150	150	150
东莞市谢岗镇曹乐格塘股份经济合作社	/	/	/	/	150	150	150

二、 被征地农村集体经济组织征地面积及补偿安置费用

被征地农村集体经济组织	总面积（公顷）	耕地（公顷）	园地（公顷）	林地（公顷）	养殖水面（公顷）	其他农用地（不含养殖水面）（公顷）	建设用地（公顷）	未利用地（公顷）	青苗补偿费（万元）	地上附着物补偿费（万元）	征地总费用(万元)
东莞市谢岗镇稔子园股份经济联合社	2.4520	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	2.4497	0.0023	0.0000	0.0000	
东莞市谢岗镇曹乐格塘股份经济合作社	1.4163	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.6365	0.2113	0.5685	0.0000	0.0000	580.245
合计	3.8683	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.6365	2.6610	0.5708	0.0000	0.0000	

三、 农业人员安置

发放货币安置。

四、留用地安置

留用地按实际征地面积的10%划留给被征地集体（即 0.3868 公顷），根据被征地村集体意愿折算成货币补偿，折算补偿标准为 600 万元/公顷，补偿总额为 232.08 万元。

五、 社保安置

本次征收土地涉及应参加养老保险的被征地农民人数为 15 人。目前被征地农民个人最低缴费标准为每人每月 270.08 元，缴费年限为 15 年。按个人最低缴费标准缴纳 15 年的被征地农民养老保障资金为 48614.4 元。

六、 反映意见和申请听证期限

征地补偿安置方案公告征集意见限期为公告张贴之日起 30 日内。拟征收土地的集体经济组织及其成员、使用权人或实际使用人对征地补偿安置方案有不同意见的，请于公告张贴之日起 30 日内以书面形式向东莞市人民政府提出。

七、 补偿登记：拟征土地的所有权人、使用权人应当在本公告张贴之日起 30 日内，持不动产权属证明材料办理补偿登记。

八、 反映意见、提交听证申请和补偿登记地点：东莞市谢岗镇广场路 1 号三楼镇土地储备中心（联系人：黄佩仪 ，联系电话：0769- 87768933）

特此公告。

附件：征地范围红线图

东莞市人民政府
2020 年 9 月 16 日

公开方式：主动公开

Figure A.5: Compensation and Settlement for the Land Taking of Dongguan

Essay 2

Transparency for Stability: Open Government Information and Contention with Institutions in China

2.1 Introduction

What is the effect of transparency on authoritarian stability? When a regime lacks institutional accountability, protest becomes a more important way for citizens to voice their discontent and seek change. Thus, it seems obvious that transparency generates more protests in autocracies. According to recent studies, the transparency of aggregate economic data increases protests and causes instability in these countries (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018). Given that repression can be costly and bring about other threats to political survival (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, Svolik 2012), many authoritarian regimes censor or manipulate information about macro-level performance or crises to prevent protests from ever happening in the first place.

However, of the studies exploring this question, few have focused on the disclosure of government information that directly affects individual citizens, such as reports on public goods delivery and local government projects. Unlike aggregate data, this type of information usually involves

issues that citizens have local knowledge. It is also perceived as more salient by citizens than macro-level information. Although transparency may improve incentives for better governance (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Kosack and Fung 2014, Anderson et al. 2019), recent research on transparency projects across various policy issues casts doubt on whether transparency produces good local governance and reduces grievances (Raffler, Posner and Parkerson 2019, Kosec and Wantchekon 2020, Arkedis et al. 2021). Furthermore, whether such transparency necessarily increases protests when governments do not behave well has rarely been discussed.

Focusing on a recently popular transparency initiative in authoritarian countries—open government information (OGI), this study proposes an additional effect of transparency and generates an alternative prediction from the conventional wisdom that is largely based on aggregate data or national crises: when citizens experience grievances against the local government, policy transparency may *reduce* the likelihood of protests.

A number of authoritarian countries have adopted OGI, a type of transparency that discloses policies and their implementation processes, which allows citizens to identify illegal government behaviors. Data from Berliner (2014) until 2009 show that 14 non-democratic countries, including China, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, and Turkey, had passed laws that created legal guarantees for the right to access government information. Russia and the United Arab Emirates, which maintain restrictive press laws and frequently represses government critics, joined this group in the 2010s. While the specific practices vary, most of these countries have established a complete legal framework along with a technological system to publicize a wide range of government information. Through governments' direct disclosures and citizens' free requests of information, OGI enables people with grievances to learn whether a local government violates laws or regulations.

Take the OGI in China as an example. The regime imposes heavy censorship and disseminates propaganda in order to reduce protests (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2014, Huang 2018). Nevertheless, it also publicizes policy information that discloses illegal local government behaviors. China's OGI Regulation has been actively enforced since the early 2000s. The law requires governments at all levels to disseminate information about policies and their implementation through

local bulletin boards, websites, and media accounts. For example, when a local government or a politically connected developer expropriates a citizen's land, OGI requires the government to publicize all information about the land-taking areas, procedures, and legal compensation standards. The citizen can find out, for instance, whether the compensation offered by the government follows the legal standard.

Grievances over local government expropriation constitute a major source of protests worldwide. In autocracies like China, when information about local policies is absent, citizens might not believe that legal or political institutions, such as courts, can address their grievances against a local government because they do not hold the evidence. Consequently, protest has become a more effective weapon for citizens, albeit a costly one (O'Brien and Li 2006, Chen 2012). However, with knowledge of whether the local government complies with the policy in a dispute, citizens become more confident that institutions can effectively support their case even if these institutions are sometimes ineffective, because open information makes political intervention to these institutions more difficult. Therefore, OGI encourages citizens to channel and resolve their grievances through institutions, which leads to a decline in the frequency of protests.

I test the theory with survey experiments in a large national sample of netizens and an original in-the-field sample of underprivileged rural citizens who are the most common victims of land expropriation. The experiments ask participants to consider a hypothetical situation in which a local land-taking project offers compensation that is lower than the market price. I ask them to report their intentions of using institutions, preference for institutions over protest, and the rank of these channels, to resolve this issue. A treatment group is randomly assigned to read an actual OGI document that explicitly outlines the land compensation standard and confirms the local mis-implementation of the policy.

Reading the OGI document significantly increases the participants' intentions to use legal and political institutions and to prioritize them over protest. Additional analyses support the mechanism that OGI increases trust in the fairness of legal and political institutions to protect citizens' rights and improves their confidence in using the institutions. I do not find evidence for the mechanism

that OGI raises people's confidence in information-obtaining ability. Although the answers from participants in the field are noisier than those from the netizens due to low verbal skills, I still find the same results for the legal institution while the results for the political institution are unclear.

I check a series of alternative explanations and show that the treatment effects are not driven by (1) better regime legitimacy stemming from the gesture of transparency, (2) biased responses due to the fear of political sanctions, or (3) the respondents' failure to consider real-world institutional costs. In the field survey, I also discuss how the results speak to the collective action problem.

This study explores an increasingly common yet rarely studied type of authoritarian transparency. Not only does it shed light on this new phenomenon (Distelhorst 2017, Chen 2019, Kim et al. 2022), but also it complements the literature by showing that open information can have a positive effect on authoritarian stability. Discussions of the transparency of macro-level information center on how it leads to protests (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018) and how dictatorships tighten restrictions on information to maintain stability (King, Pan and Roberts 2013). While this type of transparency can be a device for solving the collective action problem, this study adds that local policy transparency could serve as a tool for grievance redirection in autocracies.

Another well-established literature points out that transparency may increase mass threats but enables leaders to counter elites or control their agents more effectively (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Lorentzen 2014, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2019, Anderson et al. 2019). The findings of this study imply that policy transparency like OGI undermines mass threats, even when local agents do not behave well. Therefore, such transparency may help dictators monitor local agents with little cost of social stability.

Finally, the study contributes to the literature on contentious politics and legal resistance in autocracies. Existing research contends that citizens can use policies and laws to legitimize their contentions against local expropriation and seek help from higher-level leadership (O'Brien and Li 2006, Chen 2012). I take a further step, showing that policy transparency encourages such resistance most strongly within institutions. This bridges the legal resistance literature's finding that the lack of policy information severely blocks citizens' use of institutions to address their

grievances (O'Brien and Li 2004, Gallagher 2006, Gallagher and Wang 2011) and highlights the role of transparency in legal mobilization when the courts are sometimes ineffective (Gallagher 2017, Whiting 2017).

2.2　A Theory of Grievance Redirection

Authoritarian leaders face a tradeoff between managing agents and preventing protests when they control information flows. On the one hand, it is not surprising that they frequently censor and manipulate information, especially when the content is negative. In China, for example, the concern of mass threats is an essential reason for censorship (King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2014). On the other hand, open information monitors local agents more efficiently through media, public reputation or fire alarms pulled by citizens, increasing officials' incentives for high-quality work and compliance with the regime (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Lorentzen 2014, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Qin, Strömberg and Wu 2017, Anderson et al. 2019, Huang, Boranbay-Akan and Huang 2019). Transparency can even counter elite coup threats through mobilization of the masses (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2019). However, we have yet to determine whether the disclosure of government information necessarily leads to protests. Can regimes maintain social stability while checking elites through some form of transparency?

Extant studies have shown that the transparency of macro-level performance may increase mass threats in autocracies because the information can be a device for coordinating collective actions (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018). In this study, I propose a theory that the transparency of policies and local implementation may not increase protests and can even decrease them. This is because, when citizens have grievances against local governments, such information encourages them to interact with legal or political institutions as a potential substitute for protest.

Official statements about the OGI initiative reflect China's concern with protests and its intention to use OGI to prevent them. In the 2014 document that set out the entire country's OGI tasks, for example, the Chinese State Council stresses the importance of using OGI to "respond to social

concerns." All information that "involves public welfare, rights and concerns, and any information that needs to be widely known must be disclosed by law completely, accurately, and promptly." The document asked the governments to identify public concerns and disclose relevant information. For information that is relevant to many citizens and attracts wide public attention, government entities should "evaluate the risks (of instability)" and "make a disclosure and response plan."

2.2.1 Approaches to Dispute Resolution and Authoritarian Stability

Although citizens often protest to pressure the government to address grievances (O'Brien and Li 2006, Chen 2012), comparative law studies find that litigation is also a crucial tool for individual resistance in dictatorships. When citizens experience conflicts with the government, courts may protect their rights even if the legal system is flawed (Stern 2013, He 2014, Schaaf 2021). The choice of an institutional approach, rather than a contentious one, depends on various factors. First, the relative cost between the approaches matters. Those who choose protest may get their issues resolved by threatening social stability but endure a high cost of being repressed. Also, the likelihood of success in dispute resolution with each approach is critical. Citizens can achieve their pursuits through legal or political institutions only if the institution effectively supports them.

Of course, one approach does not necessarily rule out another. If legal or political institutions fail to resolve a citizen's grievance, the protest option remains. For instance, the limitations of the legal system for dispute resolution often result in subsequent labor protests (Gallagher 2017). Nevertheless, when citizens first turn to legal or political institutions that could address their grievances, protests are less likely to occur. Research finds that a potential labor protester is less likely to go on the street if she is in the midst of pursuing a legal remedy (Lee and Zhang 2013). Studies show that solving citizen-state disputes through legal process demobilizes citizens or disrupts their attempts to coordinate protests in various authoritarian countries (Gallagher 2017, Hanson 2022). Thus, citizens' greater use of institutions can reduce the overall occurrence of protests, even though the institutions are sometimes ineffective.

The regime views protest as an unfavorable scenario, not only because of the extensive cost of

repression but also the risk of instability escalation and diffusion. This is also true for local leaders, as collective actions against the government threaten their careers. In China, for example, the mayor of a city with more spontaneous protests is less likely to be promoted, even if the protests are not against the government (Foley, Wallace and Weiss 2018). A bureaucrat in a provincial government's department who handles disputes against the government explained during an interview that their task is to "turn big issues into small ones, and small ones into nothing."[1]

In contrast, although running legal and political institutions to resolve disputes incurs economic costs, the government's marginal cost for each case is small. The benefit of avoiding threats to social stability that can be triggered by any of the cases makes this cost worthwhile. The official I interviewed also contended that because the process of law and institutions are more certain compared to negotiation during protest, ruling by law can diminish protests and petitions, which she described as a heavy burden for the government.

2.2.2 Transparency and Citizens' Preference for Institutions

How does transparency lead to greater use of legal and political institutions? I argue that disclosed information provides citizens with more confidence in the fairness of institutions for addressing disputes. Imagine a citizen who harbors a grievance against a local governmental actor. This might involve an unsatisfactory payment for land expropriation, a poor pension paid by state-run firms, or a construction project that she considers detrimental to her interests. She believes she deserves better treatment based on her local knowledge but does not know whether she can win through an institutional channel, such as the courts. She might not believe that an institution can deal fairly with her case and support her pursuit unless she holds evidence that the government violates the policy or the law. In other words, her perceived likelihood of winning depends on whether she can find evidence that her entitlement is infringed upon. Transparency requires local governments to publish the regulation and policies that govern their behavior in such matters, which provides evidence to the aggrieved citizen. This makes her more confident in winning the case through a

---

[1]Author's interview with the head of a governmental dispute resolution center of a northern province in China on February 5th, 2021.

legal or political institution even if she knows that the institutions may be unfair.

For a more specific example, suppose a local government decides to take a citizen's land for construction. By law, the compensation standard should be set at the local market price. The local government, however, may extract rent from the land-taking project and offer compensation that is less than the local market price. A citizen uses her local knowledge to compare the offered compensation with the market price and realizes that the government is exploiting her. She searches for the compensation standard information to support her case while attempting to resolve the dispute through the court or any government institution. Without policy transparency, she cannot find the information, and her chances of winning the case will be slim because the court is very likely to collude with the local government and refuse to admit that any exploitation has taken place. In contrast, if the compensation standard is transparent, the disputant will be more confident that an institution can endorse her pursuit because the information makes it more difficult for the local government to manipulate the institution.

The effect of policy transparency on the fairness of institutions is well-grounded, even though these institutions are sometimes unfair in authoritarian countries. According to O'Brien and Li (2004)'s documentation before the introduction of the OGI Regulation as well as some recent cases reported in my interviews, some local governments tried to block residents from accessing policy information in order to prevent them from winning legal cases against the government.[2] Moreover, judicial documents record that in many Chinese administrative litigation cases won by citizens, these people had previously obtained policy information.[3]

The perception of more effective institutions and a higher likelihood of winning cases encourages citizens to trust and interact with the institutions. Stockmann and Gallagher (2011) suggest that a pro-worker image in legal news makes Chinese workers believe in the fairness of the legal system. In Pakistan, information about improved court services increases rural residents' trust in and collaboration with the institution (Acemoglu et al. 2020). Trust in judicial assertiveness raises

---

[2]Author's interviews conducted in 2021 August with rural workers about their dispute resolution experiences in their hometowns.

[3]Examples can be found at China Judgements Online: https://wenshu.court.gov.cn.

citizens' intentions of legal contention in various authoritarian countries in the Middle East (Schaaf 2021). While it is unclear whether Chinese people trust the court for administrative litigation in general, their trust is shown to be crucial for the use of the institution (Landry 2008).

The theory yields the following hypotheses:

H1 (Use of Institutions): Policy transparency about the issue of dispute with local government increases citizens' intention of using legal or political institutions for dispute resolution.

H2 (Preference for Institutions over Protest): Policy transparency about the issue of dispute with local government increases citizens' intention of choosing legal or political institutions first over protest for dispute resolution.

H3a (Trust in Institutions): Policy transparency about the issue of dispute with local government increases citizens' trust in the fairness of legal or political institutions for solving the dispute.

A possible alternative mechanism is that transparency may increase citizens' self-confidence in their own skills to obtain such information and thereby makes them feel easier using the legal or political institution. Being exposed to OGI may provide them a sense of ability for accessing information. The legal promotion literature finds that information cultivates legal awareness in authoritarian countries. People with legal experiences prefer using the court to petitioning when they have disputes because those experiences make them more confident about their ability to use the channels (Gallagher and Wang 2011, Gallagher 2017). Research also finds that knowledge of legal aid increases local residents' legal awareness and their use of institutions to resolve disputes (Whiting 2017). Transparency might help build up citizens' self-confidence in an important legal skill—searching and using the information about their disputes.

H3b (Self-confidence in Information-Obtaining Skills): Policy transparency about the issue of dispute with local government increases citizens' confidence about their ability to obtain the information they need to solve disputes with institutions.

2.3   Open Government Information and Land Disputes in China

The Open Government Information initiative and local land disputes in China provide a prototypical case for studying transparency and stability in authoritarian regimes because of three features: the high relevance of the OGI content to citizens' disputes with the government and their high demand for such information, the fact that land disputes are of high salience and often lead to instability, and the high local variation of OGI compliance and protests.

In January 2007, China's State Council passed the OGI Regulation. It required governments at all levels to open an extensive range of information to the public, including law, regulations, and policies; each government department's responsibilities, performance, budget, official profile and placements; governments' response to crisis; and public goods provision. Starting in 2012, the State Council sets up and publishes main OGI tasks for local governments to perform in each year. To enforce the regulation, the central government employs third parties to evaluate all levels of governments on their efforts to implement this mandate.[4] The organizations have conducted randomly sampled inspections of local government websites each year. The results, including names of the localities that failed to reach the target, are published soon after the inspections.

Chinese citizens are actively seeking and using policy information. Since beginning of the OGI initiative, the central government is estimated to have processed over a million disclosure requests from citizens each year (Kim et al. 2022). According to Distelhorst (2017), the transparency requests per thousand citizens are "on par with Canada and Mexico, and well ahead of the United Kingdom, India, and Germany." It is also well established that transparency contributes to citizens' success in their conflicts against their governments. In 2017, for example, two villagers in an autonomous prefecture in Sichuan Province sued their government for its failure to compensate them properly when taking their timberland. The prefecture government was silent about the compensation standard and had made the villagers a verbal offer they considered unsatisfactory. They asked for better compensation and the government's written response according to the policies.

---

[4]The organizations are "third-party" only to local governments. They are research centers affiliated with or in collaboration with the central government.

Although the prefecture government attempted to claim that the suit was redundant, the prefecture court eventually decided that the villagers should get additional compensation in line with policy.[5]

As in many countries, land and demolition create direct conflicts of interest between local governments and citizens in China. Since the late 1970s, the rapid industrialization and urbanization have led local government to take increasing amounts of land for development. While the citizens have little power to decide a land project, they are supposed to be compensated for the market value of their land and the attachments to it according to the law.[6] Yet local officials, who monopolize the power to decide and enforce the projects, may refuse to follow the compensation standard stipulated by law. The likelihood and degree of that policy violation largely depend on factors that influence the local government's incentive and capacity, such as economic demand, local power structure, and the local leader's career incentives and networks (Cai and Sun 2018, Jiang and Zeng 2020, Lu, Ong and Yang 2021), rather than citizen demands.

As a result, land protests compose a great share of mass grievance and social instability in China (Cai 2003, Jiang and Zeng 2020, Lu, Ong and Yang 2021). According to a report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, between January 2000 and September 2013, 83 out of 383 (22%) protests against the government with more than 100 participants were due to demolition and land expropriation (Tian et al. 2014). Figure A.2 in the appendix shows that issues related to home and land are among the top five causes of protests reported by social media, comprising more than 20 percent. Knowing the salience of land protests, the central government has actively led land reforms and passed laws to regulate local land expropriation. Nevertheless, local governments can still strategically implement land policies to grab rents.

According to the OGI Regulation, when a land expropriation plan starts, the local government must make the specific policy dictating compensation or resettlement of the residents of the expropriated area transparent.[7] Then, the project operator that is affiliated or connected with the

---

[5]"张元和、张元海、凉山彝族自治州人民政府一审行政判决书"（2020）川34行初12号。 The case document was obtained from China Judgements Online: https://wenshu.court.gov.cn

[6]See the 2004 and 2019 versions of *Land Management Law of the People's Republic of China.*

[7]Under Chinese law, there is no private ownership of land, so for an individual villager, this "ownership" is actually either the right to use the land or a share of right from the village's collective ownership.

government proposes compensation to the owners. If an owner is not satisfied with the proposal, she can either file a case with the court, starting an "administrative litigation," or with a government department at the same or an upper level to seek a political solution, which is called "administrative review." If she wins the case, she will get the compensation she is entitled to for the land and maybe even compensation for damages due to the government's misbehavior (O'Brien and Li 2004).

