



Coercive capacity and the durability of the Chinese communist state



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ABSTRACT

Why has the Chinese communist state remained so durable in an age of democratization? Contrary to existing theories, this article argues that the strong state coercive capacity has survived the authoritarian rule in China. We demonstrate that the Chinese Communist Party has taken deliberate actions to enhance the cohesion of its coercive organizations—the police, in particular—by distributing “spoils of public office” to police chiefs. In addition, the state has extended the scope of its coercion by increasing police funding in localities where the state sector loses control of the population. We use and rely on mixed methods to test this theory.

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1. Introduction

Why has the Chinese communist state remained so singularly durable in an age of democratization? The Chinese case seems to contradict modernization theory’s prediction that “the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.” (Lipset, 1959: 75) China has far surpassed the “threshold” of per capita income for democratic transition, as calculated by Przeworski et al. (2000: 94) to be \$4,115, whereas China’s per capita GDP in 2011 was \$8,394. China has also entered the intermediate income level (\$7,000–\$10,000), which, according to Huntington (1968: 43) and Przeworski et al. (2000: 92), is the most destabilizing period for dictatorships. A higher level of economic development, rapid economic growth, dramatic social transformations, deep involvement in the international economy, and increasing number of democracies in the world—all these factors that have been said to be conducive to democratization have only made the authoritarian rule in China more robust.

We argue that *one* reason for the durability of the Chinese authoritarian rule is the state coercive capacity. In the face of challenges from home and abroad, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has successfully strengthened its coercive organizations, especially the police, to deal with potential threats both domestically and internationally.

We argue that there are two critical challenges to authoritarian rulers’ survival. One is the possibility of defection of coercive leaders in the face of domestic rebellion. The second is the limited ability of the state to monitor and control the masses in the face of economic reforms.¹ Authoritarian rulers’ survival, therefore, depends on first, their ability to secure the loyalty of their coercive leaders and second, on the coercive apparatus’ capacity to reach every corner of the society.

¹ Svoblik (2012) makes a similar argument with a slightly different angle. He argues that all dictators face two fundamental challenges. The first comes from the masses over which they rule—this is the problem of *authoritarian control*. The second challenge arises from those with whom they rule—this is the problem of *authoritarian power-sharing*.

We demonstrate that contemporary China is facing these two challenges at the same time. On the one hand, the CCP needs to keep the loyalty of its coercive organizations, especially the police, in the face of numerous protests every year. On the other hand, the Chinese state finds it more difficult to reach every corner of the society as the state sector declines and the economy diversifies. However, the Chinese state is still robust because the CCP has taken deliberate actions to enhance the “cohesion” and to extend the “scope” of its police. The CCP enhances the “cohesion” of the police by incorporating police chiefs at every level of the government into the core decision-making organ: the leadership team. Empowered police chiefs not only have a higher ranking in the bureaucracy, but also enjoy stronger bargaining power vis-à-vis the government. In addition, the CCP extends the “scope” of the police by allocating more police funding to localities where the state sector controls a smaller proportion of the population. Thus, the high “cohesion” and extensive “scope” of the Chinese police have contributed to the survival of the Chinese authoritarian state in the context of intensive domestic and international oppositions.

We rely on mixed methods—including fieldwork, qualitative interviews, bureaucratic analysis, reading of Party documents, and statistical analysis—to test our theory.

The paper is structured as follows: The second section will reveal a gap in the existing explanations for authoritarian resilience in China, and present our theory based on the coercive capacity of authoritarian states. The third and the fourth sections will examine two dimensions of China’s coercive capacity respectively: cohesion and scope. The fifth section will discuss why the CCP is able to control its coercive organizations while focusing on the Party’s revolutionary heritage. The last section then concludes with major findings and broader significance of the research.

2. Coercive capacity and authoritarian resilience

Nathan (2003: 6) once wrote, “After the Tiananmen crisis in June, 1989, many observers thought that the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would collapse. ... This particular authoritarian system, however, has proven resilient.” The resilience of authoritarianism in China is indeed puzzling.

