Following the Wisdom of Elders: Instability in China

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Introduction

China’s rise as an acknowledged global economic power is accompanied by concerns over the sustainability of its political organization and social structure. Increasing focus is placed on stability in China, isolating factors ranging from the expectation gap in China’s emerging middle class (Brockmann, Delhay, Yuan & Welzel 2008), to income inequality (Reilly 2005), to political and social dislocation (Yang 2007), to regime change including democratization (Pei 1995) as critical determinants of future stability. Scholars also observe that political violence within China is a local phenomenon, more appropriately addressed at the subnational level (Kolaweski 1981; Wallace 2010). The sub national level of analysis is appropriate due to the relative levels of autonomy in provinces and the relevance of local political entities as salient political units in the distribution of goods despite the authoritarian and centralized nature of the Chinese government (Hoggard 1962; Kolaweski 1981; Yep and Fong 2009; Wallace 2010). Certainly this approach complements more aggregate studies of internal violence in China, providing insights into variance in provinces with otherwise similar profiles.

The Chinese case presents a puzzle: qualitative and empirical observations indicate that increasingly severe violence is concentrated in rural areas, primarily between subsistence level farmers or peasant populations and local authorities. Existing theoretical work, including economic theories of civil conflict (Collier & Hoeffler 2001), gaps in political authority (Fearon & Laitin 2002), relative deprivation theory (Gurr 1970), urban social mobilization and revolution (Downs 1989) fail to adequately explain this process. In part, it is likely that these theoretical approaches lack explanatory power due to the localized nature of conflict in China. The appropriation of livelihood and a lack of measures for political redress or economic compensation occur between local political authorities and individuals.

We posit that the concept of social exclusion (Li 2005; Legrande & Pichaud 2002), where particular populations lack access to social opportunities, resources or entitlements in a given society better explains violence in China. Social exclusion is difficult to operationalize, and historically suffers from a lack of comparability across populations. We argue that *Relative Political Reach* provides a non-normative and comparable measure of social exclusion: in regions where government involvement in the daily lives of the population is low, the social structure provided by the government and institutions is unable to furnish or yield expected benefits and services to the population. In the context of China, this is particularly important. Social and cultural mobilization historically serves as a key facet of social organization in China.
Our analysis includes controls for associated explanatory factors of internal conflict including political extraction, urban population, income per capita, and prior levels of conflict in a region. We find a significant negative relationship between political reach and the severity of violence in a province. The results suggest that China would be well served by following policy objectives of its historic leaders: do not neglect the rural and peasant populations. Despite claims to the contrary, including a 1994 tax reform, trends in Chinese policy have been to reward and increase rewards to provinces where economic success is evident (World Bank 1998; Yep and Fong 2009). In anticipating and minimizing violence, China’s policy makers should listen to the wisdom of their elders and increase the relevance of the government in the places where it is least present.

Foundations

Numerous studies of political violence and instability have identified aspects of political or economic exclusion as contributing factors to the choice to engage in conflict. Gurr’s (1970) work on relative deprivation argues that the gap between rising expectations and realized gains explains the choice of individuals to engage in conflict; however, this theory more accurately describes inclusion failures other than the process of exclusion. Ethnic, religious, and identity-based conflicts are often attributed to institutional or political exclusion based on politicized identity and/or geographic underrepresentation (Toft 2003). Similarly, studies focusing on the relationship between political repression and democracy and conflict cite a lack of access to political voice and goods provided by the state as integral to the choice to rebel (Moore 2000; Saxton 2005). Each of these arguments is comprised of, at least in part, the notion that aspects of exclusion from social networks, political access, or economic resources contribute to political violence and instability. Despite our intent to explain political violence on a smaller scale than many of the studies listed above, the common element of exclusion is where our focus is centered. We find that theories of social exclusion provide a sound explanation for the motivation for violence across populations.

A relatively new theory, social exclusion has its roots in studies examining increasing inequality in the United States and Western Europe in the 1970s (Sen 2000; Silver 1994, 2007). Generally, the concept of social exclusion refers to a gap in the extension of social, political, or economic rights to a population (Silver 1994), the lack of or dissolution of social or cultural bonds (Loury 1999; Sen 2000), or a lack of access to economic resources (Rodgers, Gore & Figueiredo 1995). Traditionally focusing on either the social dislocation caused by disruptions in social networks, specific discrimination as the result of policy or institutional practice, or established hierarchies that concentrate economic deprivation within particular populations - social exclusion is often criticized for its conceptual slipperiness (Rodgers, Gore & Figueiredo 1995). More recent work suggests that social exclusion is often a multidimensional and dynamic process composed of various aspects of each of the above characteristics (Silver 2007). For example, a lack of access to political rights can result in a failure to realize resources or affect policy; a lack of access to economic resources can result in political irrelevance or social exclusion as a product of lack of
funds for schooling, healthcare, or other social services. These relationships emphasize only a few ways in which social, political, and economic exclusion can have ripple effects.