Yet in many cases, a local government does not disclose the specific policy on compensation and resettlement in order to hide its rent-seeking behaviors. The outcome is a high variation of local compliance with OGI, even though the central government makes considerable efforts to promote and enforce the regulation. For example, until early 2021, while some local governments disclose all the information systematically as required on their websites, many do not even have an accessible platform for land OGI. Based on my interviews with rural citizens, while some governments make all information public and even hold hearings in villages, many others never let citizens know anything except for the offered compensation.[8]

Land protests in China often occur in places with low policy transparency. Two violent protests in the 2010s occurred in two villages of Guangdong Province, Wukan and Xian. The local governments in both villages, colluding with construction firms and corrupt village officials, secretly sold the villagers' land to the firms at a low price. The local leaders received an enormous amount of bribes. Villagers sought to defend their land but lacked information about the issue. Throughout the conflicts, the governments kept refusing to disclose information about the land sale. The villagers were even prevented from knowing how much land they owned, even though they continuously called for transparency. In both cases, the villagers had a deep distrust of their governments. In Xian, the mayor attempted to speak to the protesters and negotiate with them, but they rejected the invitation and called for the help of provincial and central leaders. Because the local governments refused to be transparent as they made illegal deals that expropriated public lands, citizens lost confidence in the local institutions and finally resorted to violent collective actions.[9]

---

[8]Author's interviews conducted in 2021 August with rural workers about their dispute resolution experiences in their hometowns.

[9]See more details about the two cases at *South China Morning Post*: https://www.scmp.com/news/china/polici es-politics/article/2019006/symbol-chinas-rural-democracy-five-years-struggle-wukan and *Caixin Weekly*:

2.4   Experiments of OGI Learning

2.4.1   Experiment Design

The main study was conducted with 3,003 adult participants from 31 provinces in mainland China recruited through a crowd-sourcing survey platform accessible on mobile devices and computers in the summer of 2021. In the survey, I first ask about a series of demographic information, background knowledge about OGI and institutional ways of land or demolition dispute resolution, and their dispute experiences. To match the real-world situation as closely as possible with the treatment condition, I base the design on Chinese land-taking cases and my interviews with rural disputants. The vignette asks all participants to put themselves in a hypothetical situation where they are residents in an actual city, Dongguan, in China. They are told that the government will be taking land from them and will offer them a certain amount of cash compensation, an amount lower than the local land price.[10]

The prompt reads: "Please put yourself in the following hypothetical situation and answer questions. Suppose you live in Dongguan. The Dongguan city government will take 0.1-acre piece of land from your household for a construction project and offer you some compensation. The project office offers you 3 million CNY/acre (you would get 0.3 million CNY) as compensation. However, you learn that the market price of neighboring land is 6 million CNY/acre (you would get 0.6 million CNY)."[11]

Chinese law requires the government to compensate citizens in line with the local land price, which is calculated in a stipulated way and passed by a higher level government. It roughly matches the market and a citizen's local knowledge.[12] Discrepancies between that calculation and residents'

---

https://weekly.caixin.com/m/2016-02-12/100908569_all.html

[10] Dongguan is a famous prefecture-level city in southeastern China where land conflicts frequently occur. It is also close to Shenzhen in terms of geographic location, economic growth, and many demographic features, which is the city where I undertook the in-the-field survey. These facts guarantee the respondents' familiarity and understanding of the context. In addition, controlling for fixed effects on respondents' residence places do not change the results.

[11] In addition to acre, I also label a more commonly used unofficial metric in the message. A tenth of an acre is the average arable land per capita in Dongguan and China. To make the scenario appear real, I choose 3 million, an amount close to the lower boundary of land compensation standard in Dongguan.

[12] Article 48, *Land Management Law of the People's Republic of China (2019)*. Article 32, "Regulation on Implementing the *Land Management Law of the People's Republic of China* (2021)."

own assessments is the source of most land conflicts between Chinese citizens and local governments.

Treatment

After reading the message, survey participants are randomized into three groups: *Control*, *OGI Content*, and *OGI Announcement*. The control group does not read any additional information. *OGI Content* is the main treatment group. People in this group are told that the city government discloses the stipulated compensation, and they read an actual policy document from the city government's website, confirming the local market price they have learned, which is higher than the official offer. This information tells them that by law and policy, the government should have offered more. While all participants learn a discrepancy between their local knowledge and the local government's offer, the gap between the legal compensation standard and the offer is only provided to the *OGI Content* group. I expect this treatment to increase the participants' intentions of using legal or political institutions and prioritizing institutions over protests.

A common concern about informational treatments in survey experiments is the truthfulness of the information. Respondents may not trust the treatment provided by researchers and interpret it differently from the real-world situation. More importantly, in this case, the real-world OGI learning process involves the citizen reading the relevant official document that provides the policy information, not receiving unsourced text. To address these concerns, I provide this information in the form of a screenshot of the government website containing real compensation information. [13]

The treatment reads, "Our country stipulates that local governments should publicize information about land projects on their websites. For example, the government of Dongguan publishes the legal compensation standard for land projects. The following figure is the open information from its website." The screenshot from the city government's website showing that the compensation standard should be 6 million CNY/acre appears below this statement (Figure 2.1). The text below is a word-for-word translation into English.

---

[13]In order to reduce the participants' cognitive load, I edit out irrelevant information and only keep the project background information, the compensation policy, and the official features of the document.

Title: Announcement of Dongguan Government's Land Compensation Plan

(government document number)

For more efficient land development and better local land production, the Government of Dongguan plans to take 3.8683 acres of land that is collectively owned by the village. The specific place area is shown with red lines in a coordinated map. Following Article 47 of People's Republic of China Land Administration Law, we make the Land Compensation Plan and announce it below.

Resettlement: 10% *of the expropriated land will be kept for the village (0.3868 acre) and will be compensated as cash according to the village's will. The compensation standard is 6 million CNY/acre, and the total compensation is 2.3208 million CNY.*

The Announcement is hereby given.

(Government Stamp and Date)

The document is pro-actively open.

东莞市人民政府征收土地补偿安置方案公告

（28）〔2020〕第 7 号

为实现土地集约利用，保证土地成片开发建设，提高区域土地利用效益，东莞市人民政府拟征收谢岗镇稔子园股份经济联合社、谢岗镇曹乐格塘股份经济合作社的集体土地 3.8683 公顷。具体征地范围以征地地形图红线圈定和坐标标定的位置为准（见征地范围红线图）。根据《中华人民共和国土地管理法》第 47 条规定，现拟定了《征收土地补偿安置方案》，并将有关内容和事项公告如下：

四、留用地安置

留用地按实际征地面积的 10%划留给被征地集体（即 0.3868 公顷），根据被征地村集体意愿折算成货币补偿，折算补偿标准为 600 万元/公顷，补偿总额为 232.08 万元。

特此公告。

公开方式：主动公开

Figure 2.1: The OGI Content Treatment Message in Chinese

According to the theory that this experiment intends to test, learning whether the local government infringes her entitlement through public information, a citizen has greater confidence she can win her case through the institutions and tends to prioritize the institutions over protest. However,

it is possible that the government does not need to actually inform citizens about the legal compensation standard. Instead, it may alter people's choice of dispute resolution simply by telling them that the government is transparent. If that is the case, the regime does not even need to enforce transparency—perhaps OGI maintains social stability through propagating a good government image rather than through increasing people's knowledge of the compensation policy (and of local government's policy violation).

To test the possibility, I randomize about one-third of the participants to receive an *OGI Announcement* message. The message does not include the screenshot but two sentences that appear before the screenshot in the *OGI Content* group: "Our country stipulates that local governments should publicize information about land projects on their websites. For example, the government of Dongguan publishes the legal compensation standard for land projects." Because the theory suggests that it is the specific information that influences people's choice, not simply a claim of transparency, I expect this treatment to have a trivial if any effect on the outcomes in comparison to the control group.
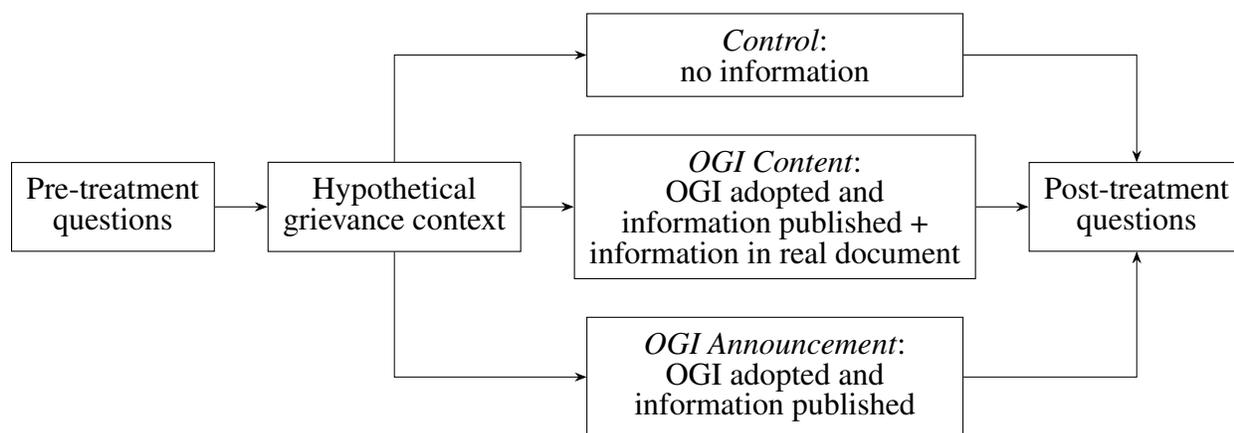
Figure 2.2: The Survey Flow

Outcomes

The survey asks the respondents, before and after treatment, how likely they are to pursue compensation through legal institutions and political institutions, respectively. The post-treatment ques-

tions are set in the hypothetical grievance case they have read in the vignette.[14] I randomize the questions' order to prevent people from being primed by the first channel they are asked.

I first measure the outcome variable for H1, the intentions of using institutions. The difference in means between the control and the treatment indicates whether the treated people are more likely to select institutions. I also estimate the difference in differences across groups for the intentions of using legal and political institutions. In this way I compare the changes from a general choice dispute resolution channel to a specific case setting between the treatment and the control groups. I expect the *OGI Content* treatment to have a positive effect on the intention of using institutions. For clear reference later, I denote the post-treatment outcome variables with *use legal* and *use political*, and the pre-post difference variables Δ *use legal* and Δ *use political*, respectively.

A disputant may want to exhaust all of the channels she can use to protect her rights, including institutions and protest. The theory suggests that policy transparency encourages people to address their grievances through institutions first, which leads to an overall decline in protests. Thus I investigate whether a disputant would choose institutions first over protest (H2) with two questions. The first one is a direct question: "If you want more compensation, compared to protests (hold banners, seat-in, assembly, collective petition, etc.), how likely are you going to use the institutions first?" (*direct protest later*). The second question asks participants to rank four approaches they would try in sequential order if they would like to get more compensation:

(a) hold a banner or seat in to demonstrate,

(b) go to court,

(c) administrative review, and

(d) assemble with other disputants to demonstrate or petition collectively.

Option (d) is different from (a) in the sense that it is a collective action. When both options (a) and (d) are ranked after (b) and (c), the answer is labeled as "protest later," and as "protest first" otherwise (*rank protest later*). The option orders for this question are randomized. I expect people

---

[14]In words that are plain for an ordinary citizen, I explain legal institution as filing a lawsuit that will be decided by the court and political institution as applying for administrative review—sending the case to government offices.

in the *OGI Content* group to be more likely to use protest later than the control group.

I also examine the participants' acceptance of the status quo by asking them how likely they would take the official offer in the case (*accept status quo*). During a conflict with local officials, although the citizen has local knowledge about her rights and believes that she deserves more than the offer, the disclosed official information may strengthen this belief. Therefore, it is likely that OGI actually triggers more resistance by increasing their discontent, which might not help reduce protests. If the treatment effect on the likelihood of taking the offer is significantly negative and substantively large compared to the results for H1 and H2, it does not support the theory. In other words, we should not observe a substantial effect of OGI on the acceptance of the status quo.

Several post-treatment questions test the mechanisms. I first ask about participants' general confidence in the institutions for protecting their rights (*institution confidence*). The second question asks how likely they believe they can be fairly treated when using institutions for dispute resolution. This question corresponds to H3a, the trust in the institution's fairness with transparency (*legal fair* and *political fair*). Finally, I ask their feeling about their capability of accessing information about the dispute to use institutions, which tests the alternative mechanism H3b, the self-confidence in information-obtaining skills (*information skill*). [15]

The summary of statistics, tests for balance across treatment arms, full models with all coefficients, and a full set of survey instruments displayed to the two experiments are presented in the appendix.

2.4.2 Main Result

The main treatment effects are estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS) models comparing the *OGI Content* and the control groups. The result supports H1 regarding the use of institutions. Table 2.1 shows that with both difference-in-means (Columns 1-2, 5-6) and difference-in-differences estimation (Columns 3-4, 7-8), exposure to the *OGI Content* treatment makes respondents more likely to use legal and political institutions to resolve their conflict with the local government. When

---

[15]The outcome questions, except for the ranking question, are asked on a five-point Likert scale. I present the results on a 0-1 scale for interpretation by percentage point.

respondents pursue more compensation, observing the open land compensation policy increases their intentions of filing a lawsuit and an administrative review by about 4 percentage point.

	H1: Use of Institutions							
	use legal		Δ use legal		use political		Δ use political	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
OGI content	0.036***	0.036***	0.044***	0.036***	0.044***	0.043***	0.040***	0.043***
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.006	0.244	0.009	0.271	0.010	0.219	0.007	0.290
Num. obs.	1935	1895	1935	1895	1936	1896	1924	1896

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.1$. The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables and province fixed effects.

Table 2.1: The Effect of Transparency on Citizen Use of Institutions

In line with the expectation from H2, OGI increases citizens' preference for legal and political institutions over protest in the context of a land dispute with the local government. The control group, who do not learn the policy information, on average report a 0.4 likelihood of choosing institutions first, although their intended likelihoods for using the two institutions are over 0.7. Table 2.2 shows that, while the *OGI Content* treatment does not make citizens more likely to believe that the local government's offer is unacceptable (Columns 1-2), it increases respondents' intentions of prioritizing institutions by 2 percentage point when they are asked the direct question about the likelihood of trying institutions first over protest. People in the treatment group also are about 5 to 6 percentage point more likely to rank institutions over protest in sequential order (Columns 5-6).

Table 2.3 shows results regarding the mechanisms in H3. Respondents in the *OGI Content* treatment group are 2 percentage point more confident to use institutions (Columns 1-2) than those in the control group. Columns 5-8 show strong support for increasing trust in institutions (H3a). Observing the OGI about land compensation makes respondents 2 to 3 percentage point more likely to believe that legal and political institutions will fairly treat them in the case of dispute. The evidence for increasing information-obtaining skills (H3b) is less clear. People in the treatment group are somewhat more likely to have confidence in their skills of gathering information for dispute resolution than the control group, but the effect is not consistently significant. These findings imply that

	accept status quo		H2: Prefer Institutions over Protest			
			direct protest later		rank protest later	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
OGI content	−0.012	−0.018	$0.023^{\dagger}$	0.020^{*}	0.052^{*}	0.061^{*}
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.000	0.073	0.001	0.421	0.002	0.114
Num. obs.	1936	1896	1930	1892	1404	1385

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$.

The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables and province fixed effects.

Table 2.2: The Effect of Transparency on the Choice of Institutions over Protest

transparency encourages the choice of institutions by raising citizens' confidence in this channel rather than in themselves.

	institution confidence		H3b: Self Skills		H3a: Trust in Institutions			
			information skill		legal fair		political fair	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
OGI content	0.023^{*}	0.020^{*}	$0.019^{\dagger}$	0.015	0.032^{***}	0.030^{***}	0.025^{**}	0.024^{**}
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.002	0.167	0.001	0.155	0.006	0.163	0.003	0.165
Num. obs.	1874	1840	1886	1850	1934	1895	1920	1883

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$. The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables and province fixed effects.

Table 2.3: The Effect of Transparency on the Mechanisms

2.4.3 Alternative Explanations

One alternative explanation for the findings is that the treatment effects come from the mere existence of a government transparency initiative instead of the content of the information itself. While the *OGI Content* message confirms that the local government violates the policy, it can also be interpreted as a general signal of supporting transparency, at either the central or local levels. An image of a transparent government could make people more satisfied with the regime, trust its institutions, and, consequently, be less inclined to protest against it. The *OGI Announcement* treatment

is designed to separate out this explanation. It clearly signals the central government's transparency stipulation and the Dongguan government's openness regarding land compensation and states that the information can be found on its website. The difference is that it does not include any specific information that is helpful for going through institutions. If signaling good governance (either the central government's requirement of transparency or the local government's compliance with law and regulations) drives trust and confidence in institutions, exposure to *OGI Announcement* should produce similar results to those of *OGI Content*. Yet I do not find any consistent effect of the *OGI Announcement* treatment on the choice of institutions, preference for institutions over protest, or the mechanisms. The signs of the coefficients for using legal institution are even negative. The results are displayed in the appendix.

The results shown in Table 2.4 address two other issues. First, because the survey only examines respondents' intentions of using institutions, they are likely to ignore the cost of institutions, which applies only if they actually experience the grievance. While administrative reviews are free in China, hiring a lawyer to appear in court is costly to many people. In the real world, this cost may counteract any positive effect of OGI on the use of institutions. Although I am unable to measure people's real behavior in the survey, I investigate the robustness of the treatment effect when people are asked to consider the cost of legal remedies. Specifically, I ask, "How much do you agree with the statement: I will consider filing a lawsuit only if hiring a lawyer is very inexpensive?" Stronger agreement with the statement means that the legal cost is more important to the participants. If we see no treatment effect on the agreement, OGI probably does not change their level of concern about that cost. The result shows a negative treatment effect that rules out the potential washoff impact of legal costs. People who observe OGI care less about the cost of lawyers when they are prompted to consider it (Columns 1-2).

Furthermore, with answers to pre-treatment questions, I measure several demographic features related to the cost of using institutions, including gender, education, economic status, occupation, rural residence, and connection with local officials and lawyers, but fail to find any consistent heterogeneous treatment effects by these covariates.

Second, people might be reluctant to report their intentions to protest due to fear of government sanctions or social desirability bias, which is perhaps exacerbated by the presence of an official document in the *OGI Content* treatment. Therefore, I test whether the treatment group views social resistance as more sensitive than others do. I ask, "Have you ever posted criticisms of any officials or policies on social media or participated in any protests?" Because this question asks people to report their own real dissent activities, it is even more sensitive than the outcome questions in a hypothetical environment. They can choose between "yes," "no," and "no answer." The number of respondents who chose "yes" and "no answer" are similar. Meanwhile, I find no treatment effect on either of the two answers (Columns 3-6). Due to the scarcity of actual dissent activities in China, the question cannot tell the existence of fear for government or social sanctions in this survey, but the null finding means that this potential bias do not drive the experimental results.

	care about legal cost		dissent: have posted		dissent: no answer	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
OGI content	−0.103*	−0.117*	−0.009	−0.009	0.006	0.008
	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.002	0.056	0.000	0.052	−0.000	0.021
Num. obs.	1877	1839	1844	1806	1936	1896

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$.

The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables and province fixed effects.

Table 2.4: Alternative Explanations

Another potential question is, the document is official and mentions that the compensation standard is set according to the law, which could remind respondents of legal institutions or procedures. It is worth noting that this study does not try to claim that the effect of local policy transparency is independent of the law. When citizens have disputes with the government, the key information they could access from OGI is whether the government violates the law. In short, publishing information that is legal is a necessary part of the grievance redirection mechanism.

Finally, it is also possible that citizens do not trust the information disclosed by the government. But even if this is true, we still find treatment effects for the change of intentions to use institutions.

Furthermore, Figure B.1 in the appendix shows that, although most people did not know OGI well and only half of them had accessed government information, more than 90 percent of them trust its reliability. There are also no conditional treatment effects by respondents' pre-treatment trust in government information.

2.5   An Experiment in the Field

The online survey has the advantage of investigating the effect of policy transparency on a large nationwide sample. Yet most of the respondents are young and relatively educated, have a higher economic status, and are therefore less likely to experience or use protest to solve land disputes. Chinese citizens who face land disputes with local government are most likely to come from rural backgrounds and to have lower income and education. To investigate the effect of OGI on this population of interest, I recruited an original field sample of 717 migrant employees from two private-sector manufacturing firms in Shenzhen, a metropolitan Chinese city with a geographically diverse population, and conducted an experiment similar to the online survey. Participant recruitment through private-sector firms is a reliable way to circumvent political intervention in a study on state-society relations. Although these people works in a city, the survey and interviews are about issues that relate to their experiences or the stories they have heard in their rural hometowns. In this sample, 70 percent of the respondents reported having experienced or heard of land-taking disputes in their close connections.

