Popular Threats and Nationalistic Propaganda: Political Logic of China’s Patriotic Campaign

Chuyu Liu & Xiao Ma

To cite this article: Chuyu Liu & Xiao Ma (2018): Popular Threats and Nationalistic Propaganda: Political Logic of China’s Patriotic Campaign, Security Studies
To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1483632

View supplementary material

Published online: 24 Jul 2018.

Submit your article to this journal

View Crossmark data
Popular Threats and Nationalistic Propaganda: Political Logic of China’s Patriotic Campaign

Chuyu Liu and Xiao Ma

ABSTRACT
Conventional wisdom suggests that authoritarian leaders use nationalist propaganda as a tool to strengthen mass support. Yet few studies have provided systematic evidence to account for specific tactics underlying these information manipulations. We argue that autocrats, recognizing the material costs of propaganda, are more likely to target localities with the greatest antiregime potential. Using a unique dataset of “patriotic education sites” that the Chinese Communist Party assigned throughout China as tools to advance its nationalistic campaign, we found a systematic association between these locations and the scale of antiregime mobilization in the 1989 prodemocracy movement. The longer the antiregime protest lasted in a city in 1989, the greater the number of patriotic education sites the city contains. Our findings highlight the strategic way in which autocrats manipulate nationalist propaganda to mitigate popular threats.

Introduction
By the early 20th century, the advent of radio and cinema, as well as the advancement of modern print techniques, provided ample opportunity for political leaders to manipulate information. In many democratizing countries, nationalist elites took advantage of emerging mass media to disseminate nationalist ideas. Jack Snyder argues that under conditions of incipient democratization, nationalist mythmaking easily dominates the marketplace of ideas. Evidence from imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union suggests that leaders in consolidated autocracies also heavily exploit nationalist propaganda to build a popular base. Inspired by these historical...
cases, a body of international relations (IR) literature argues that nationalist propaganda serves as an effective tool with which to generate a sense of national solidarity that distracts from domestic dissensions.\(^7\)

Scholars have found increasing empirical evidence that nationalist propaganda has an impact in autocratic societies. For example, Maja Adena et al. show that when the Nazi Party took control of state radio, they used it to distribute propaganda that helped the fascist regime gain more votes and stoke anti-Semitism.\(^8\) David Yanagizawa-Drott finds that radio broadcasts directed by Hutu nationalists significantly increased participation in collective killings during the Rwandan genocide.\(^9\)

Despite recent advances in uncovering nationalist propaganda’s efficacy, empirical studies have barely addressed how autocratic states exploit propaganda machines. As we will see below, the manipulation of information often entails considerable material costs. Given these costs of propaganda, a question then arises: How do autocratic leaders allocate scarce resources to maximize the effectiveness of information manipulation? Put differently, which audience is the most valuable target for propaganda? To address this question, we examine a large-scale campaign of nationalist propaganda by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—its Patriotic Education Campaign. The CCP actively engaged in a host of policy changes to burnish its legitimacy after the 1989 prodemocracy movement, with the use of nationalist propaganda being among the most prominent.\(^10\) While similar to campaigns in other countries, the scale of this campaign was unprecedented.\(^11\)

The Patriotic Education Campaign included a massive initiative of construction and refurbishment of national museums and public monuments. Some of these projects certainly cost the party-state millions of renminbis (RMBs). Thus, it had a reason to select these “patriotic education sites” with care, and significant regional variations within this campaign are evident. These variations provide a rare opportunity to analyze the party’s strategic use of nationalist propaganda.

We argue that an authoritarian government wanting to maximize the effectiveness of nationalist propaganda is more likely to target those localities that have greater potential for antiregime activities. Consistent with our cost-based explanation, we find that locations of patriotic education


sites are systematically associated with the scale of the antiregime mobilization that immediately predated the nationalistic campaign—the 1989 pro-democracy movement. The longer the antiregime protest lasted in a city in 1989, the greater the number of patriotic education sites the CCP erected in that city. The results are robust with respect to a host of confounds and alternative explanations, including each city’s socioeconomic conditions and its historical legacies.

Our findings contribute to the IR literature in general and that on Chinese foreign policy in particular. First and foremost, to the best of our knowledge this research offers the first systematic quantitative evidence that specifies the strategy autocratic leaders employ when they distribute nationalist propaganda. Although many influential IR studies argue that authoritarian regimes stoke the flames of nationalism to enhance domestic political support, they have not examined concrete strategies authoritarian states employ. Specifically, if autocratic leaders strategically resort to nationalist propaganda when they face domestic crises, how do they target that propaganda? It is difficult to identify an empirically convincing measure of these tactics in less-transparent nondemocracies. Most preexisting research refers to the instrumental usage of nationalist propaganda on the basis of anecdotal cases.

This paper also brings a new perspective to the literature of authoritarian regimes’ propaganda by emphasizing propaganda’s material costs. The renewed interest in autocratic propaganda has significantly improved our understanding of these phenomena. Autocratic states engage in propaganda to demonstrate their strength, to distract the public from controversial issues, and to cultivate a reputation for neutrality. Our study departs from the extant research focusing on how propaganda encourages proregime attitudes or compliance with the status quo. Instead, we conceptualize propaganda as a set of “semiotic practices” that involve numerous budgetary resource investments. Therefore, given budget constraints, a cost-conscious dictator will target a particular audience when engaging in propaganda.

Finally, our particular empirical setting might be of interest to scholars of Chinese foreign policy. With its rapid growth in economic and military

14Haifeng Huang, “Propaganda as Signaling,” Comparative Politics 47, no. 4 (July 2015): 419–44.
capacity after the 1970s, China emerged as a pivotal player in international politics. Meanwhile, the rise of Chinese nationalism has attracted considerable attention from both academic and policy communities.\(^{18}\) Scholars continue to debate the multidimensional nature—both the popular-based aspect and state-led side—of Chinese nationalism\(^{19}\) and its implications for China’s foreign policy.\(^{20}\) Some contend that the resurgence of nationalism is a bottom-up process driven by the disparity between China’s currently relatively low international status and its rising power;\(^{21}\) others suggest this increasing nationalist sentiment resulted from a top-down project: the Chinese government’s instrumental usage of nationalism.\(^{22}\) We add to this debate by providing the first quantitative evidence of the historical root of state-led nationalism: that the CCP’s pragmatic interest in maintaining its grip on power in the face of a domestic-legitimacy crisis drives it.

This paper is organized as follows: the first section presents our theoretical framework; the second briefly describes the Patriotic Education Campaign, focusing especially on patriotic education sites; the third discusses the data used and explains our research design in more depth; and the fourth section offers empirical evidence from various model specifications and corroborates our core argument through checks of robustness. The conclusion provides a summary, acknowledges limitations of the study, and suggests avenues for future research.