Social exclusion can be distinguished from repression in several ways. First, studies of repression tend not to be comparative across populations, and instead focus on the ability of individuals to influence or make appeals to the government. Repressed populations experience the government as extremely relevant in the regulation of behavior and suppression of desired activities. Socially excluded populations experience a lack of involvement by the government in their daily lives. Social exclusion is typically an externality, resulting as a consequence of other policy decisions. Conversely, repression is typically overt or intentioned exclusion and can exist as a consequence of ongoing rivalry between competing groups. In other words, social exclusion precludes building social capital and networks that build cultural cohesion and civic engagement. Social exclusion can result in apathy and disengagement or when livelihoods are more directly threatened, small scale violence.

Attempts to operationalize the concept of social exclusion are often based on normative assessments that rely on the composition of a particular society’s political culture or on the particular type of exclusion (political rights, lack of access to social services, etc.) within a society. While useful for specific analysis, this renders the concept difficult to use in cross national comparisons and across studies. We argue that the concept of relative political reach (RPR) captures the assumptions behind theories of social exclusion. RPR is a relative measure that indicates the degree to which the government is involved in the daily lives of a population. We suggest that populations where the government is not relevant or present in a meaningful daily way are experiencing social exclusion across multiple dimensions; they do not have access to the benefits and services provided by the government, they often have little say in the formulation of policy, and their social networks are not integrated into local governmental institutions. Even within states, RPR should be somewhat varied, particularly in countries with high regional variance in economic or other development. Due to its relative nature, values of RPR are inherently comparative and provide a useful tool for beginning comparisons of social exclusion. In this paper, we posit that in Chinese provinces where RPR is lower, violence is more likely to occur.

**Violence in China**

Political instability and violence in China have long been recognized as appropriately examined at the subnational level (Kolaweski 1981). The relative levels of autonomy in provinces, vast size of China, and differences in provincial economies and populations warrant assessment of violence from the subnational level (Hoggard 1962; Kolaweski 1981; Yep and Fong 2009; Wallace 2010). For example, 5 of China’s 31 provinces are designated as “autonomous regions” where the regional cultural practices and language are afforded protected status.¹ In addition,

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¹ China’s autonomous regions include: Tibet, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Guangxi.
despite centralization, tax efforts and transfers from the central government to provinces are not equitably distributed (World Bank 2002; Shih & Qi 2007). China is characterized by a transfer system that has historically made allocation decisions based on considerations other than population and apparent need, with a structure that passes along deficits to subnational governments. Essentially, the central government requires provinces to administer required and often unfunded programs without accounting for the necessary allocation. This means that provinces are faced with tough choices: either raise rents in other ways, or become increasingly politically savvy to extract a greater number of transfers in the future. In some instances the fiscal stress on provinces is untenable because standard expenditures exceed standard collections. The 1994 tax reform intended to compensate provinces for shortcomings in the elaborate transfer system by changing existing tax structures to include rebates for VAT, consumption, and resource taxes (Shinn & Zhang 2009). However, these reforms failed to reach their desired goals. In studies of 1995 and 2000 subsidies, the World Bank found that there is a consistent and established relationship that continues between the level of revenue collection and subsidies received from the central government (Shinn & Zhang 2009).

In a study of land conflicts among peasant populations in China, Yep and Fong (2009) find that localities that fail to attract sufficient numbers of transfers are more likely to seek rents by terminating land leases and offering the land for sale. For example, in 2005 in Guangdong province, only 27% of budgetary revenue was available for satisfying mandated policies, compared to a more average 46% in Shangdong (Yep & Fong 2009). Not surprisingly, Guangdong province also generates large revenues from land lease abrogation; in 2005 they generated 1584 million yuan, or approximately 232 million US dollars, to cover revenue shortfalls (Yep & Fong 2009). Wallace (2010) suggests that this trend has slightly declined in the mid 2000s as the Chinese government recognized that increasing threats to security are located in rural areas characterized by a lack of transfers. However, the process in which the reach of provincial government impacts violence is still largely unexamined.