The participants come from 27 out of 32 provinces in China. Among them, 85 percent have a rural residence, 60 percent did not receive a high-school degree, 53 percent are low-skilled labor, and 83 percent self-identified as low or mid-low class in the city. As shown in Figure 2.3, compared to the internet sample, the field sample contains significantly greater shares of low-income and less-educated people. The age distribution is also more representative of the adult population in China.
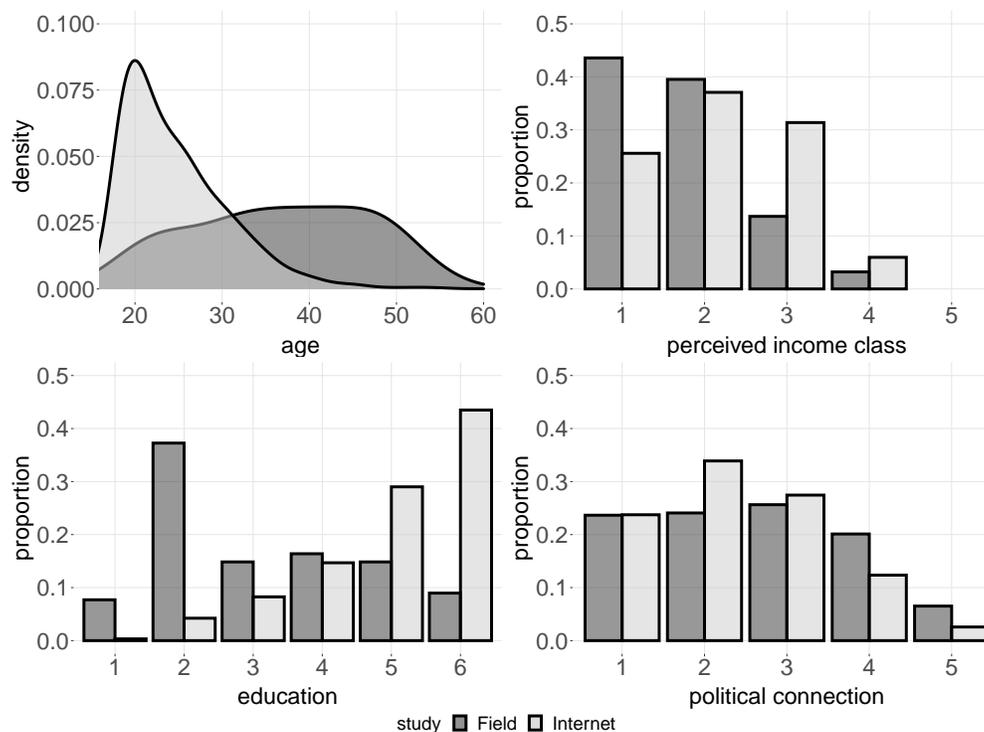
Figure 2.3: Important Features of the Two Samples

2.5.1 Survey Distribution and Ethics

The survey administered to this sample is similar in design to the one used in the main study. Some pre-treatment demographic questions are worded for the specific context. To retain more statistical power, I keep only the control and the *OGI Content* treatment in the vignette. About half of the sample work in Firm X and the other half in five departments of Firm Y. The Firm X group participate in the survey through anonymous mobile phone links. The treatment assignment follows a simple Bernoulli randomization with about one-half observing the treatment in Firm X. The Firm Y group receive the survey with printed hard copies, and the treatment is assigned to them with block randomization by department.[16] Table B.9 in the appendix shows the survey distribution forms in detail.

The enumerators of our research team and staff members from the firms distribute the survey and help address questions from the participants. Neither our enumerators nor the staff have access

---

[16]Important demographic variables such as the respondents' gender, education, and income are highly correlated with their departments.

to their answers unless a participant asks for help completing the survey. Meanwhile, participation in the survey and the answers to all questions are entirely voluntary. Participants are asked to voluntarily leave a phone number if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview. The records of these numbers are destroyed upon the completion of the study. The compensation for participating in the survey or interview is distributed in cash or to participants' mobile wallet with a privately designed application that does not record any personal information. These strategies minimize coercion and maximize confidentiality for participants. We did not receive any report of risks or concerns from the participants during or after the study.

2.5.2   Result

Tables 2.5 and 2.6 show the results controlling for department and province dummies.[17] Observing the policy information makes people about 3 percentage point more likely to choose institutions over protest for dispute resolution when they are asked the direct question comparing the two approaches. However, I do not find a treatment effect on whether people rank both legal and political institutions over protest (Table 2.5). Comparison of the odd and even columns in Table 2.6 indicates a possible reason: the treatment effects are significant for the legal, but not the political, institution. The treatment increases people's willingness to go to court by 3 percentage point (Column 1) and to rank this channel higher (Column 3). The mechanism is probably that the treatment makes them about 3 percent more likely to believe that the legal institution would resolve the land dispute fairly (Column 5), in line with H3a. Adding or removing control variables does not change the results.

The findings suggest that land OGI in China can channel low-income and low-education rural people from the streets to courts. Meanwhile, these people seem not to trust the political institutions as deeply as the national internet sample. In addition, like the main study, no effect is found in this sample for H3b, the self-confidence of information-obtaining skills.

This survey yields similar results for the checks on the alternative explanations as in the main study. Moreover, existing theories contend that authoritarian transparency leads to more protest

[17]Because the sampling of participants is clustered by department, I cluster the standard errors at the department level (Abadie et al. 2017).

	accept status quo	direct protest later	rank protest later
	(1)	(2)	(3)
OGI content	0.018	0.033*	−0.011
	(0.022)	(0.009)	(0.026)
Adj. R^2	0.026	−0.007	−0.002
Num. obs.	705	701	637
AIC	273.360	125.959	953.819
BIC	428.339	280.744	1100.893
Log Likelihood	−102.680	−28.979	−443.910

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the department level.

Table 2.5: The Effect of Transparency on the Choice of Institutions over Protest (Field Sample)

	use legal	use political	rank legal	rank political	fair legal	fair political
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
OGI content	0.027**	0.028	−0.138†	−0.026	0.031*	0.015
	(0.005)	(0.015)	(0.067)	(0.035)	(0.010)	(0.008)
Adj. R^2	0.014	0.029	0.022	0.023	0.019	0.059
Num. obs.	704	704	658	661	705	693
AIC	36.047	27.327	1898.109	1899.425	−36.971	−42.463
BIC	190.977	182.258	2046.252	2047.719	118.007	111.932
Log Likelihood	15.977	20.336	−916.054	−916.713	52.486	55.232

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the department level.

Table 2.6: The Effect of Transparency on Use of Institutions and the Mechanisms (Field Sample)

because open information facilitates collective action (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, 2018). Although my study does not focus on collective action, it is possible that while OGI reduces individual citizens' intentions to protest, it could make those intended protests grow into collective ones more easily. To address this issue, I ask a post-treatment question: "How likely do you think other disputants are to join you if you protest for more compensation?" The question is on the five-point Likert scale. The effect on this question is not even close to significant. While the small sample size might account for this finding, it still suggests that even if such effect exists, it is minor compared to the ones that this study finds. These tests' results are presented in Table B.10 in the appendix.

There is one caveat to the findings with this sample. Because most participants have low education levels, questions of relatively high cognitive load may be difficult to answer. Although missingness seems not to be a fundamental issue (the highest missing rate in the analyses across all model specifications is 12 percent), some people may answer difficult questions randomly. In addition to the attention-check question, we label out the participants that choose the same option for several questions in a row. Dropping or adding these identifiable low-quality variables does not influence the results. Nevertheless, we need to be especially careful in interpreting the null results in light of the low education levels of participants.

2.6   What People Say about Transparency and Institutions

To further investigate how transparency encourages citizens' interactions with institutions, I ask participants at the end of the main survey why they think OGI is helpful for using legal or political institutions to solve their disputes with the government in an open-ended question. Participants are selected to answer this question if they previously self-identified as tending to believe or indifferent about this statement, which accounts for roughly 90% of the total sample. I then conduct a text analysis with a structural topic model that controls for a series of important covariates (Roberts et al. 2014).

Citizens' responses to the open-ended question reflect directly how they perceive the relation-ship between transparency and institutions outside of the experimental context and free of any response options designed by the researcher. Figure B.2 displays the topic distribution and vocabu-lary associations, as well as more details about model parameter choices and specifications. Many of the responses do not specify a clear reason. Some people, for example, simply answer, "Because OGI can help us protect our rights." However, topics regarding fairness, evidence, or confidence take up major shares in the respondents' self-reports. This indicates that citizens are well aware that OGI can provide evidence and improve the fairness of institutions during disputes. The re-sult is not conditional on treatment assignment, meaning that the OGI document did not prime the respondents.

2.7   Discussion

It is widely agreed that concern for stability usually leads to the restriction of information in autoc-racies. Nevertheless, in the past twenty years, an increasing number of non-democratic countries that censor and manipulate information have adopted OGI initiatives that publicizes policies and their implementation. This kind of transparency is more than window dressing. It provides legal confirmation when a local government mistreats citizens. Like other types of transparency, OGI can involve monitoring and constraining government agents. However, unlike the disclosure of macro-level performance or crises which expand mass threats, transparency about local policies can undermine the risk of protests. This study shows with experimental evidence from various groups of Chinese citizens that OGI channels people away from the streets and towards institutions to resolve their disputes with the government, thereby preserving social stability. This is because the information of a local government's policy violation makes people trust the institutions more to address their grievances fairly.

Of course, OGI is not a perfect solution for preventing contentious politics in these countries. To the governments, on the one hand, it requires sufficient technological and administrative ca-

pacity at both the central and the local levels to enforce the transparency law. A regime may also want to co-opt local elites by allowing them to expropriate citizens. On the other hand, the field study reveals that knowledge of OGI is still deficient among underprivileged citizens. Although my interviews of rural disputants in China suggest that their success in dispute resolution is highly correlated with their localities' transparency level, most people do not know how the OGI Regulation is implemented. To policy makers in the developing world, this highlights the importance of promoting OGI at the grassroots.

Finally, OGI encourages citizens to use more institutional, less extreme, and therefore less risky channels to protect their rights from local expropriation. However, it is worth noting that institutions in an autocracy are not always fair and effective, even with transparency. Studies on legal resistance have found that sometimes the courts turn away sensitive legal cases, and disputants with those experiences become disenchanted with legal institutions (Gallagher 2017, Kim et al. 2022). In my interviews, a few disputants mentioned their frustrations when the institutions did not do as they had hoped. These people also have the potential to protest after they have tried legal or political approaches. Nevertheless, compared to cases where the government discloses little about its policies, programs, and behaviors, transparency still encourages more confidence in institutions and reduces the overall likelihood of protests in an authoritarian country.

Appendices

B.1 Online Survey Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
gender	3,001	0.392	0.488	0	1
age	2,993	24.715	6.070	18	60
rural residence	3,001	0.545	0.498	0	1
education	3,001	4.983	1.160	1	6
income	3,001	2.059	1.160	1	6
student	2,998	0.345	0.475	0	1
public sector employee	2,998	0.058	0.233	0	1
unemployment	2,998	0.037	0.189	0	1
perception of economic class	3,000	2.177	0.882	1	4
CCP member	3,001	0.070	0.256	0	1
know official	3,001	0.419	0.494	0	1
know lawyer	2,998	0.298	0.457	0	1
social and political news	3,001	3.298	0.827	1	5
know OGI	2,988	2.898	0.859	1	5
use OGI	2,999	0.539	0.499	0	1
trust OGI	3,001	4.210	0.642	1	5
dispute experience	3,000	0.901	0.683	0	2
pre-treatment choose legal	3,001	4.179	0.874	1	5
pre-treatment choose political	2,984	4.136	0.865	1	5
pre-treatment choose protest	3,001	2.807	1.080	1	5
OGI important	2,992	4.548	0.656	1	5
connection important	2,994	3.318	1.156	1	5
ability to use connection	2,993	2.362	1.052	1	5
accept offer	3,001	2.476	1.034	1	5
choose legal	2,999	3.958	0.917	1	5
choose political	3,001	4.016	0.876	1	5
choose institutions before protest	2,994	2.627	1.098	1	5
rank: banner, seat-in	2,191	3.361	0.974	1	4
rank: legal institution	2,191	2.230	0.979	1	4
rank: political institution	2,191	1.706	0.895	1	4
rank: collective protest	2,191	2.703	0.898	1	4
legal institution fair	2,999	3.857	0.799	1	5
political institution fair	2,979	3.890	0.791	1	5
confidence use institution	2,921	3.851	0.858	1	5
self-confidence gather information	2,913	3.640	0.887	1	5
legal institution only with low cost	2,912	3.243	1.027	1	5
OGI help legal	2,993	4.267	0.714	1	5
OGI help political	2,986	4.274	0.705	1	5
post criticism or protest	2,867	0.037	0.189	0	1
no answer to criticism or protest	3,001	0.045	0.207	0	1

Table B.1: Summary of Statistics (Main Study)
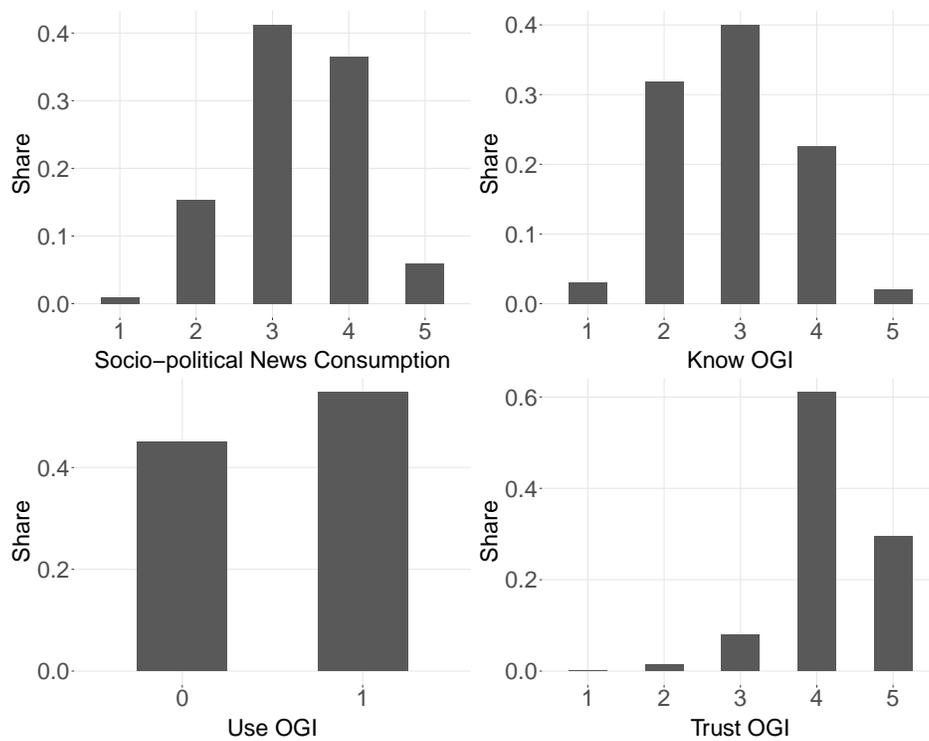
Figure B.1: Pre-treatment Questions about Open Government Information (Main Study)

Variable	Mean Diff.	t-statistic	SE	p-statistic
gender	-0.0102	-0.455	0.0225	0.6492
age	-0.4212	-1.4975	0.2813	0.1346
rural	-0.0204	-0.8918	0.0229	0.3727
perception of economic class	-0.0221	-0.54	0.0409	0.5894
CCP member	0.0117	0.9966	0.0118	0.3192
education	0.0413	0.7635	0.0541	0.4453
student	0.0322	1.4737	0.0219	0.1409
unemployment	0.0122	1.4186	0.0086	0.1564
public sector employee	-0.0085	-0.8061	0.0106	0.4204
income	-0.0905	-1.6704	0.0542	0.0952
know official	0.0262	1.1524	0.0227	0.2495
know lawyer	0.004	0.1911	0.0211	0.8485
social and political news	0.059	1.5731	0.0375	0.116
know OGI	0.0861	2.1964	0.0392	0.0283
use OGI	0.004	0.1738	0.0229	0.8621
trust OGI	0.0364	1.25	0.0291	0.2116
dispute experience	0.0333	1.072	0.0311	0.284
pre-treatment choose legal	-0.042	-1.0626	0.0396	0.2883
pre-treatment choose political	0.0079	0.2023	0.0391	0.8397
pre-treatment choose protest	0.0399	0.814	0.0491	0.4158
OGI important	-0.0414	-1.3954	0.0297	0.1632
connection important	0.0071	0.1335	0.0529	0.8938
ability to use connection	-0.0331	-0.6972	0.0474	0.4859
attention check	-0.0077	-0.6132	0.0126	0.5399
frequency taking surveys	0.0359	1.4038	0.0256	0.1607

Table B.2: Balance of Covariates (OGI Content vs. Control)

Variable	Mean Diff.	t-statistic	SE	p-statistic
gender	-0.0117	-0.5324	0.0219	0.5946
age	-0.1819	-0.663	0.2744	0.5075
rural	-0.0014	-0.061	0.0223	0.9514
perception of economic class	-0.0487	-1.2502	0.039	0.2115
CCP member	0.007	0.6188	0.0113	0.5362
education	0.1298	2.4989	0.052	0.0126
student	0.0056	0.2639	0.0211	0.7919
unemployment	0.0099	1.2016	0.0082	0.2298
public sector employee	-0.0003	-0.0304	0.0107	0.9758
income	-0.0867	-1.6576	0.0523	0.0977
know official	-0.008	-0.3636	0.022	0.7162
know lawyer	-0.0041	-0.2025	0.0205	0.8396
social and political news	0.0072	0.1955	0.0368	0.845
know OGI	0.0121	0.3125	0.0386	0.7547
use OGI	-0.0182	-0.8173	0.0223	0.414
trust OGI	0.0014	0.0507	0.0285	0.9596
dispute experience	-0.0092	-0.3031	0.0304	0.7619
pre-treatment choose legal	-0.0662	-1.7003	0.039	0.0894
pre-treatment choose political	-0.0549	-1.4153	0.0388	0.1573
pre-treatment choose protest	0.0086	0.1782	0.0482	0.8586
OGI important	-0.0038	-0.1341	0.0285	0.8934
connection important	0.0685	1.3208	0.0519	0.1869
ability to use connection	-0.0101	-0.2103	0.0478	0.8335
attention check	0.0017	0.1457	0.0119	0.8842
frequency taking surveys	0.0411	1.6717	0.0246	0.0949

Table B.3: Balance of Covariates (OGI Announcement vs. Control)

B.2 The Effect of OGI Announcement

	use legal		Δ use legal		use political		Δ use political	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
OGI announcement	-0.022^*	$-0.017^\dagger$	-0.008	$-0.017^\dagger$	0.006	0.011	$0.017^\dagger$	0.011
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.002	0.238	-0.000	0.258	-0.000	0.197	0.001	0.297
Num. obs.	2048	1998	2048	1998	2050	2000	2040	2000

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^*p < 0.05$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$

Table B.4: The Effect of OGI Announcement on Citizen Use of Institutions

	accept status quo		direct protest later		rank protest later	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
OGI announcement	0.017	0.014	-0.011	-0.010	0.017	0.029
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.001	0.046	-0.000	0.399	-0.000	0.094
Num. obs.	2050	2000	2046	1998	1504	1479

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^*p < 0.05$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$ The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables.

Table B.5: The Effect of OGI Announcement on the Choice of Institutions over Protest

	confident to use		get information		legal fair		political fair	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
OGI announcement	-0.013	-0.005	-0.015	-0.014	-0.014	-0.009	-0.013	-0.010
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.000	0.204	0.001	0.185	0.001	0.160	0.001	0.157
Num. obs.	1999	1953	1983	1939	2048	1999	2034	1988

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^*p < 0.05$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$. The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables.