**Strategic Deployment of Nationalist Propaganda**

**Instrumental Usage of Nationalist Propaganda**

This study focuses on contemporary China to explore an instrumental usage of nationalism through state-sponsored propaganda. In this paper, we view the “patriotism” discourses promulgated by the CCP after 1989 as a form of nationalist propaganda. Top CCP leaders have long recognized the utility of encouraging nationalism.\(^{23}\) As Suisheng Zhao notes, the official patriotism


narrative in the 1990s reflected strong pragmatism—it favored the status quo, especially the rule of the CCP.24 The Party’s propaganda machine actively advertised the link between a love of China and loyalty to the CCP. According to this official narrative, a quest for “wealth and power” gives “the Communist state the responsibility to speak in the name of the nation and demands that citizens subordinate their individual interests to China’s national ones.”25 The official patriotism discourses highlighted the central role of the Communist Party as the custodian of national interests.26 The CCP’s message was quite clear: China would fall apart if the Party lost control of the country; only the CCP has the capacity to govern. From the perspective of this state-led nationalism, the political stability only achievable through a single-party rule is a prerequisite for a stronger and wealthier China in the future.

The nationalist propaganda the CCP promulgated after 1989 generally consisted of two themes: (1) national pride, which was usually associated with prevailing national myths that emphasize honored achievements of the nation; and (2) strong emotional feeling against national humiliations of the past. Patriotic education sites, which the Chinese state constructed across China, advanced both, framing them as discursive reasons for supporting the regime.

The sites advanced national pride to make Chinese visitors’ in-group identity as members of Chinese society more salient, increasing the in-group bias toward the ruling party, which they equated with Chinese national identity. In this way, the CCP regime portrayed itself as a successor and guardian of these glorious historical heritages: should the Party fall, Chinese civilization might end as well.

Patriotic education sites also highlighted China’s traumatic experience of the modern era (1840–1949). They advanced a new official discourse framing this period as a century of humiliation brought on by Western imperialists, the out-group. The CCP attributed this national shame to the weakness of previous Chinese governments. Avoiding future humiliation would therefore require a strong and stable regime. Hence, love of China is the same as loyalty to the Party: empowering enemies of the CCP would cause domestic chaos and damage the nation’s quest for wealth and power. This national humiliation theme exemplifies the in-group/out-group logic that scholars have considered essential to the manipulation of nationalism.27 By highlighting previous interstate conflicts, the propaganda creates a sense of in-group social cohesion that lets people put aside differences with their leaders. They “rally round the flag,” and leaders garner popular support.

26 Shirk, China: Fragile Superpower.
Material Costs of Propaganda and Strategic Targeting of Audience

If we define propaganda as a government’s efforts to cultivate proregime attitudes among the masses through political indoctrination, by what means these messages are conveyed is as central to its impact as the narrative content. To produce progovernment ideologies, the state has to systematically invest resources in institutions that help deliver and perpetuate proregime messages. As a result, government propaganda is closely related to the control over the mass media or other channels of information flows.  

Control over media is costly. The case of Fascist Italy clearly illustrates the relationship between the production of propaganda and associated financial costs imposed upon the regime. According to Mabel Berezin, in terms of subsidies of theaters for the fiscal year 1926–1927, “the entire state budget was 14,550,000 lire; resources allocated to the Ministry of Public Instruction were 1,477,000 lire, which represents 10% of the Italian state budget. ... Theatrical grants represented 585,000 lire, or 40% of the Ministry of Public Instruction’s budget.” In other words, to promote fascist ideology, the Italian government spent 4 percent of its overall yearly budget on state-subsidized theaters.

The Italian case is not an exception to the general pattern in terms of propaganda’s material costs. To capture the marketplace of ideas, politicians in many countries bribe mass media directly. For example, John McMillan and Pablo Zoido show that former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori’s security chief paid the country’s television channels more than US$3 million per month to buy off these media companies. In the context of Argentina between 1998 and 2007, Rafael Di Tella and Ignacio Franceschelli find that there was a negative correlation between government-related advertising and the first-page newspaper coverage of corruption scandals. In addition to bribing private media, autocratic governments throughout the world devote sizable resources to build up state-owned media outlets.

To advance the Patriotic Education Campaign, the CCP spent billions of yuan. As Elizabeth J. Perry notes, “With the launching of the Patriotic Education Campaign, spending on cultural initiatives took another major leap (from 2,237,000,000 RMB in 1993 to 3,425,000,000 in 1994).”

33Perry, Cultural Governance in Contemporary China, 14.
Constructing patriotic education sites and refurbishing existing buildings was a large part of the cost. Further suggesting that the CCP has a reason to be cautious in spending for patriotic education sites, President Xi Jinping recently advised the party-state against overspending in this area. For a list of examples with regard to these costs, see Table 1 of Appendix A.

Given the budgetary costs of propaganda, autocrats strive to maximize the effectiveness of propaganda by prioritizing certain targets over others. For example, the CCP imposed military training for all first-year college students from Peking University and Fudan University after Tiananmen Square, focusing on universities whose students played a pivotal role in the uprising. The government provided military training—essentially political indoctrination by the party-state—at four isolated military bases. The state expanded the project to additional universities in the ensuing years, but only around 200 of China’s 1,075 universities had implemented such military training by 1992 because of a funding problem.

We argue that the autocratic propaganda machine tends to target localities with greater antiregime potential. In China, the configuration of political ideology differs considerably across localities. People in some regions are significantly more open to politically liberal values than others. It is thus economically more efficient to prioritize these politically dangerous localities. The regime has no need to invest resources in regions where it already enjoys a solid political support base, but investing in regions without loyalty to the regime provides a significant return on investment.

**Antiregime Protest and the Selection of Targets**

Autocrats who seek to preempt potential internal threats through nationalist propaganda face an acute problem: the scarcity of reliable information about

---


35 According to Stanley Rosen, “The cost of a year of military training was 5,000 yuan per student.” Compulsory military training was different from patriotic education sites despite the fact that both of them are proregime propaganda. Due to costs, the year-long compulsory military training was only implemented in two universities and was abolished after only four years, before the Party turned to building the patriotic education sites. In addition, compulsory military training of college students included various types of proregime indoctrination, which was not specific to nationalist propaganda. See Stanley Rosen, “The Effect of Post-4 June Re-Education Campaigns on Chinese Students,” China Quarterly 134 (June 1993): 318.


37 We recognize that the strategic targeting story may be contingent on a crucial variable—the extent to which the rule of the state can effectively penetrate its territory. In cases where strong states are able to exert control over the entire territory, such as China, a selective use of nationalist propaganda may simply be a function of perceived levels of mass discontent across space. However, if the reach of a state is geographically constrained, it is more costly for the weak state to extend its propaganda engineering to peripheral regions where there has been a fragile presence of the state. Put differently, ruling elites in weak states may devote more resources to consolidate their control over the “core” area. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.
the preferences of their constituency. To prioritize targets with greater potential for revolt, autocratic leaders need first to identify these targets. But repressive regimes force individuals to hide their authentic preferences, undermining dictators’ ability to collect reliable information. To overcome this information gap, autocratic leaders may adopt semicompetitive elections as tools to gather essential intelligence. For example, an unfavorable electoral outcome for a local candidate who is affiliated with the hegemonic party may betray local constituents’ true feelings. China lacks semicompetitive electoral institutions that provide this kind of feedback and thus tends to rely on protests as an alternative channel through which leaders can gauge the potential of mass threats. Autocratic elites in China have therefore established institutions that monitor and contain popular contention.