Scholars have made serious efforts to explain the puzzle from various perspectives. These include Perry (2012) on the CCP’s revolutionary tradition and cultural resources, Nathan (2003) on institutionalization, Manion (2008) and Cho (2008) on congress², Shi (1997) on political participation, Whiting (2004) and Landry (2008) on the cadre evaluation system, Sheng (2007) on the central committee³, Stockmann and Gallagher (2011) on the media, Zhao (1998) on nationalism, Dickson (2003) and Tsai (2006) on private entrepreneurs, and Gallagher (2002) on foreign direct investment. In addition, scholars have noticed the “stabilizing” effects of social protests, for example, O’Brien and Li (2006), Chen (2009), Solinger (2009), Hurst (2004), Dimitrov (2008), Lorentzen (2013).

While existing theories have contributed to putting the pieces of the “jigsaw puzzle” together, there is still a very important missing piece: coercion.⁴

Skocpol (1979: 32) reminds us that “[e]ven after great loss of legitimacy has occurred, a state can remain quite stable—and certainly invulnerable to internal mass-based revolts—especially if its coercive organizations remain coherent and effective.” Bellin (2004: 143), when explaining the stability in the Middle East and North Africa, argues, “The will and capacity of the state’s coercive apparatus to suppress democratic initiative have extinguished the possibility of transition.”

The recent uprisings in the Arab world again call our attention to authoritarian regimes’ control of their coercive organizations. The loyalty of the coercive force has explained the survival of the Bahraini monarch, whereas the defection of the military has contributed to the breakdown of the ruling autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt (Bellin, 2012).⁵

In Serbia and Georgia in the late 1990s, the non-compliance of under-financed or unpaid security forces left incumbents without a means to suppress opposition protest (Way and Levitsky, 2006: 396). In Georgia, the police in 2003 were unwilling to crack down in the midst of a regime crisis because they “had not been paid at that point for three months. So why should they have obeyed Shevardnadze?” (Karumidze and Wertsch, 2005: 39)

What determines a state’s coercive capacity? Way and Levitsky (2006: 388–393) distinguish between two distinct dimensions of state capacity: *cohesion* and *scope*. First, cohesion refers to the level of compliance *within* the state apparatus. In cases of high cohesion, the leader is able to rely on subordinates—the police, for example—to fulfill even controversial orders. In contrast, cases of weak cohesion are characterized by open or disguised disobedience by subordinates. Second, scope refers to the effective reach—across territory and into society—of the state apparatus. Where scope is extensive, states possess a developed internal security sector—including extensive intelligence networks and specialized police and paramilitary

² Both Manion (2008) and Cho (2008) focus on the strengthening of the people’s congress as an institution and its implications for the Chinese Communist Party.

³ Sheng (2007) discusses how the Chinese Communist Party uses its central committee to co-opt powerful local leaders.

⁴ Cai (2008) is an exception who also focuses on repression. Pei (2012) identifies three key factors for the resilience of the Chinese authoritarian regime, which include repression.

⁵ A direct comparison between China and the Arab states should carefully acknowledge the fact that none of those Arab countries have achieved over thirty years’ double-digit economic growth like China. However, as Huntington (1968) contends, instability is more likely under rapid economic development. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

units—whose presence is felt throughout the national territory. Where scope is narrow, leaders have access to relatively small, underpaid, and weakly trained security forces.

We theorize that the Chinese authoritarian state faces two credible threats to its power. One is elite defection. Elite defection refers to the behavior of elites withdrawing their support for the incumbent ruler in favor of the opposition. Elite unity and loyalty in the face of crisis are the key to surviving authoritarian rulers (Geddes, 1999; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005). Facing numerous protests in China, the Chinese coercive organizations, especially the police, sometimes need to obey very controversial orders, for instance, to open fire at the protestors. The police's disobedience would fail to preclude small-scale demonstrations from escalating into nation-wide revolts.