Table B.6: The Effect of OGI Announcement on the Mechanism Variables

B.3 Text Analysis of the Open Question

Top Topics

protect rights: 可以, 保护, 政府, 维权, 权益

evidence: 证据, 有效, 保障, 社会, 一定

confidence: 透明, 公信力, 直观, 信心, 依据

fairness: 公正, 公平, 政策, 民众, 大众

know how to: 知道, 判断, 怎么, 透明化, 以及

Expected Topic Proportions
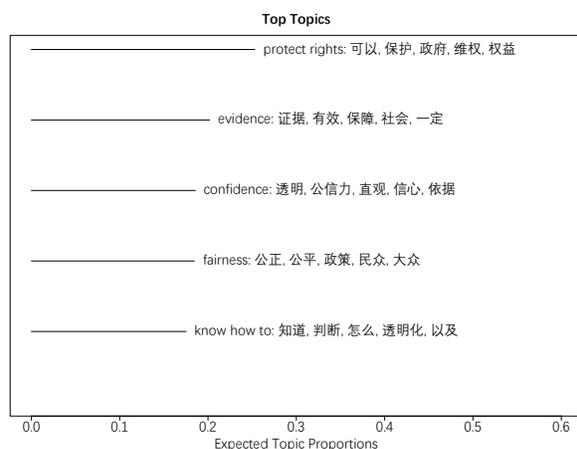
(a) Topic Proportions of Five Topics

know how to:
知道, 判断, 怎么, 透明化, 以及, 公开化, 部门, 措施, 可信度, 哪些, 现在, 比较, 老百姓, 从而, 有理有据, 标准, 调查, 受损, 做出, 清楚

confidence:
透明, 公信力, 直观, 信心, 依据, 自身, 有利于, 方式, 有利, 办事, 更加, 信服, 安全, 广泛, 职责, 信息, 有理, 解决, 可循, 依法

evidence:
证据, 有效, 保障, 社会, 一定, 这些, 作用, 制度, 方面, 方向, 促进, 做到, 基本, 因为, 一切, 最大, 成为, 建设, 民心, 数据

fairness:
公正, 公平, 政策, 民众, 大众, 避免, 有用, 态度, 相对, 真实性, 准备, 法律依据, 有助于, 当下, 纠纷, 居民, 了解, 减少, 对待, 行动

protect rights:
可以, 保护, 政府, 维权, 权益, 大家, 公民, 根据, 合理, 权威, 方便, 意识, 问题, 普通百姓, 公平性, 安心, 查阅, 公开, 知情, 知情权

(b) Vocabulary Associated with the Topics

Top Topics

fairness: 公正, 公平, 比较, 相信, 权威

monitor: 一些, 监督, 社会, 支持, 正确

evidence: 掌握, 对称, 有效, 可以, 消息

protect rights: 自己, 我们, 清楚, 更好, 维权

rule by law: 透明化, 民众, 有法可依, 解决问题, 直观

Expected Topic Proportions

(c) Topic Proportions of Top Five out of Ten Topics

fairness:
公正, 公平, 比较, 相信, 权威, 可靠, 公信力, 看到, 我国, 态度, 觉得, 可信, 一般, 居民, 执行, 至少, 变得, 充足, 对待, 完善

monitor:
一些, 监督, 社会, 支持, 正确, 公众, 打官司, 行为, 程度, 作用, 个人, 制度, 很多, 增加, 放心, 机关, 证明, 促进, 实现, 行使

evidence:
掌握, 对称, 有效, 可以, 消息, 信息, 得知, 几率, 安全, 百姓, 公民, 拥有, 目前, 其次, 机会, 收到, 防止, 取证, 如果, 权利

protect rights:
自己, 我们, 清楚, 更好, 维权, 受到, 合理, 权益, 能够, 规则, 受损, 根据, 知情, 大家, 损害, 重要途径, 这样, 利益, 清晰, 方向

rule by law:
透明化, 民众, 有法可依, 解决问题, 直观, 明白, 事情, 透明, 动态, 实情, 最新, 有用, 获取, 了解, 懂法, 明晰, 威严, 无法, 徇私枉法, 真实情况
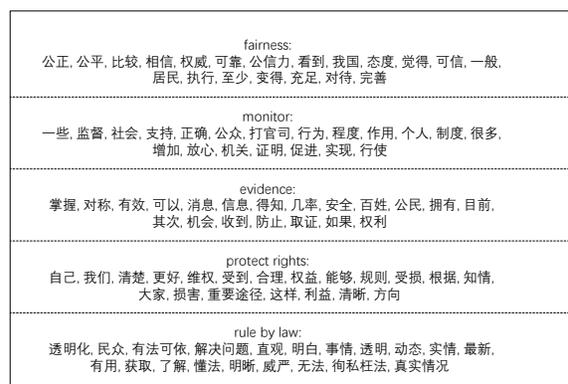
(d) Vocabulary Associated with the Topics

Panels (a) and (b) show the share of five topics and top twenty keywords associated with the topics that are estimated with structural topic model. The number of topics is set at five and the importance of vocabulary is weighted using the FREX method. The covariates included in the estimation are: treatment group dummy, gender, age, rural residence, economic perception, party member, education, student, unemployment, public sector, know officials, know lawyers, social news consumption, used OGI before, trust in OGI, dispute experience, political connection, and attention. Panels (c) and (d) show the result for the topic five topics from the same estimation when the number of topics is set at ten. The analyses use the **stm** package (Roberts, Stewart and Tingley 2019).

Figure B.2: Self-reported Reasons for the Usefulness of OGI

B.4 Field Survey Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
gender	698	0.569	0.496	0	1
age	692	36.620	10.128	15	60
rural residence	710	0.851	0.357	0	1
education	714	3.203	1.486	1	6
income	712	2.313	0.855	1	6
perception of economic class	716	1.765	0.804	1	4
know official	715	0.248	0.432	0	1
know lawyer	708	0.191	0.393	0	1
social and political news	714	3.412	1.028	1	5
know OGI	708	2.908	0.961	1	5
use OGI	714	0.423	0.511	0	3
trust OGI	651	4.026	0.842	1	5
dispute experience	713	0.701	0.730	0	2
pre-treatment choose legal	715	4.000	0.983	1	5
pre-treatment choose political	712	4.028	0.954	0	5
pre-treatment choose protest	709	3.309	1.120	1	5
OGI important	707	4.307	0.888	1	5
connection important	706	3.497	1.216	1	5
ability to use connection	706	2.618	1.227	1	5
attention	714	0.797	0.403	0	1
accept offer	709	3.066	1.161	1	5
choose legal	708	3.880	0.976	1	5
choose political	708	3.883	0.977	1	5
choose institutions before protest	704	3.865	1.029	1	5
rank: banner, seat-in	640	2.989	1.179	1	4
rank: legal institution	662	2.252	1.009	1	4
rank: political institution	665	1.931	1.004	1	4
rank: collective protest	643	2.781	0.984	1	4
legal institution fair	709	3.684	0.929	1	5
political institution fair	697	3.666	0.945	1	5
collective action possible	692	3.793	1.029	1	5
confidence use institution	702	2.769	1.255	1	5
confidence gather information	702	3.708	0.940	1	5
legal institution only with low cost	698	3.489	1.054	1	5
OGI help legal	708	4.038	0.921	1	5
OGI help political	707	4.038	0.920	0	5
post criticism or protest	667	0.271	0.684	0	3
no answer to criticism or protest	710	0.103	0.304	0	1

Table B.7: Summary of Statistics (Field Study)

Variable	Mean Diff.	t-statistic	SE	p-statistic
gender	-0.0556	-1.3505	0.0411	0.1779
age	-0.3333	-0.3904	0.8538	0.6965
rural	-0.0347	-1.1469	0.0303	0.2524
perception of economic class	-0.0208	-0.3106	0.0671	0.7563
education	0.0208	0.1642	0.1269	0.8697
income	0.0764	1.0432	0.0732	0.2977
know official	-0.0312	-0.8517	0.0367	0.3951
know lawyer	0.0069	0.2074	0.0335	0.8358
social and political news	-0.0312	-0.3704	0.0844	0.7114
know OGI	0.0451	0.559	0.0807	0.5766
use OGI	0	0	0.0424	1
trust OGI	-0.0069	-0.0984	0.0706	0.9217
dispute experience	-0.0139	-0.2275	0.0611	0.8202
pre-treatment choose legal	-0.059	-0.7481	0.0789	0.455
pre-treatment choose political	-0.0799	-1.0614	0.0752	0.2894
pre-treatment choose protest	-0.0694	-0.7362	0.0943	0.4622
OGI important	-0.0938	-1.2691	0.0739	0.2054
connection important	0.0903	0.8802	0.1026	0.3795
ability to use connection	0.1007	0.9857	0.1022	0.3251
attention check	0.0104	0.3045	0.0342	0.761
frequency taking surveys	0.0451	0.9509	0.0475	0.3424

Table B.8: Balance of the Field Sample

Department	Survey Form	Randomization	Number
Firm Y - Department B	Printed	Block	100
Firm Y - Department C	Printed	Block	112
Firm Y - Department J	Printed	Block	25
Firm Y - Department S	Printed	Block	46
Firm Y - Department D	Printed	Simple	65
Firm X	Mobile	Simple	370

Table B.9: Field Survey Distribution

	care about legal cost		join collective protest		dissent: have posted		dissent: no answer	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
OGI content	0.068*	0.056*	0.035	0.023	0.004	−0.005	0.011	0.020
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.025)	(0.010)	(0.017)
Control	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.009	0.051	0.022	0.114	0.027	0.056	0.010	0.021
Num. obs.	688	571	682	566	657	543	700	583
AIC	146.107	115.748	102.448	47.138	1356.371	1049.191	337.742	292.225
BIC	304.790	328.771	260.824	259.729	1508.952	1255.452	497.030	506.266
Log Likelihood	−38.054	−8.874	−16.224	25.431	−644.185	−476.595	−133.871	−97.112

[***]$p < 0.001$; [**]$p < 0.01$; [*]$p < 0.05$; [†]$p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the department level.The "Control=Y" models include a full set of pre-treatment variables.

Table B.10: Alternative Explanations (Field Study)

B.5 Survey Instruments Translated in English

B.5.1 Main Sample

1. What is your gender? Male; Female

2. What is your year of birth?

3. Which group do you think your economic status belongs to in the place of your residence? Low; mid-low; middle; mid-high; high

4. Are you a CCP member? Yes; No

5. Among your relatives, friends, and other people you have got along with, is there anyone who work in the court or the government? Yes; No

6. Among your relatives, friends, and other people you have got along with, is there anyone who work as a lawyer? Yes; No

7. How much do you care about socio-political news? Very much; somewhat; Not care nor uncare; not much; Not at all.

8. Do you know about open government information? Very well; somewhat; I don't know or unknow; not much; not at all

9. Have you ever obtained any government-disclosed information from government website, Weibo or WeChat account? Yes; No

10. Do you think government-disclosed information is reliable? Very much; somewhat; not reliable nor unreliable; not much; not at all

11. Have you ever experienced or heard about disputes related to demolition or land expropriation? Yes, myself or my family have experienced one; Yes, no one in my family have experienced one but my relatives, friends or acquaintance have experienced one; No, I never experienced or heard people around me experience one.

12. If you experience this kind of disputes and have grievances, how likely are you going to protect your rights in the legal channel? (i.e., file a lawsuit or use court mediation) Very likely; somewhat likely; not likely or unlikely; not very likely; not likely at all

13. If you experience this kind of disputes and have grievances, how likely are you going to protect your rights in the administrative channel? (i.e., file an administrative review, let the government resolve) Very likely; somewhat likely; not likely or unlikely; not very likely; not likely at all

14. What are the major challenges for using legal/political channel to protect your rights? (can choose up to two) Lack of issue-relevant information; too expensive, too costly; do not know how to; legal/political channel is not fair or effective; the procedure goes too long; my issue is out of sphere; other (please specify)

15. If you experience this kind of disputes and have grievances, how likely are you going to try any of the following activities: hold banners, sit-down protest, assemble, parade. Very likely; somewhat likely; not likely or unlikely; not very likely; not likely at all

16. In your opinion, to resolve this kind of disputes, how important is government disclosure of demolition and land expropriation related information? Very important; somewhat important; not important or unimportant; not very important; not important at all

17. In your opinion, to resolve this kind of disputes, how important is your personal network with the court and/or the government? Very important; somewhat important; not important or unimportant; not very important; not important at all

18. If you need to use your personal network to solve for this kind of disputes, how confident are you with doing it successfully? Very confident; somewhat confident; not confident or inconfident; not very confident; not confident at all.

19. Please choose from below TWO social problems needed to resolve. Lack of teenager nationalism education; population aging; economic inequality across regions; lack of public health

resources; environmental pollution.

20. Treatment Vignette (Subjects are randomized into one of the following groups and read the information and answer the questions below, respectively.)

Group *Control*: Please put yourself in the following hypothetical situation and answer questions. Suppose you live in City D. The government of City D is going to take 1000 square meters land from your household for a construction project. Your local government office offered you 3 million CNY/acre or 0.3 million CNY in total compensation. However, you think you should get 6 million CNY/acre or 0.6 million CNY in total.

Group *OGI Announcement*: Our country stipulates that local governments should publicize information about land projects on their websites. For example, the government of Dongguan publishes the legal compensation standard for land projects.

Please put yourself in the following hypothetical situation and answer questions. Suppose you live in Dongguan. The Dongguan city government will take 0.1-acre piece of land from your household for a construction project and offer you some compensation. The project office offers you 3 million CNY/acre (you would get 0.3 million CNY) as compensation. However, you learn that the market price of neighboring land is 6 million CNY/acre (which means you would get 0.6 million CNY).

Group *OGI Content*: Our country stipulates that local governments should publicize information about land projects on their websites. For example, the government of Dongguan publishes the legal compensation standard for land projects. The following figure is the open information from its website.

Please put yourself in the following hypothetical situation and answer questions. Suppose you live in Dongguan. The Dongguan city government will take 0.1-acre piece of land from your household for a construction project and offer you some compensation. The project office offers you 3 million CNY/acre (you would get 0.3 million CNY) as compensation. However, you learn that the market price of neighboring land is 6 million CNY/acre (which

means you would get 0.6 million CNY).

Please click the picture and read "Resettlement", and answer: According to the policy, what is the compensation you should receive? 1.5 million/acre; 3 million/acre; 4.5 million/acre; 6 million/acre (correct answer); 7.5 million/acre

Title: Announcement of Dongguan Government's Land Compensation Plan

(government document number)

For more efficient land development and better local land production, the Government of Dongguan plans to take 3.8683 acres of land that is collectively owned by the village. The specific place area is shown with red lines in a coordinated map. Following Article 47 of People's Republic of China Land Administration Law, we make the Land Compensation Plan and announce it below.

Resettlement: 10% of the expropriated land will be kept for the village (0.3868 acre) and will be compensated as cash according to the village's will. The compensation standard is 6 million CNY/acre, and the total compensation is 2.3208 million CNY.

The Announcement is hereby given.

(Government Stamp and Date)

The document is pro-actively open.

21. How likely are you going to take the 3 million yuan/acre compensation offered by the project office? (Five-point Likert scale.)

22. If you are not satisfied with the 3 million yuan/acre compensation, how likely are you going to fight for what you believe you should get with legal approaches (i.e., file an administrative litigation, or court mediation)? (Five-point Likert scale.)

23. If you are not satisfied with the 3 million yuan/acre compensation, how likely are you going to fight for what you believe you should get with political approaches (i.e., file an administrative review, go to government department)? (Five-point Likert scale.)

24. If you are not satisfied with the 3 million yuan/acre compensation, among all the options you can think of, how likely are you going to protest *first* (i.e., hold banners, seat in, assemble or petition with other disputants)? (Five-point Likert scale.)

25. Rank the following approaches that you would try in time order if you would like to get more compensation than 3 million yuan/acre. 1) hold a banner or seat in to demonstrate 2) go to the court 3) administrative review 4) petition or assemble with other disputants. (Option orders are randomized.)

26. How likely do you think you can be fairly treated and get more than 3 million yuan/acre compensation if you go to the court? (Five-point Likert scale.)

27. How likely do you think you can be fairly treated and get more than 3 million yuan/acre compensation if you file an administrative review and let the government resolve the issue? (Five-point Likert scale.)

28. To what extent do you agree with the statement: I can solve demolition or land issues through legal or political approaches. (Five-point Likert scale.)

29. To what extent do you agree with the statement: I can conveniently obtain government information for using legal or political approaches. (Five-point Likert scale.)

30. To what extent do you agree with the statement: I would go to the court for solving these issues only if I can find a cheap lawyer. (Five-point Likert scale.)

31. Do you think open government information is helpful for solving issues through the legal approach? (Five-point Likert scale.)

32. Do you think open government information is helpful for solving issues through the political approach? (Five-point Likert scale.)

33. Please specify the reason why you think OGI is helpful for using legal or political approaches. (Open question, only for people who answer 3-5 for any of the previous question.)

34. Please specify the reason why you think OGI is not helpful for using legal or political approaches. (Open question, only for people who answer 1-3 for any of the previous question.)

35. What is the province of your registered residence?

36. Are you registered as having rural residence? Yes; No

37. What is your highest education degree? Elementary school or below; junior high school; senior high school; secondary vocational school; Junior college; 4-year college or above

38. Which of the following best describes your occupation?

39. What is your monthly income (CNY)? Below 3000; 3000-4999; 5000-7999; 8000-11999; 12000-19999; 20000 and above

40. Have you ever posted criticisms to any officials or policies on social media or participated in any protests before? Yes; no; no answer

41. In the past month, how many social science surveys have you taken? 0; 1-5; 6-10; more than 10

B.5.2 Field Sample

Differences from the main sample:

- The question about party member (Q.4) is removed due to the concern of political sensitivity.

- The *OGI Announcement* group is removed to retain more statistical power.

- After the questions about the fairness of institutions (Q.26-27), a question is added as follows: If you are going to fight for what you believe you should get through protest, how likely do you think other disputants would join you? (Five-point likert scale.)

- The open question about reasons why OGI is helpful (Q.33) is replaced with a multiple-choice version to reduce the cognitive load on this question. Why do you think OGI is helpful

for using legal or political approaches? (Choose all that applies.) OGI lets me know that my right is infringed; the information can be used as the evidence for lawsuit or administrative review; the information makes the court or the administrative review organs fair; OGI makes me believe that the government supports my pursuit; other reason.

- The question about occupation (Q.38) is replaced by the following one:What is your position in the firm? Ordinary unskilled worker; skilled professional worker; customer service; clerical and not management worker; management; cleaner or helper.

- The last question (Q.41) is adjusted to fit the sample's experiences: Have you ever taken social science surveys before this one? Never; occasionally; many times.

B.6 Full Regression Models

| | H1: Use of Institutions | | | | | | | |
	use legal		Δ use legal		use political		Δ use political	
OGI content	0.036***	0.036***	0.044***	0.036***	0.044***	0.043***	0.040***	0.043***
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
male		0.015		0.015		0.022*		0.022*
		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)
age		−0.000		−0.000		0.001		0.001
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
rural		0.007		0.007		−0.001		−0.001
		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)
class perception		−0.007		−0.007		−0.005		−0.005
		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.006)
CCP member		0.024		0.024		−0.000		−0.000
		(0.019)		(0.019)		(0.019)		(0.019)
education		0.008†		0.008†		0.001		0.001
		(0.004)		(0.004)		(0.004)		(0.004)
student		−0.017		−0.017		−0.011		−0.011
		(0.014)		(0.014)		(0.014)		(0.014)
unemployment		0.027		0.027		0.030		0.030
		(0.025)		(0.025)		(0.025)		(0.025)
public sector		0.018		0.018		0.009		0.009
		(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.021)
income		0.003		0.003		0.004		0.004
		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.005)
know official		0.003		0.003		0.011		0.011
		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)
know lawyer		−0.016		−0.016		−0.010		−0.010
		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.011)
social political news		−0.020**		−0.020**		−0.015*		−0.015*
		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)
know OGI		0.018*		0.018*		0.015*		0.015*
		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)
use OGI		0.002		0.002		0.011		0.011
		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)
trust OGI		0.012		0.012		0.012		0.012
		(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.008)		(0.008)
dispute experience		−0.001		−0.001		0.011		0.011
		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)
able to use connection		0.002		0.002		−0.001		−0.001
		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.005)
attention check		−0.045**		−0.045**		−0.013		−0.013
		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)		(0.017)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.006	0.244	0.009	0.271	0.010	0.219	0.007	0.290
Num. obs.	1935	1895	1935	1895	1936	1896	1924	1896

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Table B.11: Full Models of Table 1

	accept status quo		H2: Prefer Institutions over Protest			
			direct protest later		rank protest later	
OGI content	−0.012	−0.018	0.023†	0.020*	0.052*	0.061*
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.026)	(0.025)
male		0.002		−0.004		0.046†
		(0.012)		(0.010)		(0.027)
age		−0.001		0.002*		0.002
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.003)
rural		0.033**		0.015		−0.038
		(0.013)		(0.011)		(0.027)
class perception		0.016*		−0.000		−0.015
		(0.008)		(0.006)		(0.016)
CCP member		0.004		−0.035†		0.063
		(0.025)		(0.021)		(0.052)
education		−0.011*		−0.004		0.013
		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.012)
student		−0.011		−0.014		−0.021
		(0.018)		(0.015)		(0.038)
unemployment		0.006		−0.005		0.022
		(0.032)		(0.027)		(0.069)
public sector		−0.022		0.007		−0.055
		(0.027)		(0.022)		(0.055)
income		−0.015*		−0.000		−0.011
		(0.007)		(0.006)		(0.016)
know official		−0.025†		−0.002		0.008
		(0.013)		(0.011)		(0.028)
know lawyer		0.008		0.002		0.006
		(0.014)		(0.012)		(0.030)
social political news		−0.000		0.001		0.004
		(0.009)		(0.007)		(0.019)
know OGI		0.031***		−0.010		0.032†
		(0.009)		(0.007)		(0.019)
use OGI		−0.006		0.017		−0.011
		(0.013)		(0.011)		(0.029)
trust OGI		0.027**		−0.016†		−0.014
		(0.010)		(0.008)		(0.022)
dispute experience		−0.021*		0.011		−0.036†
		(0.009)		(0.008)		(0.020)
able to use connection		0.028***		0.020***		0.023
		(0.006)		(0.005)		(0.014)
attention check		−0.029		−0.036*		0.035
		(0.021)		(0.018)		(0.052)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.000	0.073	0.001	0.421	0.002	0.114
Num. obs.	1936	1896	1930	1892	1404	1385