Given that the ruler lacks reliable information about where the most discontented groups reside, previous mass protests serve as an informative signal to the incumbent by revealing the public’s authentic preferences. The presence of public protests shows that individuals living in these places are discontented enough to express it openly. In addition, the magnitude of popular protests indicates the degree of mass discontent. Consequently, when authoritarian leaders decide to initiate a nationalistic campaign, they are more likely to target those localities that have experienced more salient protests. In the case of the Patriotic Education Campaign, the CCP had another source of information: the location and scale of mass protests in 1989, which gives the incumbent a heuristic measure with which to predict the occurrence of antiregime protests in the future.

Context: Patriotic Education Campaign after 1989

The Patriotic Education Campaign

The military crackdown on the 1989 prodemocracy movement created a legitimacy crisis for the CCP. Party elites were well aware

---


of this. In 1989, the party leadership initiated the Patriotic Education Campaign to reorient the party’s ideological position. This was a massive nationalistic campaign consisting of a host of edicts. All the activities in this new propaganda strategy were aimed at replacing Marxism-Leninism, which the party-state now considered outmoded, with a new nationalistic theme. This nationalist propaganda had three components: (1) the institutionalization of patriotic education; (2) reforms in history education; and (3) large-scale construction of patriotic education sites.

New official discourses depicted the CCP as the key actor for invigorating China, its central mission defending of national interests. The Party institutionalized this change in ideology through measures such as an increased use of patriotic rhetoric in the People’s Daily, the official media outlet of the CCP. A keywords content analysis of the newspaper archives from 1979 into the 1990s shows an upward trajectory in which the meaning of patriotism was idiosyncratic and unstructured in the 1980s but increasingly coherent and systematic in the 1990s. While it once usually referred to a myriad of diverse social activities, by 1989 “patriotism” became closely related to the emerging large-scale ideological propaganda. Only 11 percent of the reports with “patriotism” in the title referred to “patriotic education” before 1979. During the 1980s, this number increased to 29 percent. But it jumped to 57 percent after 1989. The tactical indoctrination of patriotic propaganda became far more institutionalized after the Tiananmen uprising.

In addition to initiating intensive patriotism education, the CCP implemented a reform of history education after the 1989 military crackdown. This reform rewrote the fundamental narrative of modern Chinese history. Instead of emphasizing the class struggle that is a core justification for Communism, the new history curriculum taught in Chinese high schools highlighted the national humiliations of the modern era. According to the new official narrative, the CCP was more than the voice of the proletariat. The Party also ended the history of China’s hundred years of humiliating diplomacy. It changed the national curriculum such that high school students, who had studied world history after receiving a background in Chinese history in middle school, continued with Chinese history after 1992.

---


43For a detailed description of this campaign, see Appendix B: A Chronology of the Patriotic Education Campaign.


46Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation*. 
The content changed as well. The old history courses emphasized that the CCP had led the Chinese people in winning a glorious revolution. The new courses described China as a victim of invasions by great Western powers. The new curriculum underscored atrocities and suffering that foreign imperial powers had imposed in the modern era, and it also required students to spend greater classroom time on Chinese history.47

In summary, the CCP took a “patriotic turn” in the 1990s as it evolved from being a revolutionary party whose legitimacy was once based on Communism to a nationalist party claiming to represent “national interests.”48 Patriotic education sites were a major component of this new strategy.49

The Patriotic Education Sites

“Patriotic Education Sites” was the CCP’s term for national museums and public monuments that began to sprout after 1989.50 These memorial sites were the central ingredient in a larger project of national mythmaking.51 Their function is to visualize national myths, which, while generally advancing accurate information, provide a rather selective presentation of collective memory. These memorials singled out memories that fit the CCP’s agenda, reframing historic memory as a tool to glorify the status quo and to denounce enemies of the CCP. Internal discussions of patriotic education sites began in 1989.52 This led to the earliest official document referencing construction of patriotic education sites in 1991, the CCP Central Propaganda Department’s first-known official document on patriotic education, a “Circular on Fully Using Cultural Relics to Conduct Education in Patriotism and Revolutionary Traditions.”53 The document

48Gries, China’s New Nationalism; Shirk, China: Fragile Superpower.
49Although the focus of our paper is patriotic education sites across China, we recognize that they are not the only tools the Party uses to promote nationalism. The regime’s strategies of nationalistic propaganda have evolved and proliferated in recent years, with the development of new forms of mass communications. Aside from more traditional channels, such as TV and movies, the Party now actively manufactures proregime messages using paid commentators in the online space. Government-backed commercial outlets, such as Global Times, also provocatively appeal to the nationalistic segment of Chinese netizens. In addition, the regime uses high-profile events such as the Beijing Olympic Games to foster nationalistic pride among the population. See Yinan He, “History, Chinese Nationalism and the Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict,” Journal of Contemporary China 16, no. 50 (March 2007): 7; King, Pan, and Roberts, “How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument”; Kecheng Fang and Maria Repnikova, “Demystifying ‘Little Pink’: The Creation and Evolution of a Gendered Label for Nationalistic Activists in China,” New Media & Society (October 2017): 13–15; Tom Ecker, “Olympic Pride: Nationalism at the Berlin and Beijing Games,” Harvard International Review 36, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 46–49.
50For a case study of patriotic education sites in a second-tier city, see Appendix C.
51He, The Search for Reconciliation; Wang, Never forget National Humiliation.
52Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation.
53See He, The Search for Reconciliation, 244.
read, in part: “Using the rich historical relic resources to conduct education of the masses about loving our motherland, loving the party, and loving socialism has the characteristic of visualization, real and convincing.”\(^{54}\) In 1994, the CCP’s Central Committee, the most powerful political body in the Party, issued an edict directing every province in the country to build patriotic education sites or to renovate existing museums to create sites. The locations of the first 100 patriotic education sites were announced in 1995.\(^{55}\) Three additional waves of construction followed. By 2009, 353 national-level patriotic education sites had been constructed or refurbished throughout the country. These waves came at four-year intervals: 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2009, suggesting a deliberate plan by the central government. The sites presented a considerable diversity of historical memories. Popular topics included the second Sino-Japanese war (1931–45) and other conflicts with foreign powers, the civil war between the CCP and Kuomintang, the history of ancient Chinese civilization, and the lives of top leaders of the early CCP.\(^{56}\) All were tied to the cities that housed them in some manner—for example, the Mao Zedong Memorial Museum celebrating Mao Zedong is in his hometown, and the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall memorializes the Nanjing Massacre that took place there in 1937.

Evidence suggests patriotic education sites have an impact. Millions of visitors enter them annually.\(^{57}\) Jeremy L. Wallace and Jessica Chen Weiss found that cities with patriotic education sites were more likely to have anti-Japanese protests in 2012.\(^{58}\) Suggesting the CCP considered the sites a success, the government invested in them on an ongoing basis, renovating and enlarging them over time.\(^{59}\)

The central government played a primary role in determining the locations of patriotic education sites,\(^{60}\) and thus they suggest the CCP’s strategy. The spatial distribution of these patriotic education sites also shows considerable variation.

On the basis of the above discussions, we expect that:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** The longer the antiregime protest lasted in a city in 1989, the greater the number of patriotic education sites the CCP assigned in that city.

\(^{54}\)Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation*, 104.

\(^{55}\)See Appendix B.

\(^{56}\)See Appendix D.


