

V. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

GOVERNANCE

Findings

- The PRC moved further away from the collective governance model as Xi Jinping secured a third term as president and general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, breaking with the established norm of a two-term office designed for peaceful transition of power. Individuals selected to fill other leadership positions had a working relationship with Xi or were described as Xi's loyalists, further reinforcing Xi's political dominance.
- Despite a claimed commitment to promoting democracy, the political system as envisioned by Xi Jinping is fundamentally undemocratic. When delivering his policy objectives, Xi described a political system that was identical to the existing authoritarian system and called it democratic.
- While Xi said community-level self-governance was a manifestation of democracy, it was in fact a grid management system in which communities were divided into discrete units to facilitate monitoring and surveillance. Recent national-level policy that called for the grid to be staffed by police further demonstrated the government's intent on implementing pervasive social control.
- The PRC government's handling of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) displayed a pattern of enforcing extreme social control giving rise to a series of mass protests, to which the government responded with censorship and criminal prosecution.
- Harsh COVID-19 measures disrupted people's lives and prompted a series of large-scale protests, where some protesters called for democratic reforms. The government responded by arresting some of the protesters after the fact, particularly targeting those who were deemed to be influenced by "Western ideology" or feminism. Shortly after the protests, the government abruptly reversed the COVID-19 policy without proper transitional measures in place, resulting in many preventable deaths.

Recommendations

Members of the U.S. Congress and Administration officials are encouraged to take the following actions:

- Support U.S. research programs that document and analyze the governing institutions and ideological campaigns of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as its relationship with companies, government agencies, legislative and judicial bodies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).
- Encourage Chinese authorities to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and release individuals detained or imprisoned for exercising their rights to freedom of speech, association, and assembly.
- Support organizations working in and outside of China that seek to work with local governments and NGOs to improve

Governance

transparency, especially with regards to efforts to expand and improve China's open government information initiatives.

GOVERNANCE

Introduction

Xi Jinping secured a third term for the top offices for the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party, substantiating speculations that his repressive policies might continue indefinitely.¹ The past year was marked by large scale protests and by the hardship that citizens endured due to the government's abrupt and unprepared reversal of pandemic control measures. In what may be a response to the protests, PRC authorities planned to strengthen a nationwide grid management system to enhance its capacity to surveil citizens and expanded law enforcement efforts in rural areas.

Xi Jinping Further Solidified Political Power

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, the People's Republic of China (PRC) moved farther away from the collective governance model this past year. Xi secured his norm-breaking third term as the General Secretary and President, having received unanimous votes at the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2022 and the 14th National People's Congress in March 2023, respectively.² Officials tapped to join the Party Central Committee and senior positions in the State Council were identified as having close ties with Xi, prompting observations that "[l]oyalty to Xi was clearly the first and most important criterion for elite promotion . . ."³ The newly appointed Premier Li Qiang, for example, had worked with Xi for decades but lacked experience in the central government.⁴ Prior to his appointment, Li enforced Xi's signature zero-COVID policy in Shanghai municipality to the detriment of the city's economic and social well-being, a record that some observers interpreted as a display of loyalty to Xi.⁵ Some leadership successions also broke with the customary retirement age limit, reportedly to make room for Xi's loyalists, and thus reinforcing Xi's political dominance and disrupting a mechanism, which according to some was designed for peaceful transition of power within a non-democratic system.⁶

The 20th Party Congress also amended the Party Constitution to reflect the Party's policy priorities. Among the changes were the addition of language confirming the Party being the highest political power, and the phrases "Four Consciousnesses," "Four Matters of Confidence," and "Two Safeguards," which refer to principles requiring Party members to maintain confidence in the socialist system and to uphold and follow Xi Jinping as "the core leader of the Central Committee."⁷

Policy Plan Affirmed Undemocratic Political System

Despite claimed commitment to promoting democracy, the political system as envisioned by Xi Jinping is fundamentally undemocratic. Prior to assuming his third five-year term as Party General Secretary, Xi Jinping delivered a policy plan to "[b]asically realize socialist modernization" by 2035, a process that included improvements on "whole-process people's democracy."⁸ This term was first coined by Xi in 2019, and has since been used in Party propa-

Governance

ganda.⁹ The political system outlined in the plan mirrors the existing authoritarian system, one which the Party controls directly or indirectly.¹⁰

According to Xi, Chinese citizens exercise state power through people's congresses that are democratically elected at all levels, and the Party consults citizens' opinion through multiparty cooperation and institutions like the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).¹¹ He additionally called for improvements on community-level self-governance, which he claimed to be a manifestation of democracy.¹² Appealing to nationalism, Xi expressed the need for using the United Front to rally the people's support, including uniting overseas Chinese, handling ethnic affairs with a "distinctively Chinese approach," and insisting that religions "must be Chinese in orientation . . ."¹³

Contrary to Xi's claims, people's congresses are not democratically elected at all levels, and public participation at local levels is not only limited but also subject to political interference, such as through candidate selection and harassment of independent candidates.¹⁴ In contrast to the stated function of soliciting public opinion, the CPPCC is tasked with co-opting non-Party members to advance the Party's objectives; only eight satellite parties are permitted to exist, and all of them are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.¹⁵ Community-level self-governance to which Xi referred is "essentially a militarisation of society" in which communities are divided into discrete management units subject to monitoring and surveillance, as explained by China Media Project.¹⁶ Moreover, Xi's emphasis on the sinicization of ethnic minority groups violates the cultural and social rights of millions of individuals in China.¹⁷