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{†}p < 0.1$

Table B.12: Full Models of Table 2

	institution confidence		information skill		legal fair		political fair	
			H3b: Self Skills		H3a: Trust in Institutions			
OGI content	0.094*	0.078*	0.075†	0.060	0.032***	0.030***	0.025**	0.024**
	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)
male		0.049		0.096*		0.007		0.002
		(0.039)		(0.041)		(0.009)		(0.009)
age		−0.015***		−0.014**		−0.003**		−0.002*
		(0.004)		(0.004)		(0.001)		(0.001)
rural		−0.070†		−0.042		0.009		0.010
		(0.041)		(0.042)		(0.009)		(0.009)
class perception		0.038		0.022		0.012*		0.004
		(0.024)		(0.025)		(0.006)		(0.006)
CCP member		−0.008		0.034		−0.004		−0.021
		(0.079)		(0.081)		(0.018)		(0.018)
education		−0.011		−0.023		0.006		0.002
		(0.018)		(0.018)		(0.004)		(0.004)
student		−0.092		−0.057		−0.007		−0.009
		(0.056)		(0.058)		(0.013)		(0.013)
unemployment		0.010		−0.107		−0.001		−0.020
		(0.104)		(0.110)		(0.023)		(0.024)
public sector		0.095		−0.124		0.035†		0.025
		(0.085)		(0.089)		(0.019)		(0.019)
income		−0.035		−0.023		0.002		0.006
		(0.022)		(0.023)		(0.005)		(0.005)
know official		0.026		−0.004		0.006		−0.001
		(0.043)		(0.044)		(0.010)		(0.010)
know lawyer		−0.002		−0.028		−0.021*		−0.027**
		(0.045)		(0.046)		(0.010)		(0.010)
social political news		−0.013		−0.003		−0.003		0.002
		(0.028)		(0.029)		(0.006)		(0.006)
know OGI		0.049†		0.145***		0.014*		0.006
		(0.028)		(0.029)		(0.006)		(0.006)
use OGI		0.054		0.089*		0.014		0.012
		(0.043)		(0.044)		(0.010)		(0.010)
trust OGI		0.221***		0.162***		0.052***		0.053***
		(0.031)		(0.032)		(0.007)		(0.007)
dispute experience		−0.010		−0.032		−0.003		−0.004
		(0.029)		(0.030)		(0.007)		(0.007)
able to use connection		0.063**		0.098***		−0.001		0.010*
		(0.021)		(0.021)		(0.005)		(0.005)
attention check		−0.071		−0.216**		−0.033*		−0.011
		(0.069)		(0.071)		(0.016)		(0.016)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.002	0.167	0.001	0.155	0.006	0.163	0.003	0.165
Num. obs.	1874	1840	1886	1850	1934	1895	1920	1883

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Table B.13: Full Models of Table 3

	care about legal cost		dissent: have posted		dissent: no answer	
OGI content	-0.103^*	-0.117^*	-0.009	-0.009	0.006	0.008
	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.010)
male		0.034		-0.009		0.014
		(0.051)		(0.009)		(0.010)
age		0.007		-0.000		0.000
		(0.005)		(0.001)		(0.001)
rural		-0.023		0.006		-0.024^*
		(0.052)		(0.009)		(0.011)
class perception		-0.157^{***}		-0.006		$-0.011^{\dagger}$
		(0.031)		(0.005)		(0.006)
CCP member		-0.084		-0.026		-0.024
		(0.100)		(0.017)		(0.021)
education		-0.001		-0.011^{**}		-0.006
		(0.023)		(0.004)		(0.005)
student		-0.027		0.001		0.021
		(0.071)		(0.012)		(0.015)
unemployment		-0.033		0.037		0.043
		(0.133)		(0.023)		(0.027)
public sector		0.036		0.000		0.016
		(0.109)		(0.019)		(0.023)
income		-0.022		$0.010^{\dagger}$		0.021^{***}
		(0.028)		(0.005)		(0.006)
know official		-0.047		0.013		0.006
		(0.054)		(0.009)		(0.011)
know lawyer		0.053		0.012		$0.021^{\dagger}$
		(0.057)		(0.010)		(0.012)
social political news		0.020		$0.011^{\dagger}$		-0.012
		(0.036)		(0.006)		(0.007)
know OGI		0.021		0.015^*		0.007
		(0.036)		(0.006)		(0.007)
use OGI		-0.000		0.012		-0.008
		(0.054)		(0.009)		(0.011)
trust OGI		-0.007		$-0.012^{\dagger}$		$-0.015^{\dagger}$
		(0.040)		(0.007)		(0.008)
dispute experience		-0.022		0.003		0.008
		(0.037)		(0.006)		(0.008)
able to use connection		$0.048^{\dagger}$		0.013^{**}		0.017^{**}
		(0.026)		(0.005)		(0.005)
attention check		-0.038		-0.017		-0.005
		(0.088)		(0.015)		(0.018)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.002	0.056	0.000	0.052	-0.000	0.021
Num. obs.	1877	1839	1844	1806	1936	1896

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^*p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$

Table B.14: Full Models of Table 4

	accept status quo		direct protest later		rank protest later	
OGI content	0.018	0.008	0.033*	0.034*	−0.011	−0.009
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.026)	(0.021)
male		−0.004		−0.038		−0.065
		(0.014)		(0.023)		(0.056)
age		0.001		−0.001		−0.004†
		(0.002)		(0.001)		(0.002)
rural		0.008		0.018		−0.119
		(0.021)		(0.037)		(0.062)
class perception		0.027†		−0.013		−0.040
		(0.011)		(0.012)		(0.027)
education		−0.024†		−0.008		0.029*
		(0.011)		(0.011)		(0.010)
income		−0.040		0.022		0.053**
		(0.020)		(0.017)		(0.008)
know official		−0.025		−0.031		−0.006
		(0.023)		(0.027)		(0.054)
know lawyer		−0.021		0.086*		0.084
		(0.021)		(0.032)		(0.064)
social political news		0.101*		−0.068*		−0.041
		(0.026)		(0.019)		(0.111)
know OGI		0.115**		0.004		0.016
		(0.023)		(0.035)		(0.055)
use OGI		−0.052†		0.010		0.055
		(0.025)		(0.016)		(0.066)
trust OGI		0.079		0.162		0.214
		(0.074)		(0.082)		(0.140)
dispute experience		−0.021†		0.010		0.017
		(0.009)		(0.011)		(0.033)
able to use connection		0.224***		0.054		−0.186*
		(0.029)		(0.055)		(0.050)
attention check		−0.025		−0.040**		0.092**
		(0.015)		(0.010)		(0.021)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.026	0.148	−0.007	0.088	−0.002	0.090
Sigma	0.287	0.275	0.259	0.242	0.499	0.475
nobs	705	581	701	578	637	539
AIC	273.360	195.511	125.959	46.224	953.819	773.254
BIC	428.339	409.384	280.744	259.844	1100.893	979.160
Log Likelihood	−102.680	−48.755	−28.979	25.888	−443.910	−338.627

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the department level.

Table B.15: Full Models of Table 5

	use legal		use political		rank legal		rank political		fair legal		fair political	
OGI content	0.023***	0.029*	0.028	0.033	−0.134†	−0.156*	−0.026	−0.019	0.031*	0.028*	0.015	0.014
	(0.003)	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.061)	(0.050)	(0.035)	(0.059)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
male		−0.016		−0.001		0.162		−0.027		−0.016		−0.023**
		(0.010)		(0.014)		(0.081)		(0.057)		(0.018)		(0.006)
age		0.001		0.002		0.003		0.001		0.002		0.003†
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.005)		(0.004)		(0.001)		(0.001)
rural		0.031		0.048		0.102		0.192		0.053*		0.030
		(0.021)		(0.030)		(0.111)		(0.113)		(0.018)		(0.021)
class perception		−0.009		−0.007		−0.043		0.039		−0.007		−0.020**
		(0.015)		(0.010)		(0.060)		(0.031)		(0.011)		(0.004)
education		0.008		0.009		−0.050		−0.005		0.007		0.015†
		(0.011)		(0.009)		(0.029)		(0.029)		(0.008)		(0.007)
income		−0.009		−0.006		−0.050		−0.096†		−0.010		−0.001
		(0.005)		(0.016)		(0.045)		(0.038)		(0.010)		(0.009)
know official		−0.062		−0.075*		0.228*		−0.057		−0.084†		−0.051
		(0.042)		(0.024)		(0.070)		(0.106)		(0.033)		(0.032)
know lawyer		0.062†		0.072**		−0.150		−0.060		0.051†		0.051*
		(0.030)		(0.016)		(0.080)		(0.103)		(0.022)		(0.014)
social political news		0.003		0.017		−0.048		0.007		−0.077**		−0.102**
		(0.017)		(0.030)		(0.328)		(0.261)		(0.019)		(0.022)
know OGI		−0.077		−0.081†		0.054		0.239		0.033		0.041
		(0.043)		(0.036)		(0.193)		(0.134)		(0.047)		(0.040)
use OGI		0.029		0.023		−0.011		−0.086		0.003		−0.005
		(0.024)		(0.015)		(0.094)		(0.092)		(0.008)		(0.016)
trust OGI		0.140		0.083		−0.285		−0.350†		0.261*		0.242***
		(0.077)		(0.077)		(0.225)		(0.158)		(0.071)		(0.029)
dispute experience		0.008		−0.007		0.015		−0.084		0.027*		−0.001
		(0.008)		(0.014)		(0.056)		(0.061)		(0.010)		(0.012)
able to use connection		0.010		0.051*		0.035		0.254**		0.101*		0.141**
		(0.048)		(0.019)		(0.191)		(0.051)		(0.037)		(0.022)
attention check		0.016		0.027†		0.133		−0.339**		−0.011		−0.021
		(0.011)		(0.007)		(0.128)		(0.068)		(0.010)		(0.014)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R²	0.001	0.098	0.029	0.139	0.015	0.009	0.023	0.099	0.019	0.165	0.059	0.243
Sigma	0.244	0.232	0.241	0.224	1.001	1.001	0.994	0.959	0.230	0.211	0.229	0.202
nobs	708	579	704	579	662	553	661	552	705	580	693	571
AIC	12.493	−0.696	27.327	−41.762	1887.434	1616.574	1899.425	1565.793	−36.971	−112.116	−42.463	−156.672
BIC	21.618	213.008	182.258	171.942	1918.901	1823.711	2047.719	1772.844	118.007	101.673	111.932	56.350
Log Likelihood	−4.247	49.348	20.336	69.881	−936.717	−760.287	−916.713	−734.897	52.486	105.058	55.232	127.336

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.1$. Standard errors clustered at the department level.

Table B.16: Full Models of Table 6

Essay 3

Monitoring and Manipulation: Authoritarian Transparency and Legal Resistance

3.1 Introduction

Although transparency is widely considered an indicator of democracy, many authoritarian countries, such as China, Turkey, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates, also adopt transparency laws and institutions. In democracies, transparency may increase accountability (see Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999), Ferejohn (1999), Ferraz and Finan (2008), Casey (2015) for examples of the literature) and serve as a tool for political competitions through elections (Berliner 2014, Berliner and Erlich 2015, Berliner et al. 2020). Concerning regimes that lack fair electoral institutions or separation of power that guards accountability, existing literature contends that the main function of transparency is to help the regime monitor elites or agents. In line with the fire alarm model (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984), transparency triggers citizens' responses when agents do not perform or behave well, which facilitates the regime's oversight and checks of the agents (Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Anderson et al. 2019, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2019).

Therefore, transparency can be beneficial to authoritarian rulers when such responses are not costly enough, i.e., peaceful, institutional, and would not trigger large-scale unrest. It then also helps citizens protect their rights against agents' exploitation.

In this study, we focus on citizens' legal resistance against regime agents in the courts. In many authoritarian countries, the courts can help regulate and collect information about agents (Moustafa 2003, 2008, Wang 2015, Hanson 2022). For example, in China, losing a case to citizens not only undermines the local government's reputation, but also damages the careers of the local officials involved. Qualitative research and judicial archives have shown that information disclosed according to transparency laws is cited frequently in lawsuits against local governments, and litigants often request transparency if information required for their cases is not disclosed (Kim et al. 2022).

In this case, transparency triggers citizens' legal resistance against misbehaving agents, helping the authoritarian regime identify and sanction the misconduct through cases that the agents lose in the courts. We investigate two important parts of this story. First, in a developing country with immature legal institutions, does transparency actually encourage people to challenge regime agents through these institutions? Second, a question remains unanswered concerning agents' response. Even if the agents cannot prevent citizens from pulling the fire alarm, they may be able to crack down on the alarm so that it does not ring. Faced with legal challenges from citizens, local governments can collude with local courts and manipulate the judgment. Such institution manipulation is especially likely in authoritarian states, where institutions have limited independence from governments (Moustafa 2008, Stern 2013, Wang 2015, Lei and Li 2022).

We argue that transparency not only discloses information that facilitates legal challenges from citizens but also signals monitoring from the regime. In fear of disclosing their loss to the regime and being sanctioned under transparency, regime agents are pushed to manipulate the courts more often, as long as the courts are dependent on them. Consequently, transparency does not necessarily favor citizens' legal resistance against the agents nor provide helpful information about agent behaviors. Instead, it may trigger judicial manipulation, which conversely undermines the prospects of citizens' resistance, preventing them from protecting their rights.

We develop this theory of dual effects of transparency by investigating a transparency initiative and citizens' legal resistance against local agents in China. We focus on land expropriation, a policy issue that often involves local government misconduct and causes resistance from citizens in this developing autocracy. We apply a difference-in-differences design that exploits variations in local transparency from a regime-mandated experiment to an original dataset of administrative litigation in China. This strategy overcomes the endogeneity challenge and allows the causal identification of the effects. The study shows mixed results: while transparency increases the number of lawsuits filed against governments, it decreases the frequency with which citizens win these lawsuits.

Analyzing another originally developed dataset of land transparency scores with a two-way fixed effects model and the data of judicial centralization reform in China with a triple-difference model, we further show that the perverse effect of transparency on legal resistance is driven by judicial dependence rather than the information that is disclosed to citizens. The effect concentrates in cities where courts are relatively dependent on the local governments, and the transparency score does not appear to have a perverse effect on legal resistance.

Our results are robust to a series of checks on measurement, model specifications, and alternative explanations. The mixed results contribute to discussions about the functions of authoritarian transparency. On one hand, we provide causal evidence that transparency does encourage citizens to challenge authoritarian governments and pull fire alarms (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015, Distelhorst 2017, Grossman and Michelitch 2018, H. Li 2022). On the other hand, we argue that transparency may lead regime agents to block these challenges more intensively if they can influence resistance institutions. This implies that transparency without institution independence has only limited, though non-zero, effect on agent monitoring. As theories of democracy suggest, achieving government accountability requires not only transparent information but also separate powers (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999).

This paper also contributes to studies of the limitation and even negative externalities of transparency in authoritarian and quasi-democratic countries. Existing research focuses on cases in which transparency has null effect on citizens' challenges or dampens political participation (Malesky

and Schuler 2012, Chong et al. 2014, Kosec and Wantchekon 2020). Our findings suggest that transparency can also lead to greater manipulation of institutions, as it signals monitoring from the regime while it fosters checks from citizens. Policymakers in developing countries should consider this adverse effect of transparency.

Finally, extant studies have provided rich qualitative evidence of the struggles of legal resistance in authoritarian countries (O'Brien and Li 2004, Michelson 2007, Moustafa 2008, Gallagher 2017). Using unique datasets and causal identification methods, this paper discusses the hopes and constraints of transparency as a legal weapon to protect citizens' rights.

3.2 Monitoring Agents with Transparency in Authoritarian Regimes

While authoritarian regimes are less transparent than democracies (Djankov et al. 2010, Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2011, Berliner 2014), an increasing number has begun to adopt transparent laws and institutions, usually called Open Government Information or Access to Information Act.[1] These acts require governments to publish a wide range of information, including officials' profiles, performance reports and statistics, policies and regulations, decision-making processes, and government behaviors during policy implementation. In the China case we study, the stipulations for publishing the information are specific to each important policy issue. Moreover, the country has made considerable fiscal and institutional investments to enforce the law at each level of governments.

Scholars investigate why these regimes provide the above information to citizens and point out that the main function of authoritarian transparency is to monitor elites or government agents through citizens' resistance. To maintain governance and survival, autocracies collect information about their agents, which improves agent compliance or performance and facilitates agent selection. The information can come from various sources. In some cases, allowing some media freedom enables political leaders to learn more about lower-level leaders and bureaucrats (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Lorentzen 2014, Qin, Strömberg and Wu 2017, Huang, Boranbay-Akan and Huang

---

[1] See Berliner (2014) and H. Li (2022) for a list of non-democratic countries that adopted these acts.

2019). Disaggregated election results also indicate the efforts and competence of local officials charged with mobilizing voters (Blaydes 2010) or conducting fraud (Rundlett and Svolik 2016). Various forms of resistance, such as online petitions, small-scale protests, and lost lawsuits, can flag problem areas as well (Lorentzen 2013, Stromseth, Malesky and Gueorguiev 2017, Huang, Boranbay-Akan and Huang 2019).

Even if agents do not care about citizens' resistance directly, the "fire alarm" allows the regime to easily identify and punish their misbehavior. In China, most places have institutionalized sanctions on local government leaders and other officials for their poor performance that is revealed by lost lawsuits. Punishments range from public shaming to transferring and forced resignation.[2] In 2011, 12 government officials in Wenzhou City were punished due to malfeasance during a labor dispute after they lost a lawsuit. Similarly, in 2016, Yinchuan City named several officials and prevented two government leaders from being promoted. Through lost lawsuits, they were found to have abused power when taking citizens' land. Recently, 13 officials from seven government departments in Meizhou City received warning, and four were investigated for misconduct when taking lands or unresponsiveness to petitions, causing the government to lose multiple lawsuits.

The reasons that transparency encourages challenges from citizens are intuitive. Of the issues about which citizens have little knowledge but salient enough to incentivize their resistance, transparency fills the informational gap and helps people evaluate the governments or officials, generating greater resistance when these regime agents do not behave well (Kosack and Fung 2014). It also facilitates collective actions (Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland 2015). Even in the cases where citizens have already known these agents' misconduct, transparency provides evidence for challenging them and increases citizens confidence in winning through institutions, such as the courts or reviews by other government agencies (Stockmann and Gallagher 2011, H. Li 2022).

In official documents and statements, China argues the goals of transparency is to ensure "citizens' right to know" and the country's "rule of law." A direct literal interpretation of these signals

---

[2]For an example of such rules and regulations, see a series of stipulated sanctioning measures on officials responsible for lost administrative litigations in Ningxia: https://www.spt.gov.cn/xxgk/zfxxgkml/zcjd/201905/t20190522_1516032.html.

is that the regime intends to regulate the behaviors of subordinate governments and sectors through legal systems with the help of open information. In reality, citizens do use disclosed information under the transparency law to challenge these agents. For example, three residents of Dalian, a prefecture city in Liaoning Province, sued two city government sectors for taking their farm land without legal compensation and selling it to a state-afflied firm. After notifying the residents about the expropriation, the government offered the residents a price for compensation, but the latter soon learned from a disclosed government document that, by law, they should have been offered a higher price.[3] In another case in Zhejiang Province, a family had a dispute about house demolition resettlement with the government of Shengzhou County. After the government tore down their house, the family found through open government information that the project had not been approved by the superior government, which was illegal. This information supported their lawsuit against the county government.[4]

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: *Transparency increases legal resistance cases against local governments.*

H2a: *Transparency increases the winning frequencies of legal resistance against local governments, controlling for the total number of cases.*

3.3   Institution Dependence and the Limitation of Transparency

One part of the above picture requires further examination: the agents' reaction to transparency and monitoring. Of course, one natural option they have is to avoid misconduct or improve performance. In a positive way, they collect less rents or spend more efforts to improve their work quality (Egorov, Guriev and Sonin 2009, Grossman and Hanlon 2014, Grossman and Michelitch 2018,

---

[3]辽宁省大连市中级人民法院(2019)辽02行初363号行政判决书. Dalian Intermediate Court Administrative Judgment (2019) Liao 02 Xing Chu No. 363.
[4]浙江省绍兴市中级人民法院行政判决书(2017)浙06行初86号. Shaoxing Intermediate Court Administrative Judgment (2019) Zhe 06 Xing Chu No. 86.

Anderson et al. 2019). They may also become less active in work to reduce the chances of being challenged (Malesky and Schuler 2012). We argue that when agents are highly rewarded from misconduct, they will attempt to block the monitoring channel to avoid being caught by their leaders. If the regime's transparency mandate is not strictly enforced, agents can choose not to implement it. For example, when the Open Government Information Law was first introduced, Chinese local governments delayed disclosing information about pollution if their cities were dominated by large industrial firms (Lorentzen, Landry and Yasuda 2013).