\(^{60}\)The process by which the state determined the locations of the education sites is a black box. Internally published government documents have not been released. See “Addressing Competing Explanations” in this paper for a discussion of the role local governments played in proposing the sites. The central government clearly dominated the process.
Data

Dependent Variable: Presence and Number of Patriotic Education Sites

We collected data on the number of patriotic education sites across all Chinese prefecture-level cities from 1997 to 2009. Before scrutinizing the city-level distribution, it is illuminating to look at the province-level variation. Figure 1 shows the cumulative number of patriotic education sites by province. As it reflects, peripheral provinces such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia have far fewer patriotic education sites than more-central provinces, where Han Chinese dominate. Furthermore, Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Hunan, which had the greatest number of days of demonstrations in

---

1989, have more sites than provinces like Guangxi and Ningxia, which had the smallest number of protests in 1989.

Figure 2 presents the city-level distribution of cumulative numbers of patriotic education sites by 2009. A stylized pattern immediately stands out in this figure. That is, the distribution is highly skewed. Whereas most cities have zero or only one patriotic education site, a small group of cities have more. The histogram of patriotic education sites appears as Figure 2 in Appendix E.

Since patriotic education sites were constructed in four waves, we also present the temporally disaggregated spatial distribution of these sites in Appendix F. Figure 3 shows that if we only look at the number of newly built patriotic education sites from 1997 to 2009, it seems that the regime devoted fewer resources to constructing patriotic education sites over time.62

62We suggest two tentative explanations for this change. First, the party-state may view patriotic education sites as expedient tools to weather political crises and to strengthen mass support. It is possible that leaders have felt more politically secure over time, and it is no longer imperative to spend more money on building new sites. Note that the state had not stopped investing in new sites until 2009, which was the nadir of the global financial crisis. Ample evidence shows that Chinese leaders became more confident of their continued power, not least because of China’s rapid economic growth at that time (for the relevant background, see the once-fashionable debate on the “China Model”). Second, this may because of a diminishing marginal return of these investments. Given that the state has been able to cultivate strong nationalist sentiments among the targeted population, adding more sites might not bring extra benefits in terms of fostering nationalist sentiments. In addition, in recent years, especially after 2012, the state also has more tools to foster nationalism, especially social media sites such as Weibo. This also decreases the marginal benefit of continued investment in these sites. See Shaun Breslin, “The ‘China Model’ and the Global Crisis: From Friedrich List to a Chinese Mode of Governance?” International Affairs 87, no. 6 (November 2011): 1323–43.
Key Independent Variable: Protest Days in 1989

James Tong provides the geographic distribution of the 1989 prodemocracy protests. To the best of our knowledge, this is the most informative source representing this distribution. He drew primarily on data released by the Education Commission, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, the Daily Report/China (FBIS, DR/China), and “Xue Yu Huo De Zhenxiang [The Truth of Fire and Blood].”

Tong focuses on four measures of mobilization in the 1989 prodemocracy movement: presence (a binary variable); magnitude (the number of days on which a protest was recorded); sequence (the city’s entry date in the movement); and intensity (the number of participants). Presence, as a binary variable, would not be as informative as other continuous variables.

---

64Ibid.
65See Ibid., 311–12.
Sequence may not bear on the likelihood of an uprising in the future. Intensity is very vulnerable to measurement errors (Clark McPhail and John McCarthy show that it is very hard to accurately estimate the size of protest rallies, even in democracies, a fact the CCP likely recognizes). Thus, this paper uses magnitude. In addition, intensity and magnitude are strongly correlated: at 0.84, the correlation coefficient indicates a high reliability.

Figure 4 presents the spatial distribution of the 1989 prodemocracy movement in terms of protest days at the city level. It clearly shows that there were considerable geographic variations regarding the scale of antiregime mobilization. Consistent with Tong’s summary, the map shows that provinces with high concentrations of ethnic minorities experienced significantly fewer days of demonstrations than provinces where Han Chinese dominate. The histogram of city-level protest days in 1989 appears in Figure 3 of Appendix E.

**Socioeconomic Control Variables**

To examine the independent influence of the 1989 mass uprising, we control for a host of socioeconomic variables that may also account for the spatial distribution of patriotic education sites. First, it is possible that the CCP favors larger cities for patriotic education sites, which would enable a greater number of people to visit. Indeed, the regime is motivated to target the largest audience possible. Larger cities were also more likely to experience protests in 1989. Therefore, we control for the population of cities as a potential confounding variable.

---

67 One could argue that protest sequence is probably even more important than the number of protest days. In Table 8 of Appendix J, as a part of robustness checks, we use two different measures to examine the impact of protest sequence. Our original argument—the state devotes more resources on nationalist propaganda to target localities with greater antiregime potential—remains intact.


69 Although we do not have access to classified sources, it is safe to assume that Beijing had good information about the scale of various protests at the local level. First, once the state had successfully suppressed the movement, the state cross-examined college students and asked them to report their activities throughout the movement. This provided information regarding the involved student protestors. Second, Beijing also initiated a rectification campaign to purge sympathizers of demonstrators within the Party apparatus. According to James A. R. Miles, the political loyalty of more than one million government officials had been investigated. Put differently, the party-state systematically gathered information regarding the distribution of dissent, even among rank and file members of the CCP. Third, China’s state agencies had compiled day-by-day chronologies to document the movement, based on which we coded our main explanatory variable. All this evidence suggests that the party-state did invest resources in information collection retrospectively. Because our access to classified documents is restricted, we use the length of 1989 protests as a proxy in our empirical analysis. See Joseph W. Esherick, “Xi’an Spring,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 24 (July 1990): 209–35; Josephine Fox, “The Movement for Democracy and Its Consequences in Tianjin,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 23 (January 1990): 133–44; James A. R. Miles, *The Legacy of Tiananmen: China in Disarray* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 30; Tong, “The 1989 Democracy Movement in China.”

70 The period was from 15 April 1989, the day that the official media announced the death of Hu Yaobang, to 9 June 1989, the day that Deng Xiaoping reviewed the troops and thus signified the end of the operations in Beijing.” See Tong, “The 1989 Democracy Movement in China,” 313.

Second, the degree of urbanization may play an important role in determining the location of a patriotic education site. Urban concentration threatens the survival of autocratic regimes. According to Wallace, “Cities bring tighter masses of people, improve communication links among them, and increase the ability of private grievances to accumulate and circulate.”

To mitigate the threat urbanization poses to them, autocratic leaders target propaganda to urbanized areas. Therefore, to determine the effect of the 1989 protests specifically, we control for the level of urbanization. We measure this variable by using the percentage of nonagricultural population as a share of the whole population as a proxy.

Third, we control for the impact of globalization. Globalization poses two potential threats to the authoritarian regime. First, when the authoritarian state liberalizes its domestic economy to accommodate foreign countries, globalization can facilitate the diffusion of democratic ideas. Second, it can weaken the state’s control over economic and social activities. We use city-level foreign direct investment (FDI) per capita as a measure of the extent to which globalization affects a city.