The second threat is the limited reach of the state as a result of economic reforms. Since 1978, China has implemented reform policies that have fundamentally changed the structure of the Chinese economy and society. Among the reform programs, privatization is a crucial component. From cautious encouragement of private sector development in the 1980s to the large-scale privatization reforms in the late 1990s, China has moved a large proportion of its population from the state sector to the private sector. Fig. 1 shows the proportion of the urban workforce employed in the state sector. The late 1990s witnessed the largest decrease in state sector employees. After 1998, more than half of the total urban workforce was employed outside the state sector.⁶

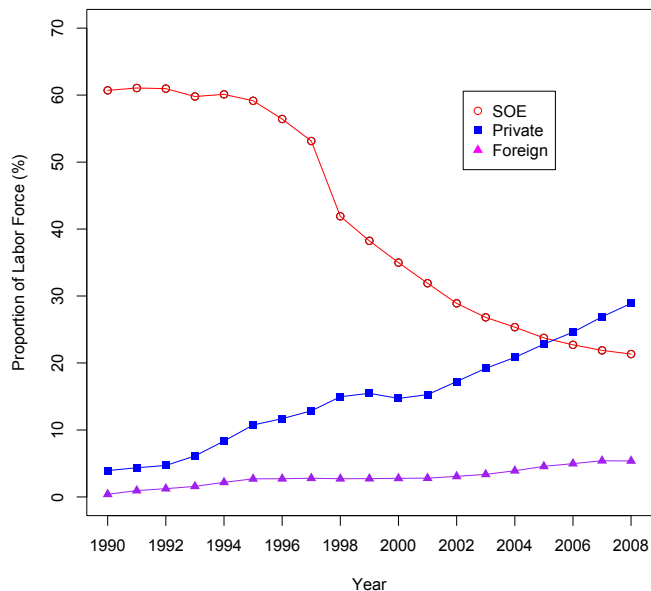


Fig. 1. The composition of the Chinese urban workforce (1990–2008).
Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2009).

The vast economic privatization posts a significant challenge to the state's "infrastructural power"—the power to penetrate society. Walder (1988: 16–19), observing China's SOEs in the 1980s, finds that "the state factory is a branch of government and, through the factory's party branch, exerts a measure of the state's political rule over the worker as a citizen." He observes, "The communist factory is laced with overlapping political organizations that serve both to prevent organized opposition and to recruit and co-opt members of the workforce. ... The security office keeps records on suspect workers, ... and these records move with the worker if he or she changes jobs." However, the market reforms and the collapse of small and medium-sized SOEs have significantly weakened the state's "reach" to society (Shue, 1988). Although the CCP has encouraged the establishment of Party branches in private enterprises, very few have followed suit, and the power of Party committees in private companies is not comparable to those in SOEs. The facts that many private entrepreneurs joined the students in 1989 in Tiananmen Square, and that the post-Tiananmen leadership mounted a nationwide crackdown on the private sector show the insecurity of the Chinese leadership after privatization (Zhao, 2004; Huang, 2008: 110).

Privatization also poses severe threats to social order. Demonstrations organized by laid-off SOE employees demanding better pensions, health care, and retirement packages have constituted a large proportion of protests in the late 1990s (Cai, 2006; Lee, 2007; Chen, 2011). The CCP, which was founded on the activism of the proletariat, is very afraid of labor protests.

⁶ This refers to the percentage of non-SOE employees. As Fig. 1 shows, the percentage of SOE employees was below 50% in 1998. Employment in the private sector and foreign firms only captures part of the non-SOE employees; the rest are employed in the informal sector that is not reflected in official statistics. I have a discussion about this on p.26.

These threats significantly endanger the longevity of the Chinese authoritarian state. The possibility of elite defection jeopardizes the *cohesion* of the Chinese state, while privatization weakens the *scope* of state control. To counter these phenomena and to remain robust the CCP has taken deliberate actions to strengthen the cohesion and extend the scope of China's coercive organizations, especially the police.

The Chinese police are responsible for “everyday forms of state repression”:⁷ monitoring the population and Internet users, managing the family registration system (*hukou*), reporting early signs of social unrests, spying on political dissidents, controlling small-scale protests, and suppressing large-scale protests. This differentiates the police from the military, which is only responsible for “high intensity coercion.” In most cases, it is the police who are in the frontline to stop protests before they escalate to large-scale revolts.