Even if transparency is well-enforced, agents often find other ways to disable the fire alarm. Furthermore, well-enforced transparency may increase their incentives to do so. If the agents must become transparent, they will be pushed to seek alternative measures to circumvent the monitoring, unless they pay fewer costs for improving performance. In this vein, transparency not only discloses information to citizens and prompts their resistance, but also signals the regime's monitoring to agents. This signal may lead to greater effort in blocking the oversight, which conversely undermines the prospects of citizens' resistance.

Studies show that regime agents are more incentivized to conceal poor performance or behaviors in any available ways when they know they are being monitored by their principals. For example, in electoral autocracies, using web cameras in polling stations prevents frauds that can be captured by the cameras, but it increases ballots miscounts (Sjoberg 2014). With non-electoral institutions that collect local information and address social resistance such as the petition system in China, local governments use various tactics, ranging from intimidation to targeted repression, to prevent petitioners from accessing their leaders.[5] Existing research also shows that litigants who file plenty of lawsuits against local governments and are therefore more likely to catch the regime's attention lose more often in court (Kim et al. 2022).

Such a manipulation is especially likely in authoritarian countries, where most political and judicial institutions have limited independence from governments. Concerning the legal resistance case that we study, collusion between local governments and courts is common in these countries,

---

[5]For a summary of local governments' tactics from the literature, see Fu and Distelhorst (2018).

making it difficult for the regime to oversee these governments through lawsuits. The comparative judicial politics literature suggests that in authoritarian or semi-democratic countries, legal cases at the local level often suffer judicial bias towards governments because these courts and governments share rents and connections (Moustafa 2008, Stern 2013). Local governments also have a strong influence on the courts' personnel or fiscal resources (Moustafa 2008, Wang 2015, Lei and Li 2022). Consequently, local agents can easily block the monitoring channel when courts are dependent on them.

If the regime pays significant attention to, or in other words, monitors closely a subordinate government's performance and behaviors regarding certain issues during a certain period of time, the government is more likely to be sanctioned by the regime for its misbehavior on those issues during that time. A transparency mandate is a signal of this attention. To avoid losing to citizens, local governments under the transparency mandate may collude with courts and crack down on citizens' resistance. Thus, we also test a hypothesis that is the opposite to H2a:

H2b: *Transparency decreases the winning frequencies of legal resistance against local governments, controlling for the total number of cases.*

In China, local judicial dependence is a serious problem, as local governments have significant control over the fiscal and personnel resources of local courts. Although the central government launched several rounds of legal reforms to reduce judicial manipulation and biases, the effect of these reforms seems limited to business cases that involves foreign investment (O'Brien and Li 2004, Liebman 2014, Wang 2015). A reform milestone is probably the recentralization of judicial power started in 2014, which reassigned control over prefecture-and-below-level court budgets and officials to provincial Communist Party Committees (Y. Li 2022, Lei and Li 2022). To test further whether any finding for H2b is driven by judicial dependence, we expect legal resistance under transparency will most likely be blocked by unreformed courts that still heavily depend on local governments in China. In contrast, transparency should have less, if any negative effect on citizens' winning frequencies when judicial power is centralized, because then local governments are less able to intervene in judicial institutions.

H3: *Transparency decreases winning frequencies of legal resistance against local governments primarily when the courts are dependent of governments.*

## 3.4 Local Transparency Experiment and Legal Resistance

China began to develop government transparency institutions in the early 2000s. The Open Government Information Law was adopted in 2007 and was enforced first at the state and provincial levels. Kim and O'Brien (2021) well document the regime's efforts in advocating transparency at local levels and the development of open government information at different stages. Although the implementation of the law experienced ups and downs over the past two decades, the 2017 transparency experiment that we use in this paper stands as a most powerful and effectively enforced mandate under the law at the grassroots level.

In this regime-mandated experiment, 100 county-level governments that are subordinated to 86 prefecture-level cities across 15 provinces were required to implement a transparency plan. Of these prefecture cities in the treatment group, 61 were asked to focus on a set of issues that includes land expropriation and construction and 35 to focus on some other issues. The task is to ensure local governments' decision making, policy implementation, and policy outcomes are structurally and comprehensively open. The information must be published promptly and accurately on government websites, in the media, and in any relevant physical areas. The order also specifies August 2018 as the hard deadline for completing the transparency task, providing local governments little flexibility in implementation time.[6]

Although the Open Government Information Law has existed in China since 2007, it had not been applied to local governments at the grassroots level until the 2017 experiment. Consequently, before 2017, all local governments below the province level could choose transparency standards at their discretion. The 2017 experiment provided legal guarantees that information regarding the stipulated policy issues are open to citizens and that the local governments' performance on the

---

[6]General Office of the State Council. (2017, May). *A Pilot Plan for Regularizing Grassroot Government Openness.* http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-05/22/content_5195775.htm.

issues are monitored by the regime.[7] Figure 3.1 displays the geographic distribution of cities with their group assignments.

Group: ☐ control ■ land transparency ■ other transparency ■ NA
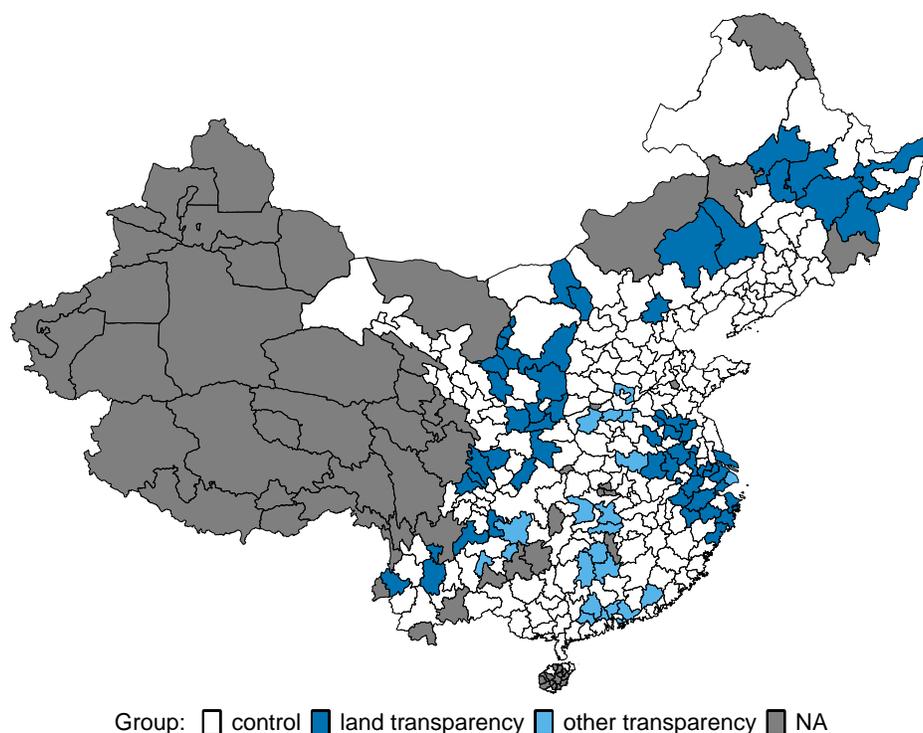
Notes: The dark blue zones are cities assigned to implement grassroots transparency for issues including land expropriation and construction. The light blue zones are cities assigned to implement grassroots transparency for other issues. The white cities are in the control group. The grey cities are not included in this study because we do not have data for their dependent variables.

Figure 3.1: Mainland Chinese Prefecture Cities in the Transparency Experiment

3.4.1 Dependent Variables

We collect the numbers and outcomes of judicial cases against the government from China Judgment Online, a public dataverse of judicial documents. By law, the documents of all judicial cases are published in this dataverse as long as they do not involve national security issues. The documents contain not only basic information about the courts, litigants, and defendants, but also the entire records of the trials, including the claims, evidence, debates, and reasons for outcomes. Our

---

[7]With an original transparency dataset that will be further explained in later sections, Table C.7 in the appendix shows that the experiment introduces a significant variation in transparency performance.

data covers documents of administrative litigation against governments below provincial level between 2013–2020 across 303 prefecture cities and four municipalities. We narrow down the data to the first trials so that the same disputes are not counted repeatedly. We focus on one issue, land expropriation, to simplify our machine-assisted coding strategy for labeling outcomes. We choose the issue of land expropriation because it generates conflicts that provide massive incentives for citizens' resistance, regime monitoring, and the blocking of monitoring channels by agents at the same time. Up to today, it has been one of the major sources of rebellions and instabilities in authoritarian countries for its high frequency and salience (Jiang and Zeng 2020, H. Li 2022, Hanson 2022). It also has significant impacts on the local fiscal budget as well as economic development, and it allows agents to extract extremely lucrative rents during the process (Mattingly 2016). For these two reasons, authoritarian regimes pay close attention to land expropriation. They take various measures to monitor local agents and respond to grievances during land expropriation, such as liberalizing the land market, promoting courts for dispute resolution, and enforcing land transparency (Jiang and Zeng 2020, H. Li 2022, Hanson 2022).

To label the outcome of each case, we first create a dictionary of keywords and their combinations by reading a random sample of documents. Then, we apply the dictionary to the entire dataset. After this, we sum the total number of each outcome for each city-year observation. If a litigant has multiple claims, we label the case as won when at least one of the claims is supported. In the appendix, we also show results with pure winning case numbers by subtracting the cases that have both supported and unsupported claims from the winning cases. The dataset contains 58,528 cases, and citizens won about 30 percent of them. To rule out the influence of cases that request more transparency, we remove the cases whose causes of action is regarding Open Government Information. The coding strategy, as well as a summary of statistics for the number and outcomes of cases, are presented in the appendix.

3.4.2 Difference-in-Differences Design

We employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) design that exploits the transparency variation intro-duced by the 2017 experiment. This strategy solves the endogeneity problem caused by common factors or by the possibility that local governments choose to become more transparent when they perform better or when they expect to win easily in courts. The intuition is that we compare the difference in legal resistance patterns between treatment and control groups, before and after the experiment. Because the dependent variables are about land disputes against local governments, we focus on the comparison between control group and the treatment group of transparency related to land and construction issues. The results for the treatment group related to other issues compared with control group are shown in the appendix. The estimation framework is as follows:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta D_i + \gamma T_t + \delta \text{DiD}_{i,t} + X_{i,t}^{\mathsf{T}}\zeta + \lambda_p + \epsilon_{i,t} \tag{3.1}$$

where $Y_{i,t}$ denotes one of the dependent variables in city i at year t, D_i and T_t are binary treatment (assigned to land-related transparency or control group) and post-treatment-time (2017 and after or pre-2017) indicators, respectively. $\text{DiD}_{i,t}$, the difference-in-differences estimator, equals D_i times T_t. X represents a series of control variables, and λ_p denotes province-level fixed effects. The main parameter of interest is δ, the coefficient of DiD.

The control variables include gross regional domestic product (GDP) per capita, population, area dimension, land urbanization, unemployed labor population, mobile user number, and internet user number.[8] For models predicting winning cases, we control the number of total cases on the right hand side.

---

[8]Land urbanization is measured with the proportion of built urban city area.

3.4.3 Results

Table 3.1 displays the main results.[9] Columns 1–4 show that transparency increases about 12 filed cases against local government for a city in a year. Nevertheless, models 5–8 show that transparency makes the winning challenges decline by about 3 cases. Figure 3.2 visualizes the two contrasting results. In general, both the total filed cases and winning cases rise over time. The number of cases increases more in the treatment group than in the control group. However, while the winning cases expand with total cases in the control cities, those in the treated cities do not follow this pattern. The results support H1 and H2b but refute H2a. They suggest that transparency increases citizens' legal resistance against local government but decreases their likelihood of winning in the legal institution.

(a) Total Filed Cases

(b) Cases Won by Citizens
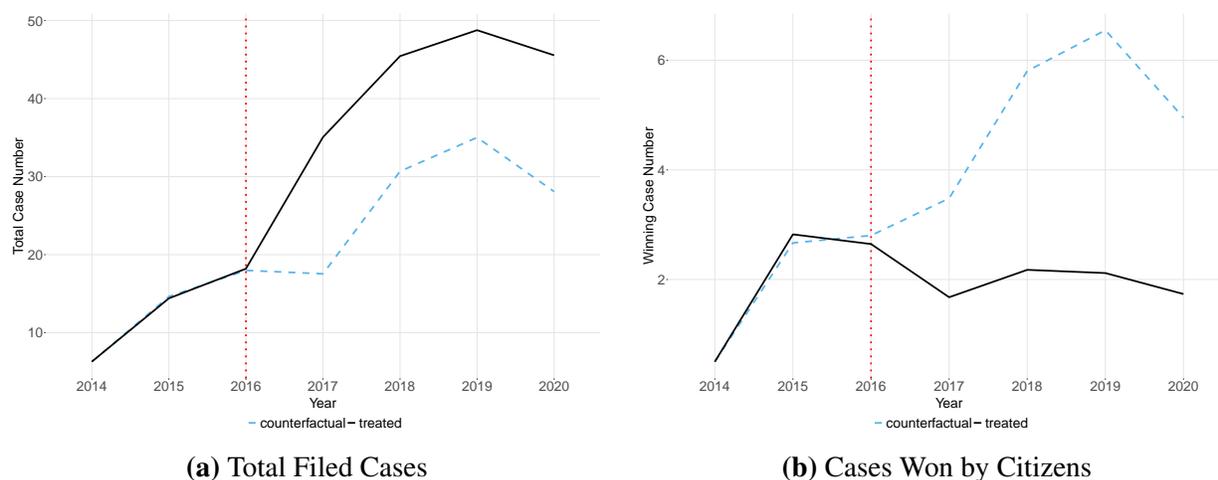
Notes: The solid lines are the average value of Y of treated cities over years, and the dash lines are estimated Y of reweighted control cities. The figures are drawn from trajectory balancing with kernel estimation that incorporates control variables: lagged GDP per capita, lagged population, area, urbanization, and total cases (for models predicting winning cases). Three control variables are not included due to too much missingness.

Figure 3.2: Trends in Total Filed and Won Cases against Local Governments in Treated and (Reweighted) Control Cities

---

[9]Because our sampling is correlated with the province and year clusters, we cluster standard errors at province-year level. Using ordinary robustness standard errors to not change the results.

	Total Filed Cases				Cases Won by Citizens			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
total cases					0.11***	0.10***	0.10***	0.11***
					(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
$GDPPC_{t-1}$			−0.00	−0.00			−0.00***	−0.00**
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
$population_{t-1}$			0.13***	0.07***			−0.00	0.00
			(0.02)	(0.02)			(0.00)	(0.00)
area			0.00*	0.00†			0.00**	0.00†
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization			34.88***	11.96			−1.80	−1.27
			(8.46)	(9.17)			(2.29)	(2.21)
unemployed				−0.00**				−0.00**
				(0.00)				(0.00)
mobile user				0.00				−0.00†
				(0.00)				(0.00)
internet user				0.00***				−0.00
				(0.00)				(0.00)
treat group	1.90	4.01*	−5.58*	−7.35**	−0.88*	0.75	1.01	1.19†
	(2.00)	(1.89)	(2.17)	(2.32)	(0.43)	(0.58)	(0.63)	(0.69)
treat year	22.87***	22.87***	20.17***	14.46***	1.24*	1.48**	1.47**	1.42*
	(2.85)	(2.00)	(1.83)	(2.28)	(0.53)	(0.54)	(0.55)	(0.57)
DiD	12.24*	12.24**	12.07**	9.29*	−3.17**	−3.16***	−3.07***	−2.47*
	(5.63)	(4.35)	(4.22)	(4.67)	(0.97)	(0.87)	(0.91)	(1.06)
Province FE	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.08	0.30	0.40	0.44	0.33	0.36	0.36	0.35
No.Obs.	2152	2152	2098	1663	1503	1503	1470	1228

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level are shown in parentheses.

Table 3.1: Transparency, Legal Cases against Local Governments, and the Outcomes

3.4.4 Robustness Checks

The results are robust to a series of checks on the parallel trends assumption of difference-in-differences estimation. First, t-tests for dependent variables across treatment and control groups from 2014 to 2016 do not find any significant difference between treatment and control groups in these pre-treatment periods. Second, we conduct a test with a DiD design for each year by interacting the treatment indicator with each year indicator. In this test, pre-2017 years serve as placebos, and we do not find any consistent pattern of statistical significance in these years. In contrast, post-2017 years show statistical significance and a sharp increase in the coefficient sizes of interaction terms. To ensure that the results are not affected by the data generating process that might actually follow a lagged outcome pattern, we also estimate a lagged dependent variable model, in which we include the lagged dependent variable and the DiD indicator. We find the results do not change. Finally, we estimate the average treatment effect on the treated from the DiD model through trajectory balancing with kernel estimation that incorporates control variables (Hazlett and Xu 2018).

Second, the results maintain after we remove potential outliers or change the measurements of dependent variables. These checks include: removing data in the pandemic year 2020, removing municipalities which are special in economic and administrative status, removing cities in provinces that are entirely assigned to the control group, imposing logarithm transformation to dependent variables that accounts for the overdispersion issue, focusing on the pure winning cases (cases in which the courts support all of citizens' requests), and coding the winning case numbers of city-years without cases as zeros. The results of these robustness checks are shown in the appendix.

3.5 Information, Institution Manipulation, and the Perverse Effect of Transparency

In this section, we present evidence for the mechanism of the perverse effect of transparency on citizens' legal resistance against local governments. As previously discussed, transparency discloses

information to citizens and sends a signal of monitoring to local agents at the same time. To test our theory, we need to understand whether the effect is driven by the disclosed information or the local agents' collusion with courts. One of the tests in this section uses an original land transparency dataset collected from local government websites to investigate whether the effect comes from the information disclosed to citizens. If greater disclosure of information decreases the frequency of winning, the effect is likely driven by citizens' resistance behavior when knowing the information. For instance, the information might encourage citizens to file lawsuits of less winning chance, which they would have not filed without such information. If we do not find a negative correlation between information disclosure and the winning frequency, we can rule out mechanisms from citizens' response to the information per se.

The other test exploits the variation of local judicial dependence in China and examines whether the effect comes from local governments' manipulation. If greater judicial dependence leads to more negative treatment effect of transparency, i.e., H3 holds, then the negative effect is likely driven by judicial manipulation.

3.5.1   Local Information Disclosure

To measure local information disclosure for land expropriation, we collect an original dataset of from government websites. Since the adoption of the Open Government Information Law in 2007, Chinese provincial governments have maintained internet platforms that publish information about local land expropriation. Specifically, five types of information are required to be open to the public: legal approval of the project, pre-approval notification to residents, a specific plan about the land-taking procedure, an announcement before the project starts, and compensation and settlement standards based on the land law. According to the law, all government online platforms should publish all the above information for each land-taking project. Each city government is responsible for providing the information. However, the transparency of these projects varies considerably across provinces and cities.

We scrape 21 government platforms of Mainland China that cover 228 prefecture cities' land-

taking projects during 2012–2020. We code a binary variable for each type of information of each project and then calculate an average score for each project. Finally, we average the scores across city-years, generating a transparency scores between 0 and 1. Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of transparency score over the years and by group in the 2017 transparency experiment. There is a general increase in actual information disclosure to citizens over years, but observations of the treatment groups, regardless of whether the treatment is about land, are more transparent than the control-group observations. Furthermore, we apply the DiD design to the transparency score and find that the DiD estimator significantly increases the score by 0.11–0.15, suggesting the transparency treatment did improve actual local information disclosure (see Table C.7 in the appendix).

(a) Average Transparency Scores over Years   **(b)** Transparency Score Distribution by Group
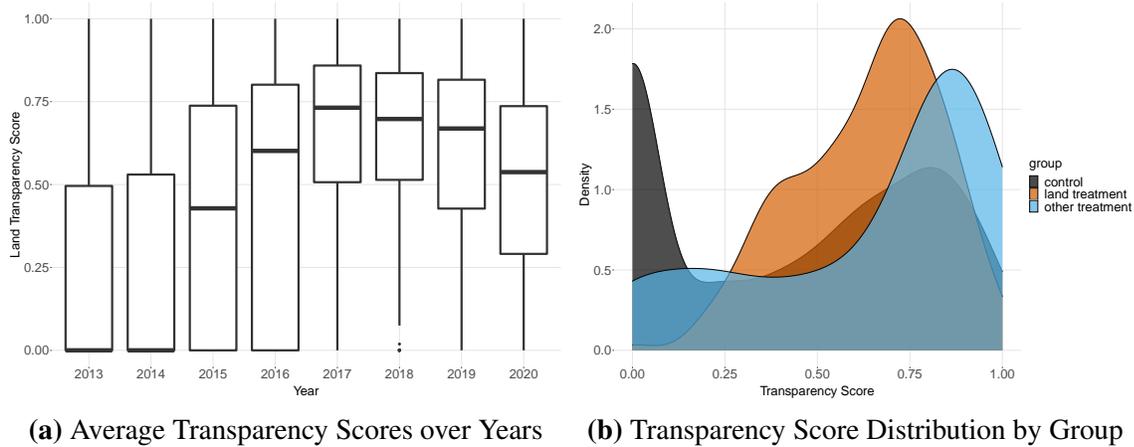
Figure 3.3: Statistics of Land Transparency Scores

Our main estimation framework is a two-way fixed-effect (2FE) model

$$\text{Win}_{i,t} = \kappa_i + \mu_t + \pi_1 \text{Info}_{i,t} + \pi_2 \text{Info}_{i,t-1} + X_{i,t}^{\mathsf{T}} \rho + \upsilon_{i,t} \tag{3.2}$$

where the main explanatory variable $\text{Info}_{i,t}$ is the transparency score of city i in year t. We also look at the possible effect of the score in the previous year. κ_i and μ_t are city-level and year-level fixed effects, respectively. In addition to the set of control variables in the DiD model, we also include the number of projects to control for the variance of transparency scores introduced by this variable.