Government's Handling of COVID-19 and Related Protests

The PRC government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic displayed a pattern of enforcing social control at the expense of citizens' well-being, giving rise to a series of mass protests, to which the government responded with censorship and criminal prosecution. Authorities began imposing zero-COVID measures in early 2020 after the initial stage of the outbreak, intending to isolate every infected person through methods such as mass testing, contact tracing, quarantine facilities, and citywide lockdowns.¹⁸ Authorities started to intensify enforcement in March 2022, when a highly transmissible virus variant spread across China, affecting millions of people.¹⁹ During these lockdowns, authorities suspended public transportation and prohibited citizens from leaving their homes, interrupting their access to food, necessities, and medical services.²⁰ Stores and eateries closed, and dozens of private hospitals shut down or declared bankruptcy due to their income declining from their efforts to comply with zero-COVID directives, which required them to divert resources away from non-COVID care.²¹ Some people committed suicide as a result of their inability to access health services other than COVID treatment.²² According to Associated Press, an epidemiologist of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention wrote in an internal document that excessive controls under the zero-COVID policy had "no scientific

basis,” but he publicly maintained that the policy was “absolutely correct” because authorities had ordered him to advocate for it.²³

COVID-19 measures likewise posed a public safety hazard. For example, “[p]andemic controls imposed by Chinese authorities around, and possibly inside, [an] apartment building had delayed [firefighters’] response” in a fatal fire in Urumqi municipality, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, according to people close to the incident; although the government denied such claims.²⁴

The fire in Urumqi followed a series of protests against harsh and disproportionate COVID measures, including the solo protest staged by **Peng Lifa** (also known as Peng Zaizhou).²⁵ On October 13, 2022—three days before the opening of the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party—Peng hung banners from Sitong Bridge in Beijing municipality that criticized the government’s harsh COVID-19 measures and called for political reforms and Xi Jinping’s resignation.²⁶ Authorities immediately detained Peng, removed the banners, and censored social media posts about the protest.²⁷ Despite censorship, Peng’s message spread across China, partly through graffiti and peer-to-peer connectivity such as Apple’s Airdrop functionality.²⁸ As news of the deadly fire in Urumqi on November 24 spread, impromptu vigils shifted into protests against the excesses of zero-COVID policy measures. Thereafter, thousands of people joined protests in at least 18 cities and 79 higher education institutions across China,²⁹ many of whom held up blank sheets of paper to show defiance in the face of censorship, giving rise to the name White Paper protests and similar variations.³⁰ Some protesters also called for Xi’s resignation in a rare direct attack on the country’s leadership.³¹

About a week after the nationwide protests, the government lifted key aspects of the zero-COVID policy, effectively reversing the zero-COVID policy.³² The abrupt policy reversal presented a new set of challenges that the Chinese government was not adequately prepared for, such as the surge in COVID infections and deaths.³³ As of March 2023, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) data showed sharp increases in confirmed cases and deaths beginning in mid-December 2022, coinciding with the policy reversal.³⁴ Factors including low vaccination rate among seniors, and shortages in hospital supplies and staff contributed to many deaths that some experts said could have been avoided.³⁵ Funeral homes saw a steep increase in demand,³⁶ and health officials in Beijing reported that “emergency services were overwhelmed with more than 30,000 calls per day.”³⁷ In his Spring Festival remarks to the nation in January 2023, Xi Jinping acknowledged the healthcare shortages in rural areas, exhorting local cadres to be of assistance.³⁸ A U.S.-based health expert explained that the zero-COVID policy had exacerbated the situation because “the government controlled distribution ... had left rural hospitals and clinics undersupplied.”³⁹ Rural residents did not receive sufficient support from Party cadres, and one villager complained that “the government’s presence has almost disappeared” after reopening.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the government’s presence was felt by some White Paper protesters as authorities hastened efforts to detain them beginning in mid-December 2022.⁴¹ According to one tally, police had detained over 100 people as of February 2023, with a significant

Governance

number of them being women.⁴² Chinese Human Rights Defenders observed that some of the detentions seemed to be aimed at “punishing youth with ‘Western ideology’ or connection to ‘feminists.’”⁴³ Among those detained on criminal charges were **Cao Zhixin, Li Siqi, Li Yuanjing,** and **Zhai Dengrui**, whom PEN International and 24 other rights groups said were being held by PRC authorities in violation of their fundamental rights of free expression and peaceful assembly.⁴⁴

Government’s Response to Other Protests

Besides the White Paper protests, other large-scale protests took place across China, prompted by grievances concerning issues important to people’s daily lives, including bank savings, housing, and healthcare. Freedom House “documented 668 incidents of protest and other dissent in mainland China from June to September 2022.”⁴⁵ Of these, 77 percent were demonstrations, marches, and obstructing roads.⁴⁶ Despite authorities’ efforts to “reduce the ability of citizens to mobilize,” “people manage[d] to form decentralized movements that increase the impact of their dissent.”⁴⁷ Some illustrative examples are as follows:

- In July 2022, over 1,000 people gathered in Zhengzhou municipality, Henan province, as part of a series of protests based on allegations that several rural banks had frozen their deposits since April.⁴⁸ Police detained over 200 protesters, and a group of unidentified people wearing white t-shirts (who were reportedly deployed by the government) forcibly dispersed the peaceful protesters, beating some of them.⁴⁹ Despite censorship, video footage of the violent dispersal circulated on the internet, prompting public criticism.⁵⁰ Earlier in June, the Zhengzhou Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision said it had disciplined five officials for tampering with COVID-19 health codes trying to prevent bank customers from traveling to Zhengzhou.⁵¹
- Also in July 2022, about 200 homebuyers gathered in front of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission branch office in Wuhan municipality, Hubei province, to ask the government to address the growing issue of real estate developers being unable to complete construction of apartments that they had presold and that homebuyers had been paying a mortgage on.⁵² The protest was part of a larger boycott in which homebuyers in some 342 incomplete projects threatened to stop mortgage payments unless the construction was completed on schedule.⁵³ Authorities responded with censorship, and a protest involving over 1,000 people in Xi’an municipality, Shaanxi province, went unreported in Chinese media and online sources.⁵⁴ Local police “maintained social stability” by means including calling a homebuyer repeatedly to ask her not to complain to higher authorities in Beijing and transporting protesters, through deceit or force, away from the protest site by bus.⁵⁵
- In February 2023, retirees in at least three cities protested changes in the public health insurance program that they perceived as having disadvantaged them.⁵⁶ The changes excluded many types of medication and reduced the amount of medical

expense reimbursement, but these cuts reportedly did not affect government officials.⁵⁷ Although authorities did not use force to disperse the protests, they took people into custody after the fact, including **Zhang Hai**, who publicly expressed support and reposted video footages of the protests.⁵⁸