The CCP has employed two approaches to enhance its coercive capacity. One is through empowering the police chiefs. Starting in the 1990s, police chiefs at every level of governments have been gradually promoted to the leadership team (*lingdao banzi*). This has significantly raised police chiefs' bureaucratic rank and financial benefits. Through the distribution of spoils (Magaloni, 2006; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005), the CCP has successfully linked the fate and interests of the police chiefs to the longevity of the regime. Second is extending the “reach” of the Chinese state by increasing police funding in localities where the state sector is weak.

As a result, the Chinese state has managed to enhance its coercive capacity in the context of frequent domestic protests, massive privatization, high social inequality, and an international environment that is supportive of democratic transition.

3. Empowering the police chiefs

We argue that confronting an urgent need to maintain social stability, the CCP has utilized the *nomenklatura* system to empower China's major coercive leaders by incorporating them into the core Party organs.⁸ “The spoils of public office” have created incentives for long-term loyalty and closely tied the interests of the police chiefs to the fate of the regime (Geddes, 1999: 129–131; Brownlee, 2007: 13; Bellin, 2012: 133).

At each level of government, the CCP establishes a leadership team (*lingdao banzi*). The leadership team includes the major Party and government leaders. For example, the Party leadership in a province includes the provincial Party secretary, the governor, the deputy Party secretary, the executive deputy governor, and several other core leaders. In theory, only provincial/ministerial level (*buji and fu buji*) cadres are included in the provincial leadership team. Provincial police chiefs are *de jure* municipal/bureau (*juji*), or lower administrative level leaders, rather than provincial level leaders.⁹ However, in most provinces in the last two decades, police chiefs are *de facto* provincial level leaders and serve as members in the provincial leadership.

Being a member in the leadership team means first, that the police chief has a high ranking in the bureaucratic hierarchy. While most bureau chiefs (for example, heads of the environmental bureau and the transportation bureau) are at the bureau level, police chiefs in the leadership team are provincial level cadres. Being a provincial level cadre in China entails all kinds of benefits provided by the state, such as VIP rooms in hospitals, first-class air travel, bodyguards, better pension and health care packages, and higher salaries.

In addition, leadership team members have access to classified information and have a stronger voice in the decision-making process. Most important meetings include only leadership team members. These meetings discuss a wide range of issues including budget, security, economic plans, law drawing, personnel decisions, and urban planning. In most cases, only leadership team members can attend these meetings and have a say. Non-leadership team members are excluded, even when the issue at stake is directly related to their jurisdictions.¹⁰

Including police chiefs in the leadership was an informal rule until 2003, when the CCP central committee issued a document making it explicit that police chiefs at all levels of government should be included in the leadership team:

To further strengthen the Party's leadership in public security work, to make sure that public security organs better enforce the Party and the government's policies and decisions, Party committees at all levels can gradually appoint public security heads at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels to the positions in the Party committee standing committee or deputy positions in the government based on local realities and cadre qualifications. (People, 2003)¹¹

The motivation for Beijing's push to raise the status of the public security organs is very explicitly stated in the 2003 CCP central committee document as well:

⁷ The term is borrowed from Scott's (1985) “everyday forms of peasant rebellion.”

⁸ The logic is similar to Shirik's (1993) argument that Deng Xiaoping pushed for reforms by empowering the provincial officials.

⁹ Provincial police chiefs, also called public security department heads (*gongan juzhang*), are also heads of the people's armed police (PAP), which are in the front line to repress mass protests.

¹⁰ All the leadership team members are Party members, but their positions vary. As discussed on p.9 (last paragraph), some leadership team members have positions in the Party organizations (for example, propaganda) while others have positions in the government (for example, police chief). The leadership team is the highest decision-making organization that incorporates both Party organization officials and governmental organization officials.

¹¹ Author's own translation.

Western powers never give up Westernizing and sabotaging our country... At present, we are at a critical stage of reforms, some deep contradictions constantly emerge, criminal offenses and economic crimes are detrimental, mass incidents and emergent events are affecting social stability, and the problem of the Internet influencing stability looms large. Maintaining social stability in this strategic stage is a daunting task that is extremely important (People, 2003).¹²

Obviously, ensuring the loyalty of the police in the face of possible revolts is what motivates the CCP to empower the police.