	Cases Won by Citizens					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
transparency score	−0.62	−0.27	0.32	−0.10	0.28	0.28
	(1.03)	(0.98)	(0.96)	(1.31)	(1.28)	(1.28)
transparency score$_{t-1}$	0.92	1.08	2.34**	1.26	1.33	1.33
	(0.95)	(0.93)	(0.85)	(1.09)	(1.07)	(1.07)
total cases	0.09***	0.09***	0.08***	0.09***	0.08***	0.08***
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
project number	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Control Variables	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Province FE	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
City FE	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Year FE	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.30	0.33	0.36	0.42	0.43	0.43
No. Obs.	1203	1200	1200	1203	1200	1200

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$
Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level are shown in parentheses.

Table 3.2: Transparency Scores and Won Cases against Local Governments

In Table 3.2, Columns 1–3 show results for a baseline model of transparency and cases won by citizens, and Columns 4–6 show the results for the 2FE model. We find no consistent effect of the actual disclosed information on winning legal resistance against local governments. The coefficient signs of transparency score are even positive in most tests. A series of robustness checks produce similar results, except for some positive significant effects (appendix). In a word, the results from local transparency scores suggest that the negative effect of transparency on winning legal resistance is not driven by information. The information disclosed to citizens has either little effect on citizens' likelihood of winning a case against the local government or even positive effect washed off by something else resulted from transparency.

3.5.2 Judicial Dependence

We have shown that transparency significantly reduces citizens' likelihood of winning while it expands their challenges against local governments through the courts. Furthermore, the information provided to citizens through the transparency initiative does not account for this perverse effect.

Therefore, it is likely that transparency increases local governments' manipulation of the courts. Now, we provide a test of this mechanism by comparing the effects of transparency across Chinese cities with different levels of judicial dependence. As stated in H3, if courts are dependent on the government in a city, the outcomes of judicial cases are easily manipulated by the government, and citizens are consequently less likely to win with transparency. In contrast, courts that are less in control of local governments should not have such a perverse effect.

To measure judicial dependence, we adopt the data of court centralization introduced by a judicial reform in China (Y. Li 2022). As mentioned previously, China announced a centralization reform of its local courts in 2014. Since then, the reform has been implemented in local courts successively. Although China has a hierarchical judicial system in which higher-level courts can provide directions to lower-level courts, before the reform, the fiscal and personnel resources of courts were controlled by local governments, making the courts highly dependent on the governments. The reform centralizes prefecture and lower-level courts by moving their fiscal and personnel power to provincial-level governments. The data measures the centralization of courts with the *de facto* change in court funding sources from lower-level governments to the provinces. It has been demonstrated a robust predictor of judicial bias in China (Y. Li 2022, Lei and Li 2022).

We treat the city in which courts are centralized as less dependent than those where courts are not centralized. The overlap between the transparency treatment and the judicial reform status in the merged dataset is not significant in size (appendix). In addition, only 18 of 198 cities (and 45 out of 1,668 non-missing observations) completed the reform after the transparency experiment, which largely rules out the concern for post-treatment bias. Finally, because some cities in our transparency dataset are not included in the court centralization data, the results might be driven by these missing cities. We replicate the same tests for H1 and H2 with the merged dataset, and the results do not change.

Model Specifications

We estimate the effect heterogeneity with the following triple-difference specification:

$$\text{Win}_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta D_i + \gamma T_t + \delta \text{DiD}_{i,t} + \eta \text{Reform}_{i,t}$$
$$+ \theta D_i \times \text{Reform}_{i,t} + \psi T_t \times \text{Reform}_{i,t}$$
$$+ \omega \text{DiD}_{i,t} \times \text{Reform}_{i,t} + X_{i,t}^{\mathsf{T}} \zeta + \lambda_p + \epsilon_{i,t} \tag{3.3}$$

where Reform is a binary variable denoting whether the courts of city i have adopted the centralization reform in year t. This model is simply an extension of equation (1) with interactions between the Reform variable and the difference-in-difference framework. We expect the estimate value of ω, the coefficient of the triple-difference indicator, to be positive and statistically significant.

Results
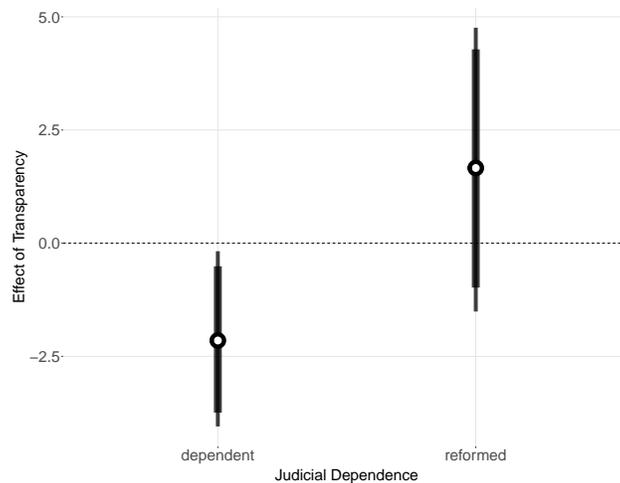
Note: The figures show the estimated effect of transparency with 90% and 95% confidence intervals generated by simulating 10,000 random draws from the model with interaction between transparency and judicial centralization.

Figure 3.4: Effects of Transparency on Cases Won against Local Governments by Judicial Dependence

Table C.6 in the appendix shows the expected result—reformed cities have about six more winning cases against local governments than the non-reformed ones. Figure 3.4 shows that when

courts are dependent on local governments, transparency reduces the number of winning cases against local governments controlling for total cases, while the effect is positive and insignificant in reformed cities. The results are robust to the same set of checks on dependent variables and model specifications as the DiD model (appendix). Moreover, judicial dependence does not condition the transparency treatment's effect on the transparency scores, suggesting our results are not driven by information disclosure that may vary by judicial dependence.

3.6   Alternative Explanations

Taken all findings together, we learn that transparency increases citizens' legal resistance against local governments on the issue of land expropriation but decreases governments' likelihood of losing. The perverse effect is driven by transparency-incentivized judicial manipulation. Now, we address several alternative explanations for our results in this section.

First, we check three characteristics regarding the administrative litigation procedures in China that could influence our results. If an administrative lawsuit aims to challenge a policy rather than government behaviors, it is almost always rejected by the court. In addition, sometimes citizens who are dissatisfied with judgments file similar lawsuits multiple times. Another possibility is that some citizens may dispute past government behaviors that are beyond the statute of limitations. According to the administrative litigation law in China, these two kinds of cases should be rejected. To probe these issues, we read in-depth the documents for 223 judicial cases that citizens lost to local governments and manually code the reasons for the losses. The cases are selected through random sampling stratified by year and experiment group. We find that transparency does not lead to more lost cases due to policy claims. The sample also shows that cases that citizens lose due to repeated or overdue claims constitute a very small share, and their numbers are not affected by the cities' transparency (Table C.9 in appendix).

Second, because we cannot measure cases that are not filed but should have been filed, our dataset might lead to a selection effect. The most likely source of selection is that citizens only file

cases when they believe they can win. However, if this is true, it would cause a bias against rather than in favor of our theory. Indeed, we find transparency leads to more cases but fewer winning cases simultaneously. The other source of selection is less intuitive but still possible. That is, in the treatment group, the number of cases that are less likely to win increases a lot while that of cases more likely to win decreases with a smaller size. This could occur when transparency substantially encourages citizens to file random or "abusive" lawsuits but slightly reduces the cases they should win. In our manually coded sample, few lawsuits are labeled *de facto* "abusive," and the number of cases in which litigants hired lawyers, which we see as less random, is not affected by transparency (Table C.9 in appendix). In addition, if this argument is true, it conflicts with our findings for H3—it does not make sense that citizens are encouraged to sue randomly only when the local courts are dependent on governments.

Third, it is entirely possible that courts censor cases lost to citizens even though, by law, they must publish all judgment documents, unless they specify the reason in written form (Liebman et al. 2020). We acknowledge that we are unable to measure the censorship in judicial case publication. However, as with the second issue, given that random cases do not increase substantially, censorship does not explain transparency's positive effect on the number of total cases. In other words, we should have observed a decline in the number of total and winning cases at the same time if censorship was the main reason for the reduced likelihood of winning. More conservatively, local agents may not only manipulate judicial outcomes but may also censor the publication of cases when they must become transparent, but this at least means that local agents are incentivized by transparency to conceal their losses.

Finally, our models on winning legal resistance cases focus on those unrelated to transparency, so that we can filter out the cases in which citizens sue for requesting more open government information about land expropriation projects. However, it is possible that citizens in treated cities tend to request transparency to challenge the local government (Kim et al. 2022). Such cases might substitute for part of the regular lawsuits against the government. If this type of cases is more likely to win with the transparency treatment, removing them from the sample could leads to our findings.

To address the concern, we apply the same DiD models to the cases requesting transparency during land disputes with local government. We do not find the treatment to cause such cases more or less likely to win, suggesting that request of transparency in courts does not influence our results (Table C.5 in appendix).

3.7   Conclusion

Authoritarian transparency is more than window dressing. Autocrats may adopt transparency as a top-down mandate to check agents and improve governance. Our research on China shows that this kind of initiative can be effective in improving actual transparency performance and providing more information to citizens. It also fosters challenges to agents from below, creating at least greater transaction costs for rent extraction in authoritarian countries. As previous studies suggest, better information increases citizens' legal awareness and confidence in using legal weapons to protect their rights, although they might be disappointed later on (Gallagher 2017, H. Li 2022).

On the other hand, however, transparency may induce backlash from regime agents against monitoring. Knowing they are being monitored, these agents are incentivized to manipulate anything within their power sphere to block the information channel. In China, judicial dependence facilitates such manipulation, repressing citizens' legal resistance and disrupting the fire-alarm function of transparency. Moreover, to citizens, although transparency offers the hope of better protection of their rights from regime agents' exploitation, an institutional resistance channel might be ineffective, as long as agents have power to intervene in the institutions. Our theory echoes a classic discussion of democracy and draws broader implications for comparative politics: transparency without horizontal separation of powers and checks and balances is insufficient to generate accountability (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999).

Conversely, institutional reforms and developments that aim to discharge local agents' power over institutions may alleviate the problem, even though they usually mean the consolidation of state power. In the case of judicial institutions, such efforts have been observed in not only China

but also other authoritarian countries, such as Egypt, Russia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Kazakhstan (Moustafa 2008, Solomon and Foglesong 2018, Widner and Scher 2008, Hanson 2022). It would be interesting to identify how these regimes use transparency and the separation of agent power interactively.

Our study is not a rejection of the general effectiveness of authoritarian transparency in monitoring agents. It is worth noting that our study focuses on land expropriation, an issue involving both lucrative rents and salient state-society conflicts. Other issues that differ on the benefit of misconduct or citizens' perceived issue salience may have different outcomes from our findings. For instance, when agents have less incentive to circumvent oversight with transparency, a signal of monitoring may force them to behave well. In other words, transparency should be more helpful in reducing misconduct that is not costly to give up. Future research may probe variations in the effectiveness of authoritarian transparency across policy issues or other conditions.

Appendices

C.1 Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
case number	2,336	25.055	52.693	0	664
win	1,745	4.978	11.507	0	137
lose	1,745	12.355	23.850	0	268
win and lose	1,745	1.430	5.506	0	129
dismissed	1,745	0.329	1.780	0	50
withdrawn	1,745	0.549	3.017	0	67
case number (OGI request)	2,528	4.383	14.597	3	418
win (OGI request)	1,227	3.105	12.960	0	403
lose (OGI request)	1,227	6.791	17.902	0	417
win and lose (OGI request)	1,227	0.980	11.727	0	402
dismissed (OGI request)	1,227	0.089	0.834	0	27
withdrawn (OGI request)	1,227	0.025	0.592	0	20
reformed	1,668	0.219	0.414	0	1
approval transparency	2,052	0.601	0.473	0	1
plan transparency	2,052	0.497	0.435	0	1
pre-approval transparency	2,052	0.365	0.387	0	1
announcement transparency	2,052	0.351	0.367	0	1
compensation transparency	2,052	0.337	0.348	0	1
transparency score	2,052	0.430	0.356	0	1
hearing	747	0.282	0.297	0	1
number of projects	2,052	68.619	106.485	0	1,107
area	2,624	2,629.613	3,074.430	1.53	43,263.52
population	2,625	173.010	267.462	0.03	2,602.32
GDP	2,569	19,260,619	31,006,045	206	326,798,700
built area	2,623	147.099	198.154	0.25	1,565.61
requisition	1,902	7.282	18.529	0	470.85
mobile users	2,214	4,156,797	5,013,878	42.94	40,760,000
internet users	2,098	1,069,051	1,233,863	10,000	13,720,000
unemployed	2,256	490.227	13,711.520	14.155	651,390
urbanization	2,623	0.117	1.668	0.001	85.359

Table C.1: Summary of Statistics

C.2 Coding Strategy for Judicial Decisions

- Year: Extract the decision year from judgment document ID.

- Case location: Extract the government name from defendant information, then match the name with its corresponding or the government's affiliated prefecture city.

- Outcome: In the decision section of each judgment document, find at least one of the following keywords for each type of the outcomes:

  1. Citizen wins: 违法,责令,判令,撤销,支付,无效,公开,答复,补偿,履行,政府负担,政府承担 (Possible actions that the defendant is asked to take if and only if citizen wins.)

  2. Citizen loses: 驳回,维持 (Reject citizen's claim or keep previous government decision.)

  3. Case is dismissed by the court: 不予立案,不予受理

  4. Case is withdrawn by citizen: 撤回,撤诉

  5. Case is transferred to other court: 移送, 移交, 交由, 管辖

C.3   Robustness Checks

	diff. in means	t	se	p
total cases$_{2014-2016}$	1.0158	0.4638	2.1901	0.6435
total cases$_{2014-2015}$	1.2919	0.5647	2.2879	0.5737
total cases$_{2016}$	0.4944	0.1109	4.4581	0.9121
total cases$_{2015}$	2.9524	0.7535	3.9182	0.455
total cases$_{2014}$	-0.2211	-0.1078	2.0513	0.9147
winning cases$_{2014-2016}$	-0.7679	-1.5188	0.5056	0.131
winning cases$_{2014-2015}$	-0.2722	-0.5447	0.4998	0.5873
winning cases$_{2016}$	-1.6608	-1.5247	1.0892	0.1335
winning cases$_{2015}$	0.2384	0.2877	0.8288	0.7749
winning cases$_{2014}$	-0.7818	-1.4696	0.5319	0.1486

Table C.2: Results for t-Tests on Pre-treatment Dependent Variables

	Total Filed Cases		Cases Won by Citizens	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
treat group	0.35	−11.92*	0.59*	2.79†
	(0.61)	(5.70)	(0.29)	(1.66)
treat group:year2014	0.73	4.03	−1.76**	−1.53
	(2.31)	(6.65)	(0.59)	(1.69)
treat group:year2015	3.31	6.51	−0.67	−0.64
	(4.09)	(6.47)	(0.80)	(1.79)
treat group:year2016	2.16	5.74	−2.30*	−2.67
	(4.55)	(6.65)	(0.92)	(1.71)
treat group:year2017	12.07	12.56	−4.06**	−3.96*
	(8.84)	(8.49)	(1.34)	(1.93)
treat group:year2018	16.95†	16.99†	−4.03*	−3.91*
	(8.83)	(9.99)	(1.64)	(1.86)
treat group:year2019	11.32	11.33	−4.22†	−4.12
	(11.09)	(9.72)	(2.17)	(2.63)
treat group:year2020	14.80		−6.33***	
	(12.46)		(1.62)	
$GDPPC_{t-1}$		−0.00		−0.00**
		(0.00)		(0.00)
$population_{t-1}$		0.06***		0.00
		(0.02)		(0.00)
urbanization		10.75		−0.83
		(9.13)		(2.27)
area		0.00		0.00†
		(0.00)		(0.00)
unemployed		−0.00***		−0.00***
		(0.00)		(0.00)
mobile user		0.00		−0.00
		(0.00)		(0.00)
internet user		0.00**		−0.00
		(0.00)		(0.00)
total cases			0.11***	0.11***
			(0.02)	(0.02)
Province FE	N	Y	N	Y
Adj. R^2	0.08	0.44	0.33	0.35
nobs	2152	1663	1503	1228

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$. The reference year is 2013.
Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level.

Table C.3: Difference-in-Differences by Each Year

	Total Cases			Cases Won by Citizens					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
total cases$_{t-1}$	0.77***	0.63***	0.54***						
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)						
winning cases$_{t-1}$				0.24***	0.19***	0.19***	0.31**	0.28*	0.28*
				(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
total cases				0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.05***	0.06***	0.06**
				(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPPC$_{t-1}$			−0.00			−0.00**			−0.00†
			(0.00)			(0.00)			(0.00)
population$_{t-1}$			0.07***			−0.01†			−0.00
			(0.02)			(0.00)			(0.00)
area			0.00			0.00*			0.00†
			(0.00)			(0.00)			(0.00)
urbanization			22.50**			−1.49			−0.39
			(7.81)			(3.03)			(4.42)
treat group	−0.86	−1.18	−6.71**	−1.39*	−0.02	0.18	−0.90	−0.33	−0.69
	(1.55)	(1.82)	(2.20)	(0.56)	(0.78)	(0.83)	(0.85)	(1.34)	(1.31)
DiD	8.06*	12.22***	13.79***	−2.08*	−2.04*	−1.90*	−1.68†	−1.96†	−1.91†
	(3.95)	(3.63)	(3.68)	(0.92)	(0.80)	(0.87)	(0.99)	(1.00)	(1.05)
reformed							0.37	0.12	0.01
							(0.91)	(1.27)	(1.35)
treat group*reformed							−1.60	−1.89	−0.71
							(1.39)	(2.15)	(2.33)
DiD*reformed							5.83†	6.45†	5.65†
							(3.34)	(3.54)	(3.18)
Province FE	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.49	0.53	0.56	0.37	0.39	0.40	0.17	0.17	0.17
nobs	1883	1883	1837	1143	1143	1118	631	631	617

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; $^\dagger p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level.

Table C.4: Results for Lagged Dependent Variable Models

	Total Filed Case				Won Case			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
case number					0.56**	0.62**	0.63***	0.67***
					(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
$GDPPC_{t-1}$			0.00	0.00			0.00	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
$population_{t-1}$			0.02***	0.01			−0.01*	−0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
area			0.00	−0.00			−0.00	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization			4.04*	−2.10			−1.54	1.56
			(1.96)	(1.97)			(2.19)	(2.01)
unemployed				−0.00***				0.00
				(0.00)				(0.00)
mobile user				−0.00				−0.00
				(0.00)				(0.00)
internet user				0.00***				−0.00
				(0.00)				(0.00)
treat group	0.90†	1.46*	0.32	−0.12	−0.96*	−0.75	−0.24	0.07
	(0.54)	(0.58)	(0.62)	(0.62)	(0.44)	(0.63)	(0.56)	(0.63)
treat year	4.76***	4.76***	4.82***	4.06***	−1.52†	−2.20†	−2.24*	−1.97*
	(0.95)	(0.72)	(0.76)	(0.87)	(0.84)	(1.14)	(1.11)	(0.99)
DiD	−1.02	−1.02	−1.51	−2.21†	−0.14	−0.03	0.17	0.51
	(1.28)	(0.96)	(1.03)	(1.23)	(0.73)	(0.75)	(0.75)	(0.93)
Province FE	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.03	0.21	0.23	0.23	0.65	0.68	0.69	0.72
nobs	2328	2328	2098	1663	1095	1095	1052	881

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level.