[For more information on the protests, see Chapter 1—Freedom of Expression, Chapter 2—Civil Society, and Chapter 12—Public Health.]

Strengthening Grid Management

The series of large-scale protests may have led the PRC government to further bolster the existing social control apparatuses, including the grid management system, which divides communities into discrete units to facilitate surveillance and monitoring.⁵⁹ In explaining how the protests were possible under the PRC's pervasive social control, a scholar surmised that the system might be ineffective in quelling society-wide discontent given the large amount of manpower required for monitoring people.⁶⁰ In an apparent attempt to address the deficiency,⁶¹ the Ministry of Public Security issued a three-year plan in March 2023 and declared a commitment to increase investment in the grid management system.⁶² The three-year plan called for strengthening police presence in communities by increasing the number of grid-style local police stations and by assigning one police officer to each village or grid unit by 2025.⁶³ While the plan did not specify the size of each grid unit, it could comprise 15 to 20 households based on existing practice.⁶⁴ The plan encompassed duties, such as correcting bad behavior of youths, intervening in family disputes and resolving couple conflicts.⁶⁵ Police also were tasked with training lay citizens into “volunteer police” to help achieve community self-governance.⁶⁶ While some localities had promoted similar initiatives before, it was “the first time these requirements have been made at the national level,” according to South China Morning Post.⁶⁷ Previously, grid managers were not required to be police officers, as indicated by a 2018 job posting.⁶⁸

The establishment of the new National Data Bureau may have an impact on the grid management system, given that digitization and informatization are central features of it.⁶⁹ In a March 2023 joint institutional reform plan, the Party and the PRC government created the National Data Bureau, to be managed by the National Development and Reform Commission, a State Council department.⁷⁰ The new bureau is tasked with pushing forward the national strategic plan called “Digital China,” of which grid management is a component, according to an expert.⁷¹ One analyst noted that there were 18 local data authorities previously, and creating a new national entity could help “coordinate disjointed local data policies.”⁷²

Rural Policies

As central authorities rolled out a food security campaign, local officials—operating in a tightening grid management system—destroyed farmers' crops to force conformity with national goals. A policy document released jointly by the Party Central Committee

Governance

and the State Council in February 2023 emphasized the importance of food security and laid out nine objectives aimed at increasing agricultural output.⁷³ Prioritizing rural development, central authorities called for building a robust Party-led rural administration system under which Party cadres are to promote obedience to the Party and to visit people's homes to bolster the grassroots level "self-governance" system that relies on grid management.⁷⁴

The document also stressed the need for protecting and strictly controlling the use of farmland,⁷⁵ the implementation of which, however, may have contributed to the abuse of power by rural management officers (*nongguan*) of local administrative units known as "rural comprehensive administrative law enforcement brigades."⁷⁶ Established pursuant to a 2018 central directive, the brigades are tasked with enforcement duties in all aspects of agricultural production and are authorized to impose coercive measures including administrative detention.⁷⁷ The planting season of spring 2023 was the first mass public deployment of rural management officers, who reportedly destroyed crops and confiscated livestock in carrying out the food security campaign.⁷⁸ China Change, a U.S.-based organization that monitors human rights in China, observed that, in the face of the government's push to boost grain production, poultry and fish farmers and those who grow other types of crops have become targets of the crackdown.⁷⁹

Online Movement Exposed Corrupt Practices

Public outcry over a violent crime led to an uptake of citizens using the internet to voice their grievances, some of which involved alleged collusion between police and criminals; while authorities addressed some of these claims, at least one complainant suffered retribution. Widely circulated video footage of a violent gender-based attack perpetrated by suspected gang members that took place in June 2022 in Tangshan municipality, Hebei province, drew public concern.⁸⁰ A report prepared by the provincial government concluded that the police's handling of the case was "slow and improper," and some people "wondered if local police were involved with local criminal figures."⁸¹ Following the incident, at least two other people in Tangshan used online platforms to recount their experiences of also having been victims of crimes, to which local police responded by detaining the alleged perpetrators as part of a half-month-long campaign against crime (although it is unclear how the campaign was different from regular law enforcement duties).⁸² Internet users elsewhere followed suit, among them police officers, including some who reported incidents in which their superiors allegedly tampered with evidence to shield perpetrators from criminal liability.⁸³

In one example, **Liu Jian**, a police officer in Bengbu municipality, Anhui province, made a post on social media saying that over ten officials beat him, destroyed evidence, and later tried to discredit him by spreading rumors that he was mentally ill.⁸⁴ He said he reported the incident to authorities to no avail.⁸⁵ After the post, the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission and Ministry of Public Security verified Liu's claims, but public security officials in Anhui detained him in August 2022 on a criminal charge.⁸⁶

PRC Counterespionage Law

In April 2023, the National People's Congress Standing Committee amended the PRC Counterespionage Law, expanding the scope of the law's application.⁸⁷ The law invokes the concept of a "holistic view of national security,"⁸⁸ which covers over 20 broad categories including political, economic, cultural, social, data, and food security.⁸⁹ The amendment inserts a clause to prohibit illicit gathering of materials "relating to national security and national interest,"⁹⁰ which one scholar described as "unworkably vague on its face" and noted that it would give security authorities broad discretion.⁹¹ Observers expressed concern that the amended law would further restrict legitimate information gathering activities by due diligence professionals and journalists.⁹²

Notes to Chapter 6—Governance

¹PEN America, “Freedom to Write Index 2022,” April 2, 2023; Qin Gang and Cheryl Tung, “China’s Congress Gives Nod to Third Presidential Term for Supreme Leader Xi Jinping,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 10, 2023.