---


73Ibid., 632.
The fourth control variable is income (GDP). After the start of economic reform in the early 1980s, China experienced astonishing economic growth while simultaneously witnessing a striking upsurge of income inequality.\textsuperscript{74} Many studies contend that the growing appeal of wealth redistribution prompted the authoritarian regime to democratize (see, for example, work by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson).\textsuperscript{75} In the same vein, the Chinese government may have promoted mass nationalism to increase its legitimacy among the poor.\textsuperscript{76}

Finally, political elites may focus on the mobilization capacity of college students. Scholars of China’s contentious politics emphasize the importance of college students in the mobilization of large-scale antiregime protests.\textsuperscript{77} College students are especially likely to take collective actions in authoritarian regimes given two structural conditions: embedded campus social networks and the spatial concentration of college students. Because of these two factors, political elites in dictatorships may pay more attention to cities with higher concentrations of college students. Therefore, we control for the proportion of college students in each city.

City population, degree of urbanization, FDI, GDP, and college student population are taken from China Data Online.\textsuperscript{78} To standardize these variables, we use the ratio of college students and per capita values of FDI and GDP. In addition, both FDI per capita and GDP per capita are further deflated based on the 1978 price index.

**Historical Legacy Controls**

The most challenging issue for our research design is how to calculate the historical legacy of each city. The education sites were tied to the historical
legacy of the cities in which they were assigned. Thus, if we fail to control for this sort of historical legacy, the result may be misleading because of the omitted variable bias. We control for five types of historical legacy based on different stages of modern Chinese history: (1) the State Council’s 1982, 1986, and 1994 lists of “National Famous Historical and Cultural Cities”; (2) the location of concessions to foreign governments, 租界 (Zujie Concession), which is a proxy for the impact of modern colonialism; (3) birthplaces of the CCP’s early leaders; (4) all cities controlled by the CCP as revolutionary bases during the 1927–37 civil war; and (5) cities occupied by Japan during the 1931–45 Sino-Japanese War.

Here, we use “National Famous Historical and Cultural Cities” as a measure of premodern cultural relics. These relics serve as the representation of great achievements of Chinese civilization. We took the list of “National Famous Historical and Cultural Cities” from the Chinese Cultural Heritage Protection website. For this variable, we include all three waves the State Council released in 1982, 1986, and 1994, respectively. In addition to using those exemplary cultural relics, the nationalism campaign used traumatic memories of national humiliations. Collective memories reminded visitors to blame Western powers for past sufferings in order to deflect the public’s hostilities away from the ruling elites. Following Ruixue Jia, we collect the spatial distribution of concessions from the appendix of Chengkang Fei.

The nationalism campaign also highlights the pivotal role the CCP has played in modern Chinese history. According to this official narrative, the CCP acted as a great savior of the Chinese nation, enabling the Chinese people to successfully establish an independent sovereign state. To control for this local revolutionary legacy, we use two different measures. The first focuses on the CCP’s early leaders. We resort to the birthplaces of Central Committee members (henceforth CC members) from the 1st Party Congress to the 7th Party Congress (1921–45). As the top power organ of the CCP, the Central Committee includes all paramount leaders of the CCP. Since patriotic education sites tend to highlight those “founding fathers” of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), here we coded the number of CC members born in a specific city. We only include CC members before the 8th

---

79 These concessions were mainly “treaty ports.” According to Ruixue Jia, “The treaty port system dates back to the late Qing dynasty of China, which is usually described as dark and shameful in Chinese history. One important feature of this period is that the Qing government signed many ‘unequal treaties’ with Western countries. Along with these treaties, China conceded more than 40 cities called ‘treaty ports’ to Western countries from the 1840s to the 1910s. The Westerners established municipal authorities, factories, schools, police and judiciaries in these ports.” See Ruixue Jia, “The Legacies of Forced Freedom: China’s Treaty Ports,” Review of Economics and Statistics 96, no. 4 (October 2014): 596.

80 http://www.wenbao.net/html/whyichan/lsmc/lsmc.html

Party Congress (1956), which was the first Party Congress held after the establishment of the PRC. We turn to biographies of CC members from the 1st to 7th Party Congress collected by the Central Organization Department and Party History Research Centre of CCP. The list of these CC members is taken from the database compiled by Fengming Lu and Xiao Ma.

The second measure of local revolutionary legacy is the location of those revolutionary bases during the 1927–37 civil war. A book by the China Old Liberated Area Construction Association provides this measure. The lengthy work offers detailed descriptions of every Communist revolutionary base from 1927 to 1937, including the name of each county that the CCP controlled for any part of this period. We use this as a reference to match every revolutionary base with current Chinese city-level administrations.

Finally, we include a variable to measure the effect of the 1931–45 Sino-Japanese War. We focus on this war for three reasons. First, among all patriotic education sites, the largest subtype is designated to present on this war. Second, most Chinese people consider this particular war to be among the most influential events in 20th century, dramatically altering the trajectory of modern Chinese history. Finally, Japan occupied 217 cities during this period (61 percent of all Chinese cities). No other national humiliation involved such a broad spatial coverage of Chinese cities.

Model Specifications and Results

The Effect of 1989 Protest Days

To examine the effect of 1989 prodemocracy movement on the selection of targeted cities we use Tobit models, since the cumulative count of patriotic

---

82 Central Organization Department and Party History Research Centre of CCP, Zhongguo gongchandang lijie zhongyang weiyuan da cidian, 1921–2003 [The Dictionary of Past and Present CCP Central Committee Members] (Beijing: Party History Publisher, 2004).
86 In our dataset, seventy-nine cities do not register under any of these historical legacy controls. Among these cities, five experienced protests in 1989 and were subsequently assigned patriotic education sites. They are (in the order of lengths of protests) Lanzhou (22 days); Guiyang (13 days); Xining (6 days); Urumqi (5 days); Liupanshui (2 days); Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture (1 day); and Mianyang (1 day). In these localities, the party-state tried to strengthen the nationalistic propaganda by assigning education sites to facilities that have remote connections to CCP’s revolutionary past. In Lanzhou, for example, the former communication office of Eighth Route Army was designated as a patriotic education site. Japan did not occupy Lanzhou, and the city was not a battlefield of the second Sino-Japanese War.
education sites in each city is a nonnegative dependent variable. We used a cross-section dataset consisting of the entire set of 338 city-level administrative units.\(^8^7\) We also employ the cumulative average values of city population, degree of urbanization, FDI per capita, GDP per capita, and the percentage of the whole population who were college students from 1995 to 2009. We use the log values of these five independent variables in the regressions.

Table 1 shows that the number of city-level days of protest in 1989 is positively associated with the number of patriotic education sites. This is in line with our theoretical expectation, and this effect is consistently significant across different model specifications. Furthermore, whether a city is designated as a one of the “National Famous Historical and Cultural Cities” is a positive predictor of the construction of patriotic education sites.

\(^8^7\)Our units of analysis are prefectures (cities). These are territorial administrations directly below the provinces. Following Greg Distelhorst and Yue Hou, we also include four provincial-level cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing, as they are comparable to other populous urbanized prefectures, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen. See Greg Distelhorst and Yue Hou, “Constituency Service under Nondemocratic Rule: Evidence from China,” Journal of Politics 79, no. 3 (July 2017): 1024–40.
in that city. The number of CC members born in a place is also positively associated with the presence of patriotic education sites. Interestingly, none of those structural conditions is statistically significant. It appears that the CCP paid more attention to those cities with more days of protest in 1989 and more salient historical status.