It is also evident that the initiative was pushed by Zhou Yongkang, who from 2002 to 2007 was a Politburo member and a Minister of Public Security. Zhou's powerful position in the Politburo gave him a strong voice in the Party's decisions concerning security work. Zhou's push is one reason why the Party's directive has been strictly enforced at the local level. It is reported that after Zhou's visit to Guangxi province in 2008, most police chiefs in Guangxi were promoted (Baidu, 2008).

To examine whether the empowerment strategy is prevalent nation-wide, we constructed a Chinese Legal Leaders Database (CLLD) that includes personal background data on provincial police chiefs in 1992–2012. We limit our data collection effort to all the 31 Chinese provinces in these 21 years because this is when and where data of most police chiefs' curriculum vitae exist publicly.¹³

A close examination of the data reveals several patterns. First, most provincial police chiefs in most of these years were members in the leadership team, although their positions vary. Fig. 2 shows the percentage of police chiefs who were also provincial leadership team members from 1992 to 2012. As shown, before 2005, over half of the provincial police chiefs were already members of the leadership. However, there was a significant jump in 2005, two years after the 2003 central committee document was issued. As of March 1, 2012, over 90% of provincial police chiefs were incorporated into the leadership team.¹⁴

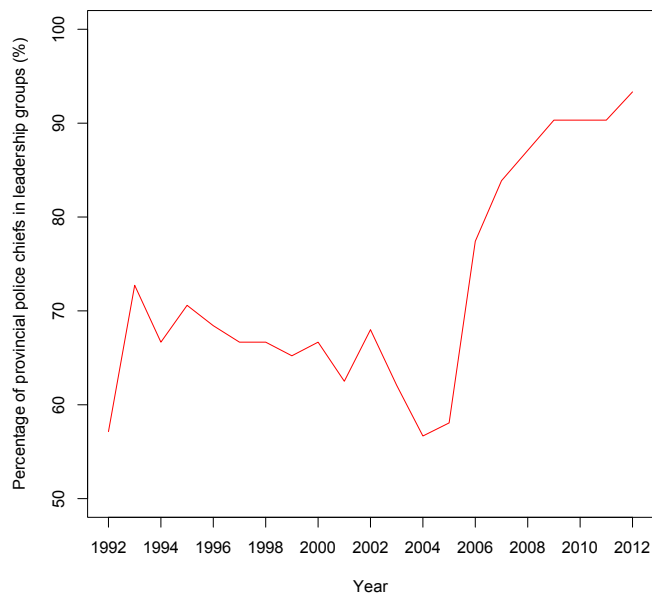


Fig. 2. Percentage of police chiefs seating in the provincial leadership teams (1992–2012). Source: Dataset compiled by the author.

However, their positions vary. Table 1 shows the list of positions a police chief could hold. Some have no other positions besides being a police chief. Once being included in the leadership team, the lowest position is Assistant to the Governor (*shengzhang zhuli*), and the next level is Deputy Governor or Chairman of the Political and Legal Committee (PLC). PLC is a powerful organ that is responsible for leading all the legal organs, including the police department, the court system, the procuratorates, the prison system, and lawyers. The next higher level is a member in the CCP standing committee. This is a critical step in a police chief's political career. Serving in the Party's standing committee means that one has become one of the highest leaders in the local hierarchy. Some police chiefs even hold multiple positions while serving on the standing committee, such as Chairman of the PLC or/and Deputy Party secretary. These are the most powerful provincial police chiefs in China. In

¹² Author's own translation.

¹³ Provincial level leaders' CVs are mostly publicly available on the Internet. We collect the data mainly through searching the Internet and government Web sites. For more details about the database, please see Wang (Forthcoming).

¹⁴ The decline in 2003–2004 might be due to the leadership change following Hu Jintao's taking office in 2002. And as discussed below, first-year police chiefs are usually not in the leadership.