²“Linghang xin shidai xin zhengcheng xin huihuang de jianqiang lingdao jiti—Dang de xin yijie zhongyang lingdao jigou chansheng jishi” [Collective leadership that takes the lead in navigating in the new era, new journey, and new glory—A record of how the new central Party leadership group came into being], Xinhua, October 24, 2022; “Xi Jinping quanpiao dangxuan guojia zhuxi zhongyang junwei zhuxi” [Xi Jinping unanimously elected the nation’s president and military commission chairman], *Global Times*, March 10, 2023.

³See, e.g., Chris Buckley et al., “China’s Communist Party Congress for His 3rd Term, Xi Jinping Surrounds Himself with Loyalists,” *New York Times*, October 30, 2022; Cheng Li and Mallie Prytherch, “China’s New State Council: What Analysts Might Have Missed,” *Brookings Institution*, March 7, 2023.

⁴Cheng Li and Mallie Prytherch, “China’s New State Council: What Analysts Might Have Missed,” *Brookings Institution*, March 7, 2023; Vivian Wang, “China Appoints Li Qiang, a Xi Loyalist, as Premier,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2023.

⁵Vivian Wang, “China Appoints Li Qiang, a Xi Loyalist, as Premier,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2023; Keith Bradsher and Chang Che, “China’s New Premier Needs to Revive Growth. How Far Will Loyalty Get Him?,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2023; Huizhong Wu, “China’s Other Top Leaders Bring Loyalty to Xi, Experience,” *Associated Press*, March 8, 2023.

⁶“Decoding the 20th Party Congress,” *Asia Society Policy Institute*, accessed June 14, 2023; Ling Li, “The Hidden Significance and Resilience of the Age-Limit Norm of the Chinese Communist Party,” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 20, no. 19 (December 15, 2022).

⁷*Zhongguo Gongchandang Dangzhang* [Chinese Communist Party Constitution], passed October 22, 2022, preamble, art. 3(2).

⁸Xi Jinping, “Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 16, 2022, 19.

⁹Stella Chen, “Whole-Process Democracy,” in *CMP Dictionary, China Media Project*, November 23, 2021; “Chinese Democracy in 9 Screenshots,” *China Digital Times*, December 13, 2021.

¹⁰Xi Jinping, “Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 16, 2022, 31–34.

¹¹Xi Jinping, “Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 16, 2022, 32–33.

¹²Xi Jinping, “Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 16, 2022, 33, 47.

¹³Xi Jinping, “Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 16, 2022, 33–34.

¹⁴See, e.g., Monica Martinez-Bravo, Gerard Padr i Miquel, Nancy Qian, and Yang Yao, “The Rise and Fall of Local Elections in China: Theory and Empirical Evidence on the Autocrat’s Trade-off,” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, November 2017, 10–11; Qiao Long, “Guangdong Tianwu cun huanjie xuanju houxuanren zao konghe bei bi tuixuan” [In Guangdong’s Tianwu village election, candidate is threatened and forced to withdraw], *Radio Free Asia*, March 4, 2021; “China Protest Village Leader Lin Zulu Convicted,” *BBC*, September 8, 2016; John Sudworth, “China Elections: Independent Candidates Fight for the Ballot,” *BBC*, November 17, 2016.

¹⁵Shannon Tiezzi, “What Is the CPPCC Anyway?,” *Diplomat*, March 4, 2021; State Council, “Ba da minzhu dangpai” [Eight major democratic parties], March 9, 2020; State Council, “Zhongguo zhengdang zhidu’ baiqi shu” [White paper on China’s political party system], November 15, 2007; Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang et al., “Guanyu minzhu dangpai zuzhi fazhan ruogan wenti zuotanhui jiyao” [Minutes of forum on several questions on the organization and development of democratic parties], June 3, 1996; Andrew Jacobs, “Non-Communist Parties Lend China an Air of Pluralism, Without the Mess,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2013.

¹⁶“Grid Based Management,” in *CMP Dictionary, China Media Project*, April 16, 2021.

¹⁷International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by U.N. General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, entry into force March 23, 1976, arts. 18, 27.

¹⁸“What Is China’s ‘Zero-COVID’ Policy?,” *Voice of America*, November 28, 2022; “Haobu dongyao jianchi ‘dongtai qingling’ zong fangzhen” [Unwavering support for the “dynamic zero-COVID” overall direction], *People’s Daily*, May 6, 2022; “Timeline: China’s COVID-19 Outbreak and Lockdown of Wuhan,” *Associated Press*, January 22, 2021; Lucy Swan and Faisal Ali, “Deadly Apartment Fire in the Far West of the Country Triggers Unprecedented Demonstrations,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2022.