**Relative Political Reach as a measure of social exclusion**

The mobilization or reach of the government is likely to be the most important facet in explaining conflict in China. Provinces where the government is more directly involved in the daily lives of the population are less likely to experience extensive upheaval when resource shortfalls occur. Individuals may still experience disenfranchisement, but an active and mobilized population that deems itself politically relevant will seek redress through government channels as well as secure alternate social support and services from provincial governments.

Measuring social mobilization has been a challenge for researchers. Relative political reach measures the degree to which the population accepts the presence of government in their lives; societies characterized by little trust in government and elites are more likely to actively avoid the government, cutting out involvement in economic and other interactions. Human resources in a population are important not only because they will produce more in terms of
increasing national power but also because they can be mobilized to support the agendas of policy makers, including the choice to go to war or to make significant economic reforms (Arbetman 1990). Relative political reach measures the degree the government is involved in economic activities of the population relative to the expected degree of involvement given the education and employment of the population. The conceptual ground work for this measure can be found in Organski (1958) and initially modeled and expanded by Arbetman (1990) with operationalization and model refinements by Arbetman-Rabinowitz & Johnson (2008; 2009; 2010).

In a context where the population trusts the government, the involvement of government decreases transaction costs and provides benefits in the form of services and social organization that outweigh imposed costs including taxation. In China, regions with low levels of political mobilization can also be described as regions experiencing high levels of social exclusion. Applications of the logic of social exclusion to urban violence in Latin America lends empirical support to our theoretical extension of the concept and the relationship between rising levels of exclusion and the occurrence of violence (Berkman 2007; Krunnings & Krujt 2007). In China, political mobilization is also a cultural phenomenon; populations that exist outside the formal sector are also excluded from the political hierarchy and many benefits including education, health care, and other social welfare programs.

At the moment, violence is not an overwhelming concern in China; although trends in the region are of increasing instability. Understanding the contributing factors can facilitate the design and implementation of proactive policies. These policy considerations merit particular emphasis as China experiences political and economic change.

**Model Specification**

We model the effect of social exclusion on the severity of violence by hypothesizing that governments with high political mobilization will be able to control instability. We utilize relative political reach (RPR) as an indicator of social exclusion. To test this proposition, the following model is utilized:

\[
\text{Violence}_{pt} = \text{RPE}_{pt} + \text{RPR}_{pt} + \text{Urban Population}_{pt} + \text{GDP per capita}_{pt} + \text{Prior Conflict}_{pt-1} + \text{Error}
\]

where:

- \( t = 1980-2007 \)
- \( p = \text{province } 1...31 \)
- \( \text{RPE}_{pt} = \text{Relative political extraction of a province (see below)} \)
- \( \text{RPR}_{pt} = \text{Relative political reach of a province (see below)} \)
- \( \text{Urban Population}_{pt} = \text{percentage of urban over total provincial population} \)
- \( \text{GDP per Capita}_{pt} = \text{Income per person in constant US$} \)
- \( \text{Prior Conflict}_{pt-1} = \text{Difference in conflict (t-1)-t} \)
Violence

Violence is defined as the number of deaths from conflicts between individuals and military, police, or public safety officials in a province. Violence or the severity of conflict can be measured in numerous ways. Categorical assessments that include other forms of instability such as riots, demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of protest are available for limited time series and are weighted aggregate measures that have not been collected at the subnational analysis. The methodology used by the traditional source typically requires a higher incident threshold in order to be calculated (Taylor & Jodice 1983; Banks 2002; Goldstone et al 2004). Other existing measures of violence rely on assessments of either number killed in combat (excluding nonmilitary fatalities) but are again nationally aggregated data that report selected years. These sources include the Correlates of War Intrastate conflict data from the University of Michigan, which includes conflicts where at least 1000 have died, and the new Armed Conflict Database from the Peace Research Institute that includes aggregated data where more than 25 deaths have occurred. In order to obtain provincial level data over time, we adopted the Armed Conflict Database description for conflict. National sources, including government statistical reporting, news sources, and human rights organizations were used to locate the province or state in which the violence occurred, and the total number of deaths. Inclusion required at least two separate media reports of casualties. Where numbers conflicted, the more reliable source was utilized or barring a difference in information quality, casualties for a province were averaged. Precedents to this measure and approach for provincial level conflict in China can be found in multiple studies including Hoggard (1962) and Kolaweski (1981), which used compilations of Facts on File, the London Times, Keesings Contemporary and the NY Times Index to form their datasets.