Drawing from Table 1, the analyses present compelling evidence for our theoretical framework: when CCP leaders play the nationalist card, they recall the extent of antiregime mobilization in each city; to the extent that a city showed itself to be a severe threat in 1989, the regime was more likely to target that city during the nationalism campaign.

To illustrate substantive effects, we simulate the predicted number of patriotic education sites based on the model in the column 3 of Table 1. To take into account the uncertainty associated with predicted values, we use long-dashed lines to indicate 95% confidence intervals of the predicted number. We plot the substantive effects in Figure 5. All else equal, Figure 5
shows that when the duration of protest increases, the number of patriotic education sites increases substantively.

**Addressing Competing Explanations**

Four alternative interpretations could explain the uneven distribution of patriotic education sites across cities. The first is the size of the population of undergraduate students on the eve of Tiananmen. Instead of focusing on the magnitude of protest, the CCP may simply use the number of city-level college students in 1988 as a heuristic measure of internal threats. Given this variable is closely related with the duration of protest, it may underlie our proposed mechanism. Moreover, there was an unprecedented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Number of patriotic education sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest days in 1989</td>
<td>0.175**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City population</td>
<td>0.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.382)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>0.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.754)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI per capita</td>
<td>-0.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.271)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.658)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of college students</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical city</td>
<td>0.923**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.398)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary base</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.448)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese occupation</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.494)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of concessions</td>
<td>0.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.272)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of CC members born in the city</td>
<td>0.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.190)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of college students in 1988</td>
<td>0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate in 1997</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative rank</td>
<td>1.357*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.764)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.811)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald Test</td>
<td>159.106***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.638</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01
expansion of higher education in China after 1998. Therefore, our measure of college student population between 1995 and 2009 may not align with the size of college students in the late 1980s. However, column 1 of Table 2 shows that adding the percentage of college students in 1988 does not affect our results.

Second, China witnessed explosive growth in social unrest after 1989. The late 1990s were particularly tumultuous due to unprecedented labor market reform that resulted in millions of laid-off workers. These disaffected workers engaged in a number of collective actions directed at local governments. Instead of focusing on the trauma of 1989, the Chinese government might have invested in nationalist propaganda mainly in response to an urgent need to appease these disgruntled workers. It is possible that those cities that had more salient protests in 1989 also exhibited more labor unrest in the late 1990s. To address this alternative explanation, we add a control of the city-level unemployment rate in 1997. This variable is taken from China City Statistical Yearbook. Column 2 of Table 2 shows that results are robust with respect to this model specification. We acknowledge that the quality of Chinese official statistics on unemployment is notoriously problematic, but we prefer this approach to any alternative for two reasons: (1) other proxies of city-level social unrest during this period are not publicly available; and (2) this variable exhibits spatial variations that are still informative (for example, the highest official unemployment rates characterized cities in Northeast China).

Third, contrary to our top-down story, the leverage of local governments may account for the geographic distribution of patriotic education sites. Local officials might have incentives to lobby the central government to assign more patriotic education sites because of associated financial investments and the potential benefits of developing local tourism. As a result, those local governments with stronger lobbying capacities are more likely to have been assigned more sites. According to this argument, those cities that had longer protests in 1989 also tend to be major cities that enjoy stronger lobbying capacities. This would render our findings spurious.

---

89Chen, Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China.
94For recent research about lobbying behaviors by local governments in China, see Xiao Ma, “Guardians and Gridlocks: Bureaucracy, Bargaining, and Authoritarian Policymaking” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2017).
because we overlook this confounding variable. However, this argument
does not hold up well for three reasons. First, we use a city’s place in the
administrative ranking of Chinese cities as a proxy for the city’s lobbying
leverage. Generally, the system of Chinese city-level territory is ranked as a
three-level hierarchy: four municipalities directly under the central govern-
ment (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing) at the top, twenty-seven
other provincial capitals in the middle, and the remaining municipalities at
the bottom. This ranking conveys a hierarchy of power relations. Leaders
who are in charge of municipalities directly under the central government/provincial capitals are more powerful than their counterparts in other pro-
vincial capitals/remaining municipalities. We code an ordinal variable that
refers to this administrative rank. Column 3 of Table 2 shows that the posi-
tive effect of protest days in 1989 remains intact after including this control
variable. Second, the alternative bottom-up view—that local governments’
lobbying largely determined the placement of education sites—assumes that
cities that at one time experienced more salient protests in 1989 also had
more policy autonomy during the 1990s. This view thus assumes that those
cities were more likely to have exerted considerable influence on the central
government. However, the political climate after 1989 pushed local officials
in those unstable localities to be more compliant with the central govern-
ment. The regime systematically punished those officials who were not
actively following the party line in 1989 and promoted those officials who
were more loyal to the CCP. Our top-down argument is more consistent
with this historical fact. In Appendix I, we document this organizational
reshuffle of the CCP after 1989. Third, it is plausible that the local govern-
ments could demand extra payments from Beijing for the designated build-
ing project during the implementation process, but it would have been
harder for them to affect how many sites the central government would
assign ex ante. As local agents of the center, city officials may maneuver
construction funds in policy implementation. However, they have little
leverage over the powerful central government’s process of deciding which

---

95This revenue-seeking explanation crucially assumes that prefectural cities obtain leverage over the central
subsidies. However, given China’s decentralized fiscal system after the 1980s, in terms of intergovernmental
fiscal transfers, provincial governments serve as intermediaries between the center and the prefectural cities.
Therefore, provincial governments enjoy the discretion of allocating central subsidies among subordinated
cities. Provinces that are more fiscally dependent on the central government might have stronger incentives
to leverage the construction of patriotic education sites. In the robustness checks below, we have added
province dummy variables in the regression model and the results are the same (see Table 5 in Appendix J).
With regard to subprovincial variations, we have also controlled for the size of city and the administrative
ranking of city, which should be good proxies of city-level lobbying capacity. The results remain intact (these
provinces fixed effects results are available upon request). See Christine P. W. Wong, Financing Local
Government in the People’s Republic of China (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Andrew Wedeman,

site to designate. In fact, the 1989 prodemocracy movement led the central government to tighten its control over subprovincial officials, which makes this bottom-up story even less likely. Our use of the number of sites (not the amount of payments) as the dependent variable in the regressions likewise lowers risk of error here.