¹⁹“What Is China’s ‘Zero-COVID’ Policy?,” *Voice of America*, November 28, 2022; “Haobu dongyao jianchi ‘dongtai qingling’ zong fangzhen” [Unwavering support for the “dynamic zero-COVID” overall direction], *People’s Daily*, May 6, 2022; “Timeline: China’s COVID-19 Outbreak and Lockdown of Wuhan,” *Associated Press*, January 22, 2021; Lucy Swan and Faisal Ali, “Deadly Apartment Fire in the Far West of the Country Triggers Unprecedented Demonstrations,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2022; Wang Pengfei and Xu Zhiwei, “Jinji shukun, guanjian shi baozhang renliu he wuliu changtong” [The key to economic relief is to ensure the unimpeded flow of people and goods], *Caixin*, June 2, 2022; Xu Wen, Dong Hui, and Wang Han, “Wuhu xian 1 ming ganran zhe ji fengcheng quanguo zhishao 22 di ‘zaifeng’” [Entire city of Wuhu locked down with one case of infection, at least 22 localities currently under lockdown], *Caixin*, April 18, 2022.

²⁰Tessa Wong, “Xi’an: The Messy Cost of China’s COVID Lockdown Playbook,” *BBC*, January 6, 2022; J. Stephen Morrison, Scott Kennedy, and Yanzhong Huang, “China’s Zero-COVID: What Should the West Do?,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, June 27, 2022; Wenxin Fan,

“China’s COVID Fight Disrupts Businesses, Food Supplies as Cases Spread,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 27, 2022; David Kirton, “Shenzhen Shuts Most Public Transport as China Battles Multiple Outbreaks,” *Reuters*, September 2, 2022.

²¹Alexandra Stevenson and Keith Bradsher, “China’s Great ‘Zero-COVID’ Guessing Game,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2022; David Stanway, “COVID and Bust: China’s Private Health System Hurt by Tough Coronavirus Controls,” *Reuters*, July 6, 2022.

²²Ceren Ergenc, “China Suddenly Abandoned Its Zero COVID Policy. How Did It Start in the First Place?,” *Diplomat*, January 28, 2023; Sang Jiejia, “Sang Jiejia: Bi bingdu geng kepa de shashou ‘qingling’ zhengce” [Sang Jiejia: “Zero-COVID” policy is a killer more frightening than viruses], *Minzhuzhongguo.org*, October 3, 2022.

²³Dake Kang, “Ignoring Experts, China’s Sudden Zero-COVID Exit Cost Lives,” *Associated Press*, March 24, 2023.

²⁴Austin Ramzy and Wenxin Fan, “China’s COVID Protests Began with an Apartment Fire in a Remote Region,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 1, 2022. See also “Deadly Xinjiang Blaze Prompts Anger at COVID Zero Policy,” *Bloomberg*, November 25, 2022.

²⁵Gao Feng et al., “Beijing Banner Protester Lauded as China’s New Tank Man, or ‘Bridge Man,’” *Radio Free Asia*, October 14, 2022; “‘Bridge Man’ Peng Zaizhou’s Mission Impossible and His ‘Toolkit for the Removal of Xi Jinping,’” *China Change*, October 19, 2022.

²⁶Gao Feng et al., “Beijing Banner Protester Lauded as China’s New Tank Man, or ‘Bridge Man,’” *Radio Free Asia*, October 14, 2022; “‘Bridge Man’ Peng Zaizhou’s Mission Impossible and His ‘Toolkit for the Removal of Xi Jinping,’” *China Change*, October 19, 2022.

²⁷Gao Feng et al., “Beijing Banner Protester Lauded as China’s New Tank Man, or ‘Bridge Man,’” *Radio Free Asia*, October 14, 2022; “‘Bridge Man’ Peng Zaizhou’s Mission Impossible and His ‘Toolkit for the Removal of Xi Jinping,’” *China Change*, October 19, 2022.

²⁸“‘Bridge Man’ Peng Zaizhou’s Mission Impossible and His ‘Toolkit for the Removal of Xi Jinping,’” *China Change*, October 19, 2022.

²⁹“Zhongguo fanfengkong kangyi chao chixu ‘Bai Zhi Yundong’ yinfa guoji guanzhu” [As anti-lockdown protests continue in China, “White Paper movement” draws international attention], *Radio Free Asia*, November 28, 2022.

³⁰Chang Che and Amy Chang Chien, “Memes, Puns and Blank Sheets of Paper: China’s Creative Acts of Protest,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2022; Human Rights Watch, “China: Free ‘White Paper’ Protesters,” January 26, 2023. Some sources report that “tens of thousands” of people joined the protests, although Commission staff did not find any systematic estimate of the number of protesters. See, e.g., Nick Schiffrin and Teresa Cebrian Aranda, “Thousands in China Protest Zero-COVID Policy in Largest Demonstrations in Decades,” PBS, November 28, 2022.

³¹Richard C. Bush, Diana Fu, Ryan Hass, Patricia M. Kim, and Cheng Li, “Around the Halls: The Outcomes of China’s 20th Party Congress,” Brookings Institution, October 25, 2022; William Yang, “Jing Hu deng di baofa jietou kangyi Shanghai shiweizhe: Xi Jinping xiatai!” [Protests broke out in places including Beijing and Shanghai; Protesters in Shanghai: Xi Jinping step down!], *Deutsche Welle*, November 27, 2022; Li Yuan, “China’s Protest Prophet,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2022; Simone McCarthy and Kathleen Magramo, “Residents ‘Revolt’ over Oppressive COVID Lockdowns in China’s Guangzhou,” *CNN*, November 15, 2022; Lucy Swan and Faisal Ali, “Deadly Apartment Fire in the Far West of the Country Triggers Unprecedented Demonstrations,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2022.

³²State Council Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism for COVID-19, “Guanyu jinyibu youhua luoshi xinguan feiyan yiqing fangkong cuoshi de tongzhi” [Circular regarding further improvements on control measures for the novel coronavirus], December 7, 2022; Frances Mao, “China Abandons Key Parts of Zero-COVID Strategy after Protests,” *BBC*, December 7, 2022.

³³Dake Kang, “Ignoring Experts, China’s Sudden Zero-COVID Exit Cost Lives,” *Associated Press*, March 24, 2023; Tony Munroe, “China Reports Huge Rise in Covid Deaths after Data Criticism,” *Reuters*, January 14, 2023.