The total number of deaths in a province per year is the most appropriate dependent variable in this context, avoiding the difficulties accrued in establishing minimal levels of conflict for inclusion. Several advantages are garnered from this approach as well. First, this operationalization of civil conflict, since it is inclusive of lower levels of violence, is consistent with an examination of the relationship between micro level behavioral explanations and the occurrence of civil conflict. In addition, assessing trends over time allows for smaller changes to be recognized. Finally, evaluation of lower levels of conflict makes much more sense in a

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2 For additional information on the reliability of sources for the violence variable see Appendix 3 in Johnson 2007, Sub National Capabilities and Internal Conflict, PhD Dissertation, Claremont Graduate University.
subnational context, where the overall numbers of deaths in regions are much more likely to be small.\(^4\)

**Urban Population**

Two theoretical traditions informed the debate on the urban or rural populations in civil conflicts. First, some contend that rural populations are less subject to the purview of government control and are more able to mount opposition efforts. Second, scholars of social mobilization and revolution argue that social movements and revolutionary efforts are born in urban environments. In 1980, 19.6% of China’s population was urban; by 2007 this number had reached 41.4% (WDI 2008). Compared to developed countries where urbanization ranges from 80% to 95%, the level of urbanization in China is low but the increase in the last 20 years has been substantial. We include a measure of the percentage of urban population in order to determine where instability is located in China and to control for the potential effect of this demographic shift.

**Political Reach**

For China, we estimate political reach in the following way:

\[
\text{EMPLOYED/POP} = \frac{\text{SECONDARY ENRL/POP} + \text{BUREAUCRACY/POP} + \text{AGE014/POP} + \text{GDPperCapita}}{5}
\]

where political reach is the actual employed population/predicted employed population.

In estimating the size of the likely employed labor force, some issues are important to consider. First, the percentage of the population with secondary education is likely to be reflected in employment. Secondary education comprises an important level of human capital accumulation for formal employment in factories, manufacturing, and other services. Secondary education is important for the development of a skilled labor force that can perform tasks that require higher skilled training, written communication, and other basic skills. Thus, in developing countries, the employed population is likely larger where a higher percentage of the population is highly educated. This is particularly reflected in the fact that this type of employment occurs almost exclusively in the formal sector.

The size of the bureaucracy or number of government employees is also an important control for the political reach of the government. Large numbers of government employees also increase the size of the employed population, although in terms of productivity they might be considered underemployed but still under the purview of the government.

\(^4\) In order to avoid the inclusion of an excessive number of zeros, when in question, deaths for provinces at 0 levels of violence are coded as .001.

Political reach is a relative indicator; for this sample the range of RPR levels is from .7 to 1.3. Generally speaking, the higher the level of RPR, the greater the degree of political mobilization on the part of the government.

**Political Extraction**

We use a relative measure of political extraction as our control for state strength and to emphasize the important of state capacity to realize transfers to minimize violence. Preceding research has found that states with higher levels of political extraction are likely to experience less severe conflict (Benson & Kugler 1997; Johnson 2007; Arbetman & Johnson 2009). A number of previous studies on civil conflict suggest that the strength of a province is important in explaining violence, particularly because weak provinces present both a lower opportunity cost to rebellion, and in these areas there is more likely to be an authority gap. Political extraction measures each of these situations. The transfer of resources from individuals to governments represents a willingness to relinquish individual wealth to the government demonstrating either an acceptance of that government as legitimate on the part of the population, or at least a tacit acceptance of the coercive mechanisms of the government.

In the case of China, the following model is used at the provincial level following RPE models used extensively at the national level:

\[
\text{Tax revenue/GDP} = \text{Year} + \text{Exports/GDP} + \text{Agriculture/GDP} + \text{Oil} + \text{Error}^6
\]

with the value for political extraction the actual level of tax revenue divided by the predicted level.

This simple model for the estimation of RPE is appropriate in the context of China. Initially, there is substantial variance in revenue collection between provincial governments. A choice is required between the use of either revenues or fiscal transfers as the dependent variable. Revenues better represent the ability of a province to mobilize the available economic resources of the population. In addition, despite the 1994 tax revision that was meant to address disparity in resource allocation, subsidies are highly correlated with revenue collected from a given province rather than population size or level of poverty, reflected in data reported by the World Bank on fiscal transfers in 1995 and 2000 (Zhang 2005).