Table C.5: Legal Cases Requesting Transparency and the Outcomes

C.4 Transparency Effect by Judicial Dependence

	full data		dependent court		reformed court	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
case number	0.07***	0.07**	0.10***	0.10***	0.07**	0.07*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
$GDPPC_{t-1}$	−0.00†	−0.00†	−0.00	0.00	−0.00*	−0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
$population_{t-1}$	−0.00	−0.00	−0.01*	−0.00	0.00	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
area	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization	−1.21	−1.13	−0.24	0.91	0.06*	0.05†
	(3.33)	(3.17)	(4.35)	(4.41)	(0.02)	(0.03)
unemployed		−0.00**		0.00		−0.00
		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
mobile user		−0.00		−0.00†		−0.00
		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
internet user		0.00		−0.00		0.00†
		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
treat group	0.07	0.14	−0.35	−0.12	3.79	1.31
	(0.81)	(0.87)	(0.82)	(0.90)	(3.17)	(3.95)
treat year	1.56*	1.57*	1.12	1.33	1.55†	2.17
	(0.70)	(0.72)	(0.80)	(0.81)	(0.88)	(1.39)
treat group*reformed	0.12	−0.92				
	(1.65)	(1.78)				
treat year*reformed	0.24	0.58				
	(1.06)	(1.10)				
DiD	−2.89**	−2.97**	−2.93**	−2.51*	3.78	6.15
	(1.06)	(1.09)	(1.09)	(1.11)	(3.92)	(4.68)
DiD*reformed	5.65†	6.85*				
	(3.25)	(3.35)				
Province FE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.13	0.13	0.25	0.24	0.21	0.21
nobs	837	804	683	649	257	250

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level.
Results do not change without control variables or fixed effects.

Table C.6: Difference-in-Differences Estimation by Judicial Dependence

C.5 Transparency Scores

	Transparency Score			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
transparency score$_{t-1}$				0.54***
				(0.03)
requisition$_{t-1}$	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
GDPPC$_{t-1}$			−0.00	−0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
population$_{t-1}$			0.00	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
area			−0.00	−0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization			−0.30*	−0.12
			(0.14)	(0.12)
treat group	−0.09**	−0.04	−0.04	−0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
treat year	0.22***	0.22***	0.22***	0.05**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
DiD	0.15***	0.14***	0.15***	0.11***
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Province FE	N	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.15	0.45	0.45	0.60
No. Obs.	1073	1073	1070	1070

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; †$p < 0.1$

Notes: In addition to the set of control variables in other models, we also include the area of land taken at time $t-1$ in order to control for the variance of transparency scores due to different numbers and scales of projects. We did not show results controlling for this variable in other models because it introduces too many missing values in the datasets. The results are similar.

Table C.7: Transparency Experiment and Transparency Scores

C.6   Sample Case Reading

To provide further evidence for judicial manipulation based on details in cases, we thoroughly read and manually code the reasons for a random sample of 223 judicial cases that citizens lost to local governments. The random sampling is stratified by year and experiment group. We show that with transparency, the cases are harder to manipulate for evidence-based reasons, but the courts can reject or dismiss cases for claimed procedural reasons that usually do not hold. A common claimed reason for the court to crack down cases is procedural but easily manipulated: claiming that the citizen is not the appropriate litigant or the government is not the appropriate defendant.

Reason	pre-2017		post-2017	
	procedural	evidence	procedural	evidence
control	0.78	0.31	0.55	0.51
treatment	0.45	0.5	0.64	0.35
Number of Cases	52		171	

Table C.8: Group Shares of Sample Administrative Litigations Citizens Lose by Reasons

Reason	Proportion	coefficient	p-value
Challenge to Policy	0.108	0.115	0.252
Repeated Lawsuit	0.022	-0.015	0.750
Overdue Claim	0.085	-0.033	0.719
Random lawsuit	0.346	-0.193	0.211
Labeled "Abusive"	0.027	-0.001	0.781
Number of Cases		223	

Table C.9: Features of Lost Cases and the Effect of Transparency (DiD Model)

C.7 Transparency of Other Issues

	Total Filed Case				Won Case			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
case number					0.13***	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***
					(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPPC$_{t-1}$			0.00	0.00			−0.00***	−0.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
population$_{t-1}$			0.09***	0.03			−0.00	0.00
			(0.02)	(0.02)			(0.00)	(0.00)
area			0.00**	0.00*			0.00	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)			(0.00)	(0.00)
urbanization			−0.57***	−0.76***			0.10***	0.11***
			(0.14)	(0.14)			(0.02)	(0.02)
unemployed				−0.00***				−0.00**
				(0.00)				(0.00)
mobile user				0.00				−0.00†
				(0.00)				(0.00)
internet user				0.00***				0.00
				(0.00)				(0.00)
treat group	19.08**	11.70†	−4.27	−4.28	1.51	0.94	1.66	2.04
	(5.73)	(6.36)	(6.07)	(7.36)	(1.64)	(1.56)	(1.63)	(1.80)
treat year	22.87***	22.87***	19.48***	12.84***	0.75	1.01*	1.10*	1.12*
	(2.85)	(1.99)	(1.79)	(2.18)	(0.54)	(0.51)	(0.51)	(0.55)
DiD	33.51***	33.51***	31.61***	33.15***	−0.48	−0.35	−0.54	−1.00
	(9.11)	(8.56)	(8.60)	(9.29)	(2.26)	(1.95)	(1.93)	(2.21)
Province FE	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Adj. R^2	0.11	0.30	0.37	0.42	0.40	0.42	0.42	0.40
nobs	1880	1880	1834	1436	1318	1318	1291	1074

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; $^{\dagger}p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at province-year level.

Table C.10: Results with Transparency of Non-Land Issues

Bibliography

Abadie, Alberto, Susan Athey, Guido W Imbens and Jeffrey Wooldridge. 2017. "When should you adjust standard errors for clustering?". Working paper National Bureau of Economic Research.

Acemoglu, Daron, Ali Cheema, Asim I Khwaja and James A Robinson. 2020. "Trust in state and nonstate actors: Evidence from dispute resolution in Pakistan." *Journal of Political Economy* 128(8):3090–3147.

Acemoglu, Daron and James A Robinson. 2006. *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Alkon, Meir and Erik H Wang. 2018. "Pollution lowers support for China＇s regime: Quasi-experimental evidence from Beijing." *The Journal of Politics* 80(1):327–331.

Alt, James E and David Dreyer Lassen. 2006. "Transparency, political polarization, and political budget cycles in OECD countries." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3):530–550.

Alt, James E and David Lassen. 2003. Fiscal transparency and fiscal policy outcomes in OECD countries. Technical report EPRU Working Paper Series.

Alt, James E and Robert C Lowry. 2010. "Transparency and accountability: Empirical results for US States." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 22(4):379–406.

Anderson, Sarah E, Mark T Buntaine, Mengdi Liu and Bing Zhang. 2019. "Non-Governmental Monitoring of Local Governments Increases Compliance with Central Mandates: A National-Scale Field Experiment in China." *American Journal of Political Science* .

Andreula, Nicoló, Alberto Chong and Jorge B Guillen. 2009. "Institutional quality and fiscal transparency." *Inter-American Development Bank Working Paper* .

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Marc Meredith and Erik Snowberg. 2014. "Mecro-economic voting: local information and micro-perceptions of the macro-economy." *Economics and Politics* 26(3):380–410.

Arias, Eric, Horacio Larreguy, John Marshall and Pablo Querubin. 2018. Priors Rule: When do Malfeasance Revelations Help or Hurt Incumbent Parties? Working paper National Bureau of Economic Research.

Arkedis, Jean, Jessica Creighton, Akshay Dixit, Archon Fung, Stephen Kosack, Dan Levy and Courtney Tolmie. 2021. "Can transparency and accountability programs improve health? Experimental evidence from Indonesia and Tanzania." *World Development* 142:105369.

Berliner, Daniel. 2014. "The political origins of transparency." *The journal of Politics* 76(2):479–491.

Berliner, Daniel. 2017. "Sunlight or Window Dressing? Local Government Compliance with S outh A frica's Promotion of Access to Information Act." *Governance* 30(4):641–661.

Berliner, Daniel and Aaron Erlich. 2015. "Competing for transparency: political competition and institutional reform in Mexican states." *American Political Science Review* 109(1):110–128.

Berliner, Daniel, Benjamin Bagozzi, Brian Palmer-Rubin and Aaron Erlich. 2020. "The Political Logic of Government Disclosure: Evidence from Information Requests in Mexico." *Journal of Politics* .

Berliner, Daniel, Benjamin E Bagozzi and Brian Palmer-Rubin. 2018. "What information do citizens want? Evidence from one million information requests in Mexico." *World Development* 109:222–235.

Blaydes, Lisa. 2010. *Elections and distributive politics in Mubarak's Egypt*. Cambridge University Press.

Cai, Meina and Xin Sun. 2018. "Institutional bindingness, power structure, and land expropriation in China." *World Development* 109:172–186.

Cai, Yongshun. 2003. "Collective ownership or cadres' ownership? The non-agricultural use of farmland in China." *The China Quarterly* 175:662–680.

Casey, Katherine. 2015. "Crossing party lines: The effects of information on redistributive politics." *American Economic Review* 105(8):2410–48.

Chen, Xi. 2012. *Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China*. Cambridge University Press.

Chen, Yongxi. 2019. Taming the right to information: motive screening and the public interest test under China's FOI-like law. In *Transparency Challenges Facing China*. Wildy, Simmonds & Hill Publishing chapter 11, pp. 254–291.

Chong, Alberto, Ana L De La O, Dean Karlan and Leonard Wantchekon. 2014. "Does corruption information inspire the fight or quash the hope? A field experiment in Mexico on voter turnout, choice, and party identification." *The Journal of Politics* 77(1):55–71.

Di Tella, Rafael and Ernesto Schargrodsky. 2003. "The role of wages and auditing during a crackdown on corruption in the city of Buenos Aires." *The Journal of Law and Economics* 46(1):269–292.

Distelhorst, Greg. 2017. "The power of empty promises: Quasi-democratic institutions and activism in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(4):464–498.

Djankov, Simeon, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de Silanes and Andrei Shleifer. 2010. "Disclosure by politicians." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 2(2):179–209.

Egorov, Georgy, Sergei Guriev and Konstantin Sonin. 2009. "Why resource-poor dictators allow freer media: A theory and evidence from panel data." *American political science Review* 103(4):645–668.

Ferejohn, John. 1999. *Accountability and Authority: Toward a Theory of Political Accountability*. Cambridge Studies in the Theory of Democracy Cambridge University Press p. 131–153.

Ferraz, Claudio and Frederico Finan. 2008. "Exposing corrupt politicians: the effects of Brazil's publicly released audits on electoral outcomes." *The Quarterly journal of economics* 123(2):703–745.

Ferraz, Claudio and Frederico Finan. 2011. "Electoral accountability and corruption: Evidence from the audits of local governments." *American Economic Review* 101(4):1274–1311.

Foley, Kevin, Jeremy L Wallace and Jessica Chen Weiss. 2018. "The Political and Economic Consequences of Nationalist Protest in China: The 2012 Anti-Japanese Demonstrations." *The China Quarterly* 236:1131–1153.

Fu, Diana and Greg Distelhorst. 2018. "Grassroots participation and repression under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping." *The China Journal* 79(1):100–122.

Gallagher, Mary E. 2006. "Mobilizing the law in China:"Informed disenchantment" and the development of legal consciousness." *Law & Society Review* 40(4):783–816.

Gallagher, Mary E. 2017. *Authoritarian legality in China: Law, workers, and the state*. Cambridge University Press.

Gallagher, Mary E and Yuhua Wang. 2011. "Users and non-users: Legal experience and its effect on legal consciousness." *Chinese justice: civil dispute resolution in contemporary China* 204:233.

Gandhi, Jennifer and Handi Li. 2022. "Data Manipulation and its Effect on Citizens' Views: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in China." *Working paper* .

Grossman, Guy and Kristin Michelitch. 2018. "Information dissemination, competitive pressure, and politician performance between elections: A field experiment in Uganda." *American Political Science Review* 112(2):280–301.

Grossman, Guy and W Walker Hanlon. 2014. "Do better monitoring institutions increase leadership quality in community organizations? Evidence from Uganda." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3):669–686.

Hanson, Margaret. 2022. *Managing the Predatory State: Corruption and Governance in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*. Book Manuscript chapter 6.

Hazlett, Chad and Yiqing Xu. 2018. "Trajectory balancing: A general reweighting approach to causal inference with time-series cross-sectional data." *Available at SSRN 3214231* .

He, Xin. 2014. "Maintaining Stability by Law: Protest-Supported Housing Demolition Litigation and Social Change in China." *Law & Social Inquiry* 39(4):849–873.

Hollyer, James R, B Peter Rosendorff and James Raymond Vreeland. 2011. "Democracy and transparency." *The Journal of Politics* 73(4):1191–1205.

Hollyer, James R, B Peter Rosendorff and James Raymond Vreeland. 2015. "Transparency, protest, and autocratic instability." *American Political Science Review* 109(4):764–784.

Hollyer, James R, B Peter Rosendorff and James Raymond Vreeland. 2018. *Transparency, Democracy, and Autocracy: Economic Transparency and Political (In) Stability*. Cambridge University Press.

Hollyer, James R, B Peter Rosendorff and James Raymond Vreeland. 2019. "Why do Autocrats Disclose? Economic Transparency and Inter-Elite Politics in the Shadow of Mass Unrest." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63(6):1488–1516.

Hood, Christopher and David Heald. 2006. *Transparency: The key to better governance?* Vol. 135 Oxford University Press for The British Academy.

Huang, Haifeng. 2018. "The pathology of hard propaganda." *The Journal of Politics* 80(3):1034–1038.

Huang, Haifeng, Serra Boranbay-Akan and Ling Huang. 2019. "Media, protest diffusion, and authoritarian resilience." *Political Science Research and Methods* 7(1):23–42.

Islam, Roumeen. 2006. "Does more transparency go along with better governance?" *Economics & Politics* 18(2):121–167.

Jiang, Junyan and Yu Zeng. 2020. "Countering Capture: Elite Networks and Government Responsiveness in China's Land Market Reform." *The Journal of Politics* 82(1):13–28.

Kim, Jieun and Kevin J O'Brien. 2021. "Understanding Experimentation and Implementation: A Case Study of China's Government Transparency Policy." *Asian Survey* 61(4):591–614.

Kim, Jieun, Rachel E Stern, Benjamin L Liebman and Xiaohan Wu. 2022. "Closing Open Government: Grassroots Policy Conversion of China's Open Government Information Regulation and Its Aftermath." *Comparative Political Studies* 55(2):319–347.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan and Margaret E Roberts. 2013. "How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression." *American Political Science Review* 107(2):326–343.

King, Gary, Jennifer Pan and Margaret E Roberts. 2014. "Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation." *Science* 345(6199):1251722.

Kosack, Stephen and Archon Fung. 2014. "Does transparency improve governance?" *Annual review of political science* 17:65–87.

Kosec, Katrina and Leonard Wantchekon. 2020. "Can information improve rural governance and service delivery?" *World Development* 125:104376.

Landry, Pierre. 2008. "The institutional diffusion of courts in China: Evidence from survey data." *Rule by law: the politics of courts in authoritarian regimes* pp. 207–34.

Lee, Ching Kwan and Yonghong Zhang. 2013. "The power of instability: Unraveling the microfoundations of bargained authoritarianism in China." *American Journal of Sociology* 118(6):1475–1508.

Lei, Zhenhuan and Yishuang Li. 2022. Judicial Independence through Recentralization: Evidence from China. Working paper. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4052769.

Lieberman, Evan S, Daniel N Posner and Lily L Tsai. 2014. "Does information lead to more active citizenship? Evidence from an education intervention in rural Kenya." *World Development* 60:69–83.

Liebman, Benjamin L. 2014. "Legal reform: China's law-stability paradox." *Daedalus* 143(2):96–109.

Liebman, Benjamin L, Margaret E Roberts, Rachel E Stern and Alice Z Wang. 2020. "Mass digitization of Chinese court decisions: How to use text as data in the field of Chinese law." *Journal of Law and Courts* 8(2):177–201.

Li, Handi. 2022. Transparency for Authoritarian Stability: Open Government Information and Contention with Institutions in China. Working paper. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4069885.

Li, Yishuang. 2022. Court Structure, Judicial Independence, and the Attraction of Foreign Investment: Evidence from Judicial Recentralization in China. Working paper. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3994808.

Lorentzen, Peter. 2013. "Regularizing Rioting: Permitting Public Protest in An Authoritarian Regime." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8(2):127–158.

Lorentzen, Peter. 2014. "China's strategic censorship." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2):402–414.

Lorentzen, Peter, Pierre Landry and John Yasuda. 2013. "Undermining authoritarian innovation: the power of China's industrial giants." *The Journal of Politics* 76(1):182–194.

Lu, Xiaobo, Lynette Ong and Wenhui Yang. 2021. "Land Taking, Windfall Revenue, and Social Unrest: Evidence from China". Working paper.

Malesky, Edmund J and Paul J Schuler. 2012. "The Adverse Effects of Sunshine: A Field ExperimentTesting the Impact of Transparency on Delegate Performance in an Authoritarian Assembly.".

Manin, Bernard, Adam Przeworski and Susan C. Stokes. 1999. *Elections and Representation*. Cambridge Studies in the Theory of Democracy Cambridge University Press p. 29–54.

Mattingly, Daniel C. 2016. "Elite capture: How decentralization and informal institutions weaken property rights in China." *World Politics* 68(3):383–412.

McCubbins, Mathew D and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional oversight overlooked: Police patrols versus fire alarms." *American journal of political science* pp. 165–179.

Michelson, Ethan. 2007. "Climbing the dispute pagoda: grievances and appeals to the official justice system in rural China." *American Sociological Review* 72(3):459–485.

Moustafa, Tamir. 2003. "Law versus the state: the judicialization of politics in Egypt." *Law & Social Inquiry* 28(4):883–930.

Moustafa, Tamir. 2008. "Law and resistance in authoritarian states: The judicialization of politics in Egypt." *Rule by law: The politics of courts in authoritarian regimes* 132.

O'Brien, Kevin J and Lianjiang Li. 2004. "Suing the local state: administrative litigation in rural China." *The China Journal* (51):75–96.

O'Brien, Kevin J and Lianjiang Li. 2006. *Rightful resistance in rural China*. Cambridge University Press.

Qin, Bei, David Strömberg and Yanhui Wu. 2017. "Why does China allow freer social media? Protests versus surveillance and propaganda." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(1):117–40.

Raffler, Pia, Daniel N Posner and Doug Parkerson. 2019. "The weakness of bottom-up accountability: experimental evidence from the Ugandan health sector." *Los Angeles: Innovations for Poverty Action* .

Roberts, Margaret E, Brandon M Stewart and Dustin Tingley. 2019. "Stm: An R package for structural topic models." *Journal of Statistical Software* 91:1–40.

Roberts, Margaret E, Brandon M Stewart, Dustin Tingley, Christopher Lucas, Jetson Leder-Luis, Shana Kushner Gadarian, Bethany Albertson and David G Rand. 2014. "Structural topic models for open-ended survey responses." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(4):1064–1082.

Rundlett, Ashlea and Milan W Svolik. 2016. "Deliver the vote! Micromotives and macrobehavior in electoral fraud." *American Political Science Review* 110(1):180–197.

Schaaf, Steven D. 2021. "Contentious Politics in the Courthouse: Law as a Tool for Resisting Authoritarian States in the Middle East." *Law & Society Review* 55(1):139–176.

Sjoberg, Fredrik M. 2014. "Autocratic adaptation: The strategic use of transparency and the persistence of election fraud." *Electoral Studies* 33:233–245.

Solomon, Peter H and Todd S Foglesong. 2018. "Courts and transition in Russia: The challenge of judicial reform.".

Stern, Rachel E. 2013. *Environmental litigation in China: a study in political ambivalence*. Cambridge University Press.

Stiglitz, Joseph E. 1999. "On liberty, the right to know, and public discourse: the role of transparency in public life." *Globalizing rights: The Oxford amnesty lectures* 149:1–32.

Stockmann, Daniela and Mary E Gallagher. 2011. "Remote control: How the media sustain authoritarian rule in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 44(4):436–467.

Stromseth, Jonathan R, Edmund J Malesky and Dimitar D Gueorguiev. 2017. *China's governance puzzle: Enabling transparency and participation in a single-party state*. Cambridge University Press.

Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press.

Tian, He, Yanbin Lu, Yue Zhu, Qianling Zhao, Xu Wang and Yu Zhang. 2014. "Qun ti xing shi jian de te dian, you yin ji qi ying dui". Annual Report on China's Rule of Law NO.12 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Wang, Yuhua. 2015. *Tying the Autocrat's hands*. Cambridge University Press.

Whiting, Susan H. 2017. "Authoritarian "rule of law" and regime legitimacy." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(14):1907–1940.

Widner, Jennifer and Daniel Scher. 2008. "Building judicial independence in semi-democracies: Uganda and Zimbabwe." *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes* pp. 235–60.

Williams, Andrew. 2009. "On the release of information by governments: Causes and consequences." *Journal of Development Economics* 89(1):124–138.

Zhang, Han and Jennifer Pan. 2019. "CASM: A deep-learning approach for identifying collective action events with text and image data from social media." *Sociological Methodology* 49(1):1–57.