³⁴World Health Organization, “China Situation [regarding COVID-19 confirmed cases and deaths],” accessed March 27, 2023.

³⁵Dake Kang, “Ignoring Experts, China’s Sudden Zero-COVID Exit Cost Lives,” *Associated Press*, March 24, 2023.

³⁶Matthew Loh, “So Many People Are Dying from COVID in China That a Crematorium Is Giving Families 5 to 10 Minute Slots to Mourn Victims,” *Insider*, January 4, 2023.

³⁷Matthew Loh, “So Many People Are Dying from COVID in China That a Crematorium Is Giving Families 5 to 10 Minute Slots to Mourn Victims,” *Insider*, January 4, 2023; Chai Rong, “Beijing Jijiu Zhongxin: Xinguan wu zhengzhuang, qingzheng huanzhe wu boda 120, wei jiwei zhongzheng huanzhe liuchu rexian tongdao” [Beijing Emergency Center: For those who are asymptomatic for COVID or have mild infections, don’t call 120, leave the hotline open for those who are critically ill], *Beijing Daily*, December 10, 2022.

³⁸“Xi Jinping chunjie qianxi shipin lianxian kanwang weiwen jiceng ganbu qunzhong xiang quanguo ge zu renmin zhiyi xinchun de meihao zhufu” [On New Year’s Eve, Xi Jinping conveys greetings to grassroots cadres and the masses through video conference, delivering beautiful blessings of the new spring to people of all ethnicities nationwide],

³⁹Xiaoshan Xue, “In Rural China, Shortages of Treatment, Doctors Prove Deadly,” *Voice of America*, February 3, 2023.

⁴⁰Xiaoshan Xue, “In Rural China, Shortages of Treatment, Doctors Prove Deadly,” *Voice of America*, February 3, 2023.

⁴¹Kawashima Shin, “China: Exploiting the ‘White Paper Protests’ to Revoke the Zero-COVID Policy,” *Diplomat*, January 30, 2023; Chinese Human Rights Defenders, “China: Free All ‘Blank Paper’ Protesters,” January 20, 2023.

⁴²Tessa Wong and Grace Tsoi, “The Protesters Who’ve Gone Missing as China Deepens Crack-down,” *BBC*, February 18, 2023.

Governance

⁴³Chinese Human Rights Defenders, “China: Free All ‘Blank Paper’ Protestors,” January 20, 2023.

⁴⁴PEN International et al., “Chinese Authorities Must Release ‘Blank Paper’ Protesters and Allow Free Expression on COVID-19 Pandemic,” March 8, 2023. For more information, see the Commission’s Political Prisoner Database records 2023-00033 on Cao Zhixin, 2023-00036 on Li Siqu, 2023-0035 on Li Yuanjing, and 2023-00037 on Zhai Dengrui.

⁴⁵Kevin Slaten, Freedom House, “Grassroots Protests Are Frequent in Xi Jinping’s China,” November 17, 2022.

⁴⁶Kevin Slaten, Freedom House, “Grassroots Protests Are Frequent in Xi Jinping’s China,” November 17, 2022.

⁴⁷Kevin Slaten, Freedom House, “Grassroots Protests Are Frequent in Xi Jinping’s China,” November 17, 2022.

⁴⁸“Zhongguo Henan baofa kangyi jihui weiquan yinhang chuhu zao ouda” [Protest broke out in Henan, China; bank depositors suffer beating as they defend their rights], *BBC*, July 11, 2022; Nectar Gan, “China Arrests Hundreds in Rural Banking Scandal,” *CNN*, August 30, 2022.

⁴⁹“Zhongguo Henan baofa kangyi jihui weiquan yinhang chuhu zao ouda” [Protest broke out in Henan, China; bank depositors suffer beating as they defend their rights], *BBC*, July 11, 2022; Nectar Gan, “China Arrests Hundreds in Rural Banking Scandal,” *CNN*, August 30, 2022; Wenxin Fan, “Large Chinese Bank Protest Put Down with Violence,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 2022.

⁵⁰Wenxin Fan, “Large Chinese Bank Protest Put Down with Violence,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 2022.

⁵¹Qu Peng, “Dianxing luan zuowei wu ren shou chufen” [Model case of abuse of official power; five people disciplined], *China Discipline Inspection and Supervision News*, reprinted in Ministry of Justice, June 24, 2022.

⁵²Cao Li and Rebecca Feng, “China Faces Growing Pressure to Address Mortgage Protests,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2022.

⁵³Cao Li and Rebecca Feng, “China Faces Growing Pressure to Address Mortgage Protests,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2022; “Analysis: China’s Mortgage Boycott Quietly Regroups as Construction Idles,” *Reuters*, September 18, 2022.

⁵⁴Cao Li and Rebecca Feng, “China Faces Growing Pressure to Address Mortgage Protests,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2022; “Analysis: China’s Mortgage Boycott Quietly Regroups as Construction Idles,” *Reuters*, September 18, 2022; “Zhongguo lanweilou fengbao kuoji guozhi beijing jianan wuzhu Hubei Jianguanju qian kangyi” [The storm of incomplete real estate projects in China expands and affects state-backed construction company; homebuyers protest at Supervision Commission in Hubei], *Central News Agency*, July 21, 2022.

⁵⁵Tang Jiajie, Zheng Chongsheng, and Kai Di, “‘Ting tai’ fengbao kuoda Zhongguo weiwen, jushi liang nan” [Storm of “mortgage halt” expands; social stability and saving the market are both difficult in China], *Radio Free Asia*, July 20, 2022; “Analysis: China’s Mortgage Boycott Quietly Regroups as Construction Idles,” *Reuters*, September 18, 2022.