The temporal domain is important to control for in the case of China. Our analysis covers a period of substantive economic change within the country, including reforms and the expansion and development of industry in a number of areas. Differences between rural and urban areas have increased, and the economies of different regions have been influenced by variance in economic development strategies. In addition, tax reforms have impacted some regulations

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6See appendix 1 for variable definitions and sources
surrounding revenue collection, making it critical that we control for revenue extraction over time.

We also control for some key structural aspects of provincial economies. Provinces that are either exporting goods or extracting oil are able to realize revenues that do not require a politically capable government to increase fiscal pressure on the population.

Finally, we control for the agricultural contribution to provincial productivity. Agricultural goods are harder to tax, particularly when they are produced at subsistence levels by peasant populations.

**GDP per Capita**

GDP per capita is an important control as it describes the employment climate of the region. Most of the extant literature on civil conflict identifies income per person as the most critical explanatory factor in defining the opportunity cost of conflict (Collier & Hoeffler 2000; Fearon & Laitin 2002). We note that this measure is used in the two studies cited here at the national level rather than disaggregated to regions, however it remains an important control in identifying the relative level of investment individuals have in the system. We use GDP per capita in constant 2000 dollars.\(^7\)

**Prior Conflict**

The existing literature also establishes a robust relationship between levels of conflict in previous years and the current year (Fearon & Laitin 2002; Collier & Hoeffler 2000). We control for the difference in level of conflict from the prior year to the current year, capturing, instead of intensity, the relative change in conflict levels from year to year. We expand on the theoretical and empirical aspects of our estimations in the following section.

**Estimation & Results**

The negative binomial model is the most appropriate model given the distribution of our data. The dependent variable, violence, is clustered in values in the lower ranges and zero inflated. Violence is a rare event, and modeling infrequently occurring values that occur independently of each other are appropriate for this estimation technique (Miaou & Lum 1993; Greene 2007; 2008). It may seem that while controlling for change in levels of violence violates this assumption, in fact the nature of our data is consistent with this. An examination of violence within provinces demonstrates that there are not consistent patterns between a single opposition group and the government in a particular locality. In fact, violence outbreaks are independent of each other, but are causally likely to be related (for example the land

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\(^7\) Ibid.
abrogation practice discussed in detail at the outset of the chapter). It is important we control for the change in violence; however the model is appropriate as the data do not violate the model assumptions.

We also report OLS estimations for robustness checks, and as a means of providing easily interpretable diagnostic checks on our model.

**Table 1 China : Political Capacity & Violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable : Violence</th>
<th>OLS Model (N=472)</th>
<th>Negative Binomial Model (N=472)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Extraction</td>
<td>-0.78 (1.57)</td>
<td>-0.22 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Reach</td>
<td>-33.46*** (6.97)</td>
<td>-12.14*** (2.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>-7.00** (2.10)</td>
<td>-0.91 (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>0.012*** (0.002)</td>
<td>0.001* (0.0008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Conflict</td>
<td>0.78*** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.064*** (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>33.71*** (7.18)</td>
<td>12.10*** (2.70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Adjusted R SQ.                | 0.77             | 0.57 (Pseudo)                    |

**Variable | VIF | 1/VIF
-----------------------------
urbpoprurpop | 3.44 | 0.290787
gdpcapc~2000 | 3.33 | 0.300205
rpe1 | 1.08 | 0.927410
rpr1 | 1.05 | 0.951111
D.violence | 1.01 | 0.992961

Mean VIF | 1.98

The VIF test outlined above demonstrates there is not multicollinearity between the independent variables; even in the most conservative interpretations VIF values below 5 indicate there is not collinearity among variables. We also estimated the model with Panel Corrected Standard Errors as an additional robustness check with virtually identical results.
The results are consistent with our theoretical expectations. The fact that GDP per capita is barely significant and the coefficient is quite small indicates that there is little support for economic models of civil conflicts in China. The argument that economic growth insulates China from domestic violence is clearly limited. Between 1980 and 2007 China’s GDP per capita in constant 2000 US$ grew 862%, and at the same time the intensity of violence has increased. We can conclude that for the case of China, using wealth as a proxy for the opportunity cost explanations of instability fail to offer a valid explanation.

We find no support for either theories of urban based social revolution or theories maintaining that rural areas provide sanctuary for opposition groups. The fact that China is a rural country rapidly urbanizing does not have any influence on the level of violence since the measure of urban population is not significant. It should be noted that the process of urbanization is happening across all provinces to some degree.

The significant positive correlation between prior conflict and violence indicates that social exclusion in some areas may be persistent, suggesting systemic policy failures on the part of regional governments. We emphasize that conflict may occur in the same province but it does not indicate that the same subpopulation is the epicenter of the instability. That persistence may indicate that during the tenure of a specific government, political mobilization may be lacking and therefore policies to minimize domestic instability could not be implemented.