Finally, it is possible that a confounding variable, local coercive capacity in 1989, primarily drives our finding. Cities with weaker repressive power had more days of protest. One could argue that increased central subsidy (both for education sites as well as other security improvements) might have more to do with strengthening the administrative capacity of local governments than targeting dissents per se. Consequently, our estimators may be biased if we do not take this factor into consideration. However, there is ample evidence to show that local coercive capacity did not primarily shape the length of local protests. First, elite divisions within the central government largely facilitated mass mobilization of the 1989 prodemocracy movement: local governments were essentially bewildered due to contradictory signals political elites in Beijing sent at that time. The CCP leadership split over how to deal with the political crisis: Zhao Ziyang, the general secretary of the Party, insisted on making concessions to the students, whereas hard-liners such as Li Peng and Yao Yilin advocated for a military crackdown. The Politburo Standing Committee, the top organ of the CCP, did not reach consensus on whether to declare the martial law and call in the military to repress the protests until 17 May. Because of this elite division, the party-state lost control over major official media between 5 and 19 May. Journalists took advantage of this opportunity and filed positive reports about the movement. Even before 19 May, the People’s Daily published overwhelmingly positive coverage of the movement. Consequently, local elites tended to view these positive official reports as a signal that the central government did not favor violently stifling protests. In fact, even until the Tiananmen crackdown on 4 June, with the exception of Changsha, Chengdu, and Xi’an, few cities had experienced state-led repression. Throughout the movement, most local officials were reluctant to use force and only launched intensive crackdowns after assuring that hard-liners had asserted their control. Second, before the eventual enforcement of martial law,

98 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.
99 Shirk, China: Fragile Superpower.
the use of force by local governments in Changsha, Chengdu, and Xi’an failed to deter antiregime mobilizations. After the suppressed riots, students in these three cities were able to reorganize large-scale protests.\footnote{Esherick, “Xi’an Spring,” 209–35; Andrea Worden, “Despair and Hope: A Changsha Chronicle,” in Unger, The Pro-Democracy Protests in China; Louisa Lim, The People’s Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).} Although the declaration of martial law on 20 May temporarily discouraged protesters, the movement revived when Beijing residents successfully resisted the enforcement of martial law.\footnote{Tong, “The 1989 Democracy Movement in China,” 316.} In fact, according to Tong, there were over 3.7 million participants in the 22 May demonstration, which was the third largest in the movement.\footnote{Tong, “The 1989 Democracy Movement in China.”} Third, a close reading of the demobilization process after 4 June shows that many local protests ended before local officials escalated the repression. Instead, many local governments

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{The effect of 1989 protest days (controlling for local coercive capacity).}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
\textbf{Dependent Variable} & \textbf{Number of patriotic education sites} \\
\hline
Protest days in 1989  & 0.185*** & 0.190*** \\
          & (0.030) & (0.031) \\
Criminal cases per capita in 1988  & 1.008 & 0.783 \\
          & (0.369) & (0.281) \\
Awarded court for repression  & $-1.013^*$ & $0.587$ \\
          & (0.256) & (0.273) \\
City population  & $-0.159$ & 0.377 \\
          & (0.717) & (0.744) \\
Urbanization  & 0.287 & 0.480 \\
          & (0.618) & (0.659) \\
FDI per capita  & $-0.218$ & $-0.315$ \\
          & (0.783) & (0.744) \\
GDP per capita  & 0.590 & 0.578 \\
          & (0.618) & (0.659) \\
Percentage of college students  & 0.213 & 0.227 \\
          & (0.283) & (0.297) \\
Historical city  & 0.739** & 0.796** \\
          & (0.370) & (0.388) \\
Revolutionary base  & 0.044 & $-0.144$ \\
          & (0.420) & (0.440) \\
Japanese occupation  & 0.185 & $-0.118$ \\
          & (0.475) & (0.482) \\
Number of concessions  & 0.060 & 0.096 \\
          & (0.257) & (0.271) \\
Number of CC members born in the city  & 0.283* & 0.421*** \\
          & (0.156) & (0.162) \\
Constant  & $-0.161$ & $-1.632$ \\
          & (4.486) & (4.610) \\
Observations  & 135 & 136 \\
Wald Test  & 167.473*** & 164.356*** \\
Pseudo $R^2$  & 0.640 & 0.630 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\footnotesize{$^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$}
\end{table}
initiated their suppressions after most college student organizations chose to disband.\textsuperscript{106}

To control for the coercive capacity of local officials, we include two indicators of local repressive power: (1) the number of prosecuted criminal cases at the provincial level in 1988, which is further standardized by population size at that time; and (2) a dummy variable that denotes whether at least one local court had been recognized by the authorities in 1989 for arresting protestors in the city. The numbers of prosecuted criminal cases in 1988 are taken from the 1989 People’s Court Yearbook (Renmin fayuan nianjian). The list of awarded courts is drawn from the 1990 Law Yearbook of China (Zhongguo falu nianjian).\textsuperscript{107} We prefer these two measures because other more fine-grained information, such as city-level numbers of police, is not publicly available. To assure the robustness of our findings, we also use more than one proxy of local coercive capacity. Table 3 shows the positive effect of protest days remains highly significant even when controlling for different measures of local coercive capacity.

**Robustness Checks**

There are several issues of robustness to be addressed. First, to assess whether outliers largely drive the results, we reestimate the model after dropping two major cities that had the highest number of protest days in 1989: Beijing and Shanghai. Column 1 of Table 5 in Appendix J presents these results. It turns out that our basic findings persisted even under this model specification.

Second, to ensure that our findings were not vulnerable to province-level heterogeneity, we also estimate a model with province-fixed effects. Province-level heterogeneity refers to interprovince differences, such as whether the province is an autonomous region, geographic characteristics, and other historical remains that our covariates do not capture. These confounding factors may affect the selection of targeted localities. The significant positive impact of protest days in 1989 on patriotic education site construction remains intact in this fixed-effects model. Column 2 of Table 5 in Appendix J presents the results.

Third, the results may be contingent upon the number of missing observations in this case. We could not take advantage of the full information of every prefecture-level city, since a host of independent variables


\textsuperscript{107}People’s Court Yearbook 1989 (Renmin fayuan nianjian) (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 1989); *Law Yearbook of China* 1990 (Zhongguo falu nianjian) (Beijing: Falu Chubanshe, 1991).
are missing.\textsuperscript{108} To address this problem, we use the multiple imputations approach developed by James Honaker et al.\textsuperscript{109} Column 3 of Table 5 in Appendix J shows that our key finding is robust with respect to taking a multiple imputations approach.

Fourth, previous findings are based on cumulative information over the period from 1997 to 2009. For a series of robustness checks, we disaggregated our empirical models by the specific wave: 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2009. This empirical strategy allowed us to be more confident about our basic findings. Table 6 in Appendix J shows findings on the basis of disaggregated waves. Except for 2005, the number of protest days is consistently positively associated with the number of patriotic education sites in a given locality. We suspect that the insignificance of protest days in the wave of 2005 is due to the much smaller number of sites constructed in that year (see Figure 3). The results suggest that the effect of protest days is not an artifact of the aggregated dependent variable.

Finally, it is possible that a number of entirely new cities have emerged since 1989 and a number of once-small cities have become much larger. As a result, using a cumulative average value of post-1995 city population may obscure those historically significant cities that used to be relatively larger in 1989. To address this issue, we include the city population in 1988 in our regressions as a part of robustness checks. This 1988 city size variable is taken from China Data Online. Our main findings remain unchanged after controlling for this variable. Table 7 in Appendix J presents these results.

**Concluding Remarks**

Recent scholarship has recognized a close relationship between nationalism and interstate conflict.\textsuperscript{110} A large body of studies also suggests that autocratic leaders often advance their own interests by exploiting nationalist propaganda.\textsuperscript{111} Yet two factors have hampered our understanding of how autocrats deploy nationalist propaganda. First, the implication of material costs for initiating nationalist propaganda has not been fully explored. Second, the existing literature has not elucidated the factors that determine the tactics underlying information manipulations.