⁵⁶Oiwan Lam, “Chinese ‘White-Hair’ Protestors Denounce Medical Insurance Reform,” *Global Voices*, March 6, 2023; “Hundreds Protest in China over Health Insurance Reforms,” *Agence France-Presse*, reprinted in *Voice of America*, February 15, 2023.

⁵⁷Gu Ting, “Zhongguo xin yibao zhidu xiaosheng luodi minzhong fudan jiazhong” [China’s new medical insurance system quietly implemented, increases people’s burden], *Radio Free Asia*, March 9, 2023; “Hundreds Protest in China over Health Insurance Reforms,” *Agence France-Presse*, reprinted in *Voice of America*, February 15, 2023.

⁵⁸Rights Defenders Network, “Yin zhichi Wuhan tuixiu laoren kangyi yigai de ‘Baifa Yundong’ Wuhan xinguan feiyan nanshu, weiquan renshi Zhang Hai yijing bei pibu” [Family member of victim of Wuhan novel coronavirus rights defender Zhang Hai formally arrested for supporting elderly people’s protest of medical reform in the “White Hair Protests”], April 1, 2023.

⁵⁹“Grid Based Management,” in *CMP Dictionary*, *China Media Project*, April 16, 2021.

⁶⁰“Live with Lizzi Lee, Featuring Lynette Ong,” (transcript of video), *China Project*, December 5, 2022.

⁶¹Vanessa Cai, “China Is Deploying More Officers for Grass-Roots Policing across the Country,” *South China Morning Post*, April 4, 2023.

⁶²Ministry of Public Security, “Gonganbu yinfa ‘Jiaqiang xin shidai gongan paichusuo gongzuo san nian xingdong jihua (2023–2025 nian)’” [Ministry of Public Security issues “Three-year action plan to strengthen public security of the new era (2023–2025)”], March 29, 2023; Vanessa Cai, “China Is Deploying More Officers for Grass-Roots Policing across the Country,” *South China Morning Post*, April 4, 2023.

⁶³Ministry of Public Security, “Gonganbu yinfa ‘Jiaqiang xin shidai gongan paichusuo gongzuo san nian xingdong jihua (2023–2025 nian)’” [Ministry of Public Security issues “Three-year action plan to strengthen public security of the new era (2023–2025)”], March 29, 2023; Vanessa Cai, “China Is Deploying More Officers for Grass-Roots Policing across the Country,” *South China Morning Post*, April 4, 2023.

⁶⁴“Zhongguo chutai xin baojia zhi: Baomi jiankong shang bao 20 hu yi wangge” [China rolls out a new baojia system: Secret surveillance to report to superior; one unit comprises 20 households], *Radio Free Asia*, April 10, 2018.

⁶⁵Ministry of Public Security, “Gonganbu yinfa ‘Jiaqiang xin shidai gongan paichusuo gongzuo san nian xingdong jihua (2023–2025 nian)’” [Ministry of Public Security issues “Three-year action plan to strengthen public security of the new era (2023–2025)”], March 29, 2023.

⁶⁶Ministry of Public Security, “Gonganbu yinfa ‘Jiaqiang xin shidai gongan paichusuo gongzuo san nian xingdong jihua (2023–2025 nian)’” [Ministry of Public Security issues “Three-year action plan to strengthen public security of the new era (2023–2025)”], March 29, 2023; Guo Yuanpeng, “Renmin Ribao dianjing: Yijing bu zhishi ‘yingjing’” [People’s Daily selects a highlight: Volunteer police do not just “rise to the occasion”], *People’s Daily*, July 9, 2014.

⁶⁷Vanessa Cai, “China Is Deploying More Officers for Grass-Roots Policing across the Country,” *South China Morning Post*, April 4, 2023.

⁶⁸“Zhongguo chutai xin baojia zhi: Baomi jiankong shang bao 20 hu yi wangge” [China rolls out a new baojia system: Secret surveillance to report to superior; one unit comprises 20 households], *Radio Free Asia*, April 10, 2018.

⁶⁹“Grid Based Management,” in *CMP Dictionary, China Media Project*, April 16, 2021; Wang Yimin, “Jiaqiang shuzi zhengfu jianshe quanmian tisheng zhengfu luzhi nengli” [Strengthen the construction of digital government, comprehensively augment government’s ability to perform its duties], *People’s Daily*, July 1, 2022; David Dorman, “Xi Jinping Presses for Digital Government. OK, but What’s Digital Government?,” *Digital China Wins the Future*, April 19, 2022.

⁷⁰“Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan yinfa ‘Dang he guojia jigou gaige fangan’” [Party Central Committee and State Council issue “Institutional reform plan of the Party and State Council”], *Xinhua*, March 16, 2023; National Development and Reform Commission, “Main Functions of the NDRC,” accessed April 10, 2023.

⁷¹“Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan yinfa ‘Dang he guojia jigou gaige fangan’” [Party Central Committee and State Council issue “Institutional reform plan of the Party and State Council”], *Xinhua*, March 16, 2023; David Dorman, “Xi Jinping Presses for Digital Government. OK, but What’s Digital Government?,” *Digital China Wins the Future*, April 19, 2022.

⁷²Qiheng Chen, “China’s New National Data Bureau: What It Is and What It Is Not,” *China Project*, March 20, 2023.

⁷³Party Central Committee and State Council, *Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan guanyu Zuohao 2023 Nian Quanmian Tuijin Xiangcun Zhenxing Zhongdian Gongzuo de Yijian* [Opinion of the Party Central Committee and State Council on the Key Tasks for Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization], February 13, 2023.

⁷⁴Party Central Committee and State Council, *Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan guanyu Zuohao 2023 Nian Quanmian Tuijin Xiangcun Zhenxing Zhongdian Gongzuo de Yijian* [Opinion of the Party Central Committee and State Council on the Key Tasks for Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization], February 13, 2023, sec. 8(28), (29), (30).