Political extraction is not significant in our models, suggesting that violence is not a product of institutional inefficiency or gaps in authority. The strength of provincial governments can be an influential factor in mitigating violence; and this result is inconsistent with our previous research on sub national violence (Johnson 2007; Arbetman-Rabinowitz & Johnson 2008). We suspect that the nature of political violence in China explains our findings. Violence in China occurs between distinct and separate subsets of the population and authorities rather than as a collective opposition enterprise. In instances where violence is a product of social exclusion, transfers from the central government are less salient than the political mobilization that provides conduits for redress. While we note in our discussion of prior conflict that spates of violence occur in provinces, these are not continued conflicts between a single opposition group and the government. Essentially, the nature of political violence in China explains the lack of results; out of the 31 provinces in China, over 17 have experienced significant violence (over 50 deaths) in a single year. Simple correlations between the political reach and political extraction variables indicate that the level of correlation is very low (6.02%).

Our results support our hypothesis that higher levels of social exclusion contribute to the severity of violence. Political Reach is negative and significant (-12.14); for every unit increase in political reach, there is a 12.14 decline in the number of deaths in a given province year. In the case of a country as diverse and populous as China, particularly given levels of regional autonomy, emphasizing the role regional governments can play in eliminating practices of social exclusion is a priority. This result is very consistent with theories and empirical work on
state building, where the political mobilization and reach of the government are both necessary and sufficient aspects of creating functioning political and economic institutions (Herbst 2000; Englebert 2000; Bates 2009). Ethnic divisions in China, exemplified increasing conflict between Uyghur populations and authorities in the province of Xinjiang in 2008 and 2009, are often by-products of social exclusion. China does have 5 autonomous regions; however the bulk of the Chinese population, 91%, is ethnically Han Chinese. We can argue that ethnic conflicts are the politicized product of social exclusion, rather than inherent to identity. In fact, even those attributing conflict to ethnic divisions identify the lack of inherent indigenous or native rights to land and the management of these lands as the root causes of conflicts.

Discussion

To satisfy the short term demands of policy and meet standards of living, provincial governments in China are compromising the social cohesion and wealth of future generations. This paper offers insights into the study of conflict at the subnational level in China as a process of social exclusion. As more qualitative studies some evidence of social exclusion is clear simply from observations; policies that pass down debt and require towns to abrogate land lease agreements in order to realize revenues are a prescription for violence and fomenting rebellion. Traditional policies of redistribution and social mobilization, cornerstones of China’s historical political apparatus, are the best mechanism for ensuring stability in the long term. In other words, as China continues its radical economic growth initiatives and continues to transform economically and socio-politically, it would be well served to remember the peasant populations and maintain the political agenda of the past. The temptation to invest in primarily revenue generating regions may result in the creation of two Chinas- one mobilized, prosperous and growing and one demobilized and dissatisfied. In addition, the government would be well served by substantially revisiting policies that decentralize and pass along deficit. Perhaps this is the most telling finding from this analysis. Local governments forced to implement mandates without funding will pass the cost along to populations least likely to be politically relevant. Conflict becomes a product of being pushed out of the system further. Differentiation between urban and rural populations is not the solution in this context. While a systematic review of our violence data suggests that these are the locations in which violence is occurring, this is a product of social exclusion not of rural residence.

In addition, China should pay attention to regions that are experiencing violent outbreaks. While these are not concentrated in single opposition efforts, what they do indicate is more widespread dissatisfaction with the existing system. Provinces that experience some level of conflict are more likely to be characterized by violence in the future. In terms of long term stability for outlying regions and populations, this observation does offer a prescriptive approach for China’s future stability. Looking into the future, China should also pay attention to levels of political reach in urban areas. A number of studies cite the emerging gender gap in
China and the difficulty China faces with an estimated 24 million young urban men likely to remain single and potentially dissatisfied.

The results also have important implications for work on political capacity. The results of this paper demonstrate that political reach can effectively be used as an indicator of political mobilization. Intuitively, this makes sense: a population has to view the government as relevant in order to engage institutions in seeking social change. Governments seeking to increase their political capacity face a number of challenges. It may be that governments would be best served by creating incentives to increase the percent of the population employed in the formal sector of the economy. Individuals then incur the benefits of social inclusion as they begin to also make individual resource transfers to the governments, decreasing the opportunity cost of participation.

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