\textsuperscript{108}For the pattern of missing data, see Appendix K.
\textsuperscript{111}David Welch, Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001); Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation.
This paper provides one of the first systematic empirical studies addressing the strategic use of nationalist propaganda in autocracies. Specifically, we looked at how the CCP regime designed and implemented a nationalist campaign as a response to prodemocracy mass mobilizations. We found that the scale of the antiregime democratic movement in each locale predicted the subsequent designation of patriotic education sites in these places. This relationship is robust after accounting for a number of alternative explanations. The results lend strong support to the argument that cost-conscious autocratic rulers tend to strategically manipulate nationalism in the face of political crises.

This paper has two implications for IR studies of nationalism and Chinese politics. First, the impact of nationalism is conditional upon the strategic action taken by the state, especially in autocratic countries. By showing how the Chinese government cultivated mass nationalism to consolidate the CCP’s power, the present study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of how states handle nationalist sentiment.  

Second, as the first quantitative study of the legacy of 1989 prodemocracy movement in China, this paper highlights the vital role this wide-ranging event played in the long-term evolution of the CCP regime. We hope our study will inspire future quantitative studies aimed at unpacking the tremendous impacts of the 1989 protest.

While nationalist propaganda could cause backlash in the sense of causing nationalist protests that turn against the Chinese government, we think this backlash effect is quite limited in reality. First, patriotic education and nationalist protest do not have a linear relationship. The former does not necessarily induce street demonstrations. Successful nationalist mobilization also largely depends on whether or not the party-state would stifle protests, especially in the initial stage of the mobilization. As Perry notes, expectations of the state’s reactions deeply shape protesters’ behavior. If the state would not welcome the protest, it may be quite challenging for activists to organize large-scale protests, even if they are imbued with nationalist sentiments. It has been well documented that protest and repression are substantially interdependent, given strategic interactions between the state and the opposition group. Put differently, there could be a disjunction between the government’s nationalist propaganda and the state’s permission of anti-foreign street rallies. In fact, Weiss shows that the Chinese

government suppressed anti-Japan protests throughout the 1990s while simultaneously launching an intensive patriotic education campaign.\textsuperscript{115}

Second, building on insights of Weiss and Peter Lorentzen, it seems that the party-state has been able to manage nationalist protests, at least thus far.\textsuperscript{116} Even if nationalist propaganda might directly contribute to street demonstrations, protesters will not necessarily direct their grievances again the state. Although nationalist protest is always inherently dangerous and may spiral out of control from the CCP’s perspective, two structural conditions facilitate the state’s management of these protests. First and foremost, the party-state has greatly improved its coercive capacity during the last decades.\textsuperscript{117} Consequently, as strategic actors, protesters rarely confront the central government directly.\textsuperscript{118} Indeed, China’s contentious politics are characterized by narrow mobilizations—there is a lack of organization-based mobilizations making broader coalitions across various social groups and localities. Nationalist protests are not exceptions. Taking college students as the case in point, university students play an important role in China’s nationalist protests. Min Zhou and Hanming Wang, in one of the few empirical studies using micro-level data, show that student organization membership had no impact on individuals’ participation in the 2012 anti-Japan demonstration.\textsuperscript{119} Rather, interpersonal ties largely drove the mobilization, which made nationalist protests more disorganized, spontaneous, and parochial. This finding corroborates the observation of Yue-him Tam on the 2005 anti-Japanese protest—it was largely disorganized.\textsuperscript{120} Another grounded study shows that committed nationalist activists did not deliberately orchestrate the 2012 anti-Japanese protest.\textsuperscript{121} Instead, various social actors participated because of heterogeneous interests, and they did not seek to build a well-organized alliance. A less-coordinated nationalist mobilization is far less threatening to the regime. Second, only when local nationalist protests could lead to a nationwide antiregime mobilization were these protests viewed as subversive. However, the likelihood of one protest igniting another is largely a function of the information environment in which they embed. It is well known that the Chinese

\textsuperscript{115}Weiss, Powerful Patriots, 104–26.


\textsuperscript{118}Kevin K. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).


\textsuperscript{121}Ketian Zhang, “‘Patriots’ with Different Characteristics: Deconstructing the Chinese Anti-Japan Protests in 2012” (working paper, MIT Center for International Studies, Cambridge, MA, 2015).
government has developed sophisticated means to tightly control the Internet and other mass media, which makes it more difficult to witness the “information cascades” that occurred in 1989. For example, Christopher Cairns and Allen Carlson find that during the 2012 anti-Japanese protest, the government deliberately censored posts on China’s leading microblog to manipulate the flow of information. Because of these two structural factors, it is not surprising to see that the Chinese government has been able to orchestrate, acquiesce, and repress an array of anti-foreign protests to a remarkable extent over three decades.

There are two questions future research might address. First of all, this paper pays more attention to the strategic actions of the elites than to the actual consequences of such actions. Future studies of the Chinese state’s manipulation of nationalism might use behavioral-level data to determine whether such manipulations have actually caused shifts in people’s attitudes. Second, it is necessary to differentiate underlying causal mechanisms associated with a strategic deployment of nationalist propaganda. Considerable content heterogeneity characterizes the patriotic education sites. The CCP used three grand themes to characterize their historical narrative: the glorious Chinese civilization and its achievements, the century of national shames at the hand of Western powers, and the central role of the CCP in reestablishing China’s glory. Future research might address which of these genres is most efficient at bolstering the legitimacy of the CCP. Despite the substantive progress in exploring Chinese nationalism in the last two decades, answers to this key question remain obscure. We hope our study proves a useful springboard for further research into understanding the CCP’s manipulation of nationalist propaganda.

126Licheng Qian et al. found that visiting the patriotic education bases was more effective in forging nationalist sentiments among high school students than in-class textbook education. However, the survey’s sample was high school students; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to the general population, and it is not clear whether the effect is causal. See Licheng Qian, Bin Xu, and Dingding Chen, “Does History Education Promote Nationalism In China? A ‘Limited Effect’ Explanation,” Journal of Contemporary China 26, no. 104 (2017): 199–212.
127Using a nationwide survey, Jackson S. Woods and Bruce J. Dickson explore the determinants of two variants of nationalist sentiments in China: national pride in China’s accomplishments and the victimization narrative. However, they did not examine the distinct effect of these two genres on the perception of the CCP’s legitimacy. See “Victims and Patriots: Disaggregating Nationalism in Urban China,” Journal of Contemporary China 26, no. 104 (2017): 167–82.
Acknowledgements

Authors are listed in alphabetical order, and both authors contributed equally to the writing of the article. The authors thank James Tong, who generously shared his data on protests in 1989. We thank Xun Cao, Ted Chen, Charles Crabtree, Karrie Kossel, Eddy Malesky, Minhyung Joo, Glenn Palmer, Kevin Reuning, Wonjun Song, Jeremy Wallace, Susan Whiting, Boliang Zhu, two anonymous reviewers, the editors of Security Studies, and participants at the 2016 ISA conference, 2016 APSA annual meeting, and Pennsylvania State University’s American Foreign Policy Seminar for helpful comments and suggestions. All errors are the authors’ own. An online appendix for the article can be found at http://chuyuliu.weebly.com/publications.html.