⁷⁵Party Central Committee and State Council, *Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan guanyu Zuohao 2023 Nian Quanmian Tuijin Xiangcun Zhenxing Zhongdian Gongzuo de Yijian* [Opinion of the Party Central Committee and State Council on the Key Tasks for Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization], February 13, 2023, sec. 2(6).

⁷⁶Wang He, “Wang He: ‘Nongguan’ luanxiang yu Zhonggong tongzhi fulan” [The chaos caused by rural management officials and corruption under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party], *Epoch Times*, April 27, 2023; “Word of the Week: Nongguan (Nongguan)—Rural Management Officials, or ‘Legalized Bandits’?,” *China Digital Times*, May 2, 2023.

⁷⁷“2018 nianzhong pandian nongye nongcun fazhi jianshe wenbu tuijin” [2018 year-end tally: Rule of law development in agriculture and rural areas steadily advanced], *Fangzheng County Agriculture and Economy Comprehensive Information Platform*, December 14, 2018; “In Zealous Effort to Increase Grain Production, China Deploys Force and Coercion to ‘Manage’ the Countryside,” *China Change*, April 30, 2023.

⁷⁸“Word of the Week: Nongguan (Nongguan)—Rural Management Officials, or ‘Legalized Bandits’?,” *China Digital Times*, May 2, 2023.

⁷⁹“In Zealous Effort to Increase Grain Production, China Deploys Force and Coercion to ‘Manage’ the Countryside,” *China Change*, April 30, 2023. See also Gu Ting, “Zhongguo zhengfu xiang nongmin fangang yibaiyi yuan caizheng butie guli nongmin zhongliang” [Chinese government disburses 10 billion yuan in subsidies to farmers to encourage grain production], *Radio Free Asia*, April 17, 2023.

⁸⁰“Tangshan: Chinese Police Deputy Dismissed over Attack on Female Diners,” *BBC*, June 21, 2022.

⁸¹“Tangshan: Chinese Police Deputy Dismissed over Attack on Female Diners,” *BBC*, June 21, 2022.

⁸²Yang Fan and Qi Leijie, “Tangshan lianxu chuxian shiming jubao anjian: Yi zhuahuo 6 ming xianyiren” [Real-name reports continue to emerge in Tangshan: 6 suspects already in custody], *Xinhua*, June 13, 2022.

⁸³“Ji minzhong wangluo shiming jubao fengchao hou, duodi jingcha ye jiaru ‘wangluo shangfang’ dajun” [Following the trend of internet users reporting incidents using their real names, police officers from different places also join the “online petition” crowd], *China Digital Times*, July 5, 2022.

⁸⁴“Ji minzhong wangluo shiming jubao fengchao hou, duodi jingcha ye jiaru ‘wangluo shangfang’ dajun” [Following the trend of internet users reporting incidents using their real names, police officers from different places also join the “online petition” crowd], *China Digital Times*, July 5, 2022.

⁸⁵“Ji minzhong wangluo shiming jubao fengchao hou, duodi jingcha ye jiaru ‘wangluo shangfang’ dajun” [Following the trend of internet users reporting incidents using their real names, police officers from different places also join the “online petition” crowd], *China Digital Times*, July 5, 2022.

⁸⁶Civil Rights & Livelihood Watch, “Liu Jian yin jubao tanfu bei yi shandian zui daibu” [Liu Jian arrested for subversion because he reported corruption], August 30, 2022; Rights Defense Network, “Weiquanwang: Zhongguo dalu zaiya zhengzhifan, liangxinfa yuedu baogao (2023 nian 3 yue 31 ri) di 90 qi (gong 1500 ren) (si)” [Rights Defense Network: Monthly report on political prisoners and prisoners of conscience currently detained in mainland China (March 31, 2023) Issue No. 90 (total 1500 persons) (four)], March 31, 2023. Note that Rights Defense Network reports that the basis of Liu’s detention is “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.”

⁸⁷*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Fan Jiandie Fa* [PRC Anti-Espionage Law], passed November 1, 2014, amended April 26, 2023, effective July 1, 2023; Jeremy Daum, “Bad as It Ever Was: Notes on the Espionage Law,” *China Law Translate*, May 2, 2023; “Pinglun. Cheng Xiaonong:

Governance

Zhongguo xin ban 'Fan Jiandie Fa' de yongyi" [Commentary. Cheng Xiaonong: The motive behind China's new version of Anti-Espionage Law], *Radio Free Asia*, May 15, 2023.

⁸⁸*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Fan Jiandie Fa* [PRC Anti-Espionage Law], passed November 1, 2014, amended April 26, 2023, effective July 1, 2023, art. 2.

⁸⁹"Xi Jinping Xin Shidai Zhongguo Tese Shehui Zhuyi Sixiang" [Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era], *Platform for Learning Xi (Xue Xi Pingtai): Holistic view of national security (Zongti guojia anquan guan)*, accessed June 14, 2023.

⁹⁰*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Fan Jiandie Fa* [PRC Anti-Espionage Law], passed November 1, 2014, amended April 26, 2023, effective July 1, 2023, art. 4(3).

⁹¹Jeremy Daum, "Bad as It Ever Was: Notes on the Espionage Law," *China Law Translate*, May 2, 2023.

⁹²"Pinglun. Cheng Xiaonong: Zhongguo xin ban 'Fan Jiandie Fa' de yongyi" [Commentary. Cheng Xiaonong: The motive behind China's new version of Anti-Espionage Law], *Radio Free Asia*, May 15, 2023; Peter Humphrey, "China's New Anti-Spy Law Is Just the Beginning," *Politico*, May 24, 2023.