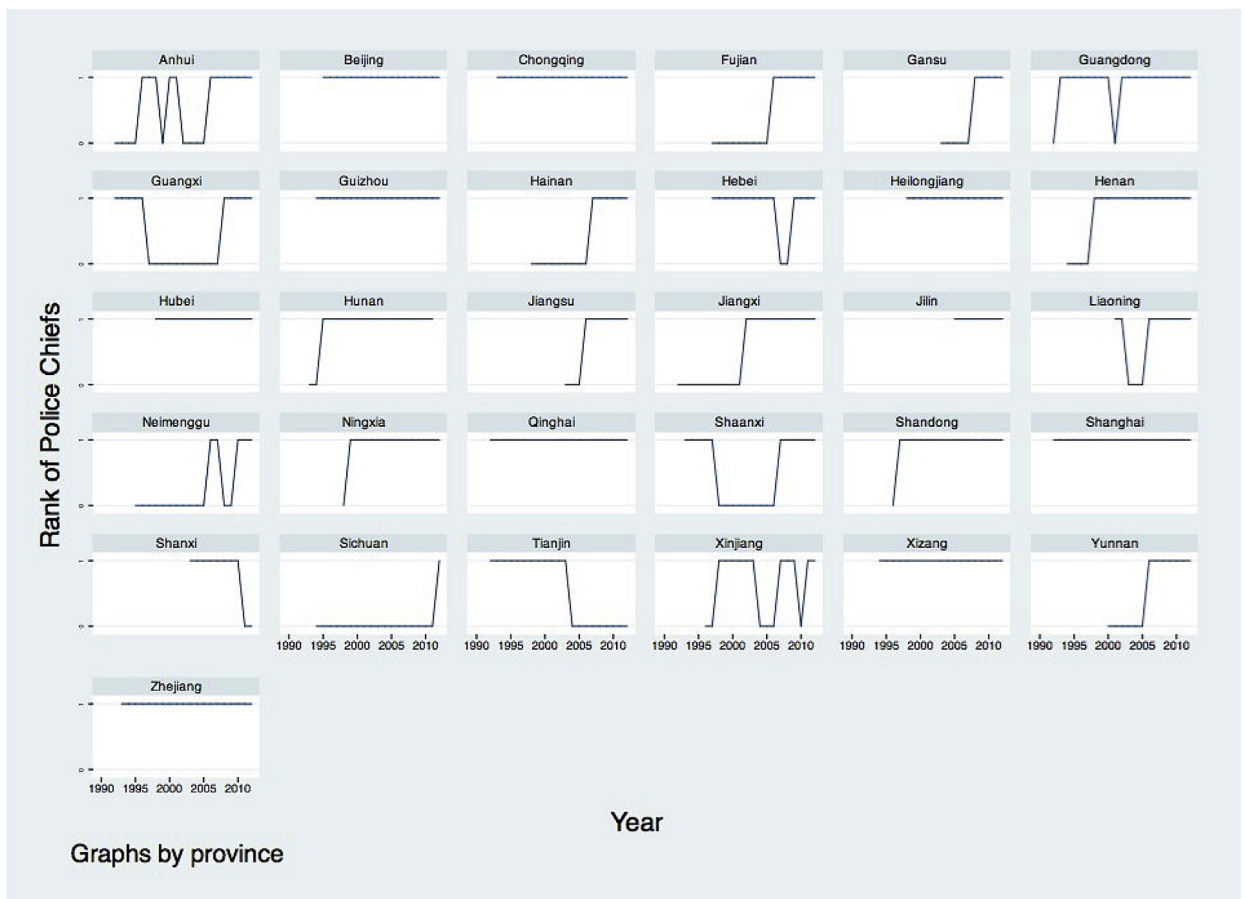
1992–2012, there was only one provincial police chief who held this highest position. Chen Shaoji, while serving as the police chief in Guangdong, was also the deputy Party secretary and the Chairmen of the PLC in Guangdong from 1998 to 2000.

Table 1
Possible positions of provincial police chiefs.

Rank	Position
0	None
1	Assistant to Governor
2	Deputy Governor or Chairman of the Political and Legal Committee
3	Provincial CCP Standing Committee member
4	CCP Standing Committee member and Chairman of the Political and Legal Committee
5	Deputy Chairman of the CCP Committee and Chairman of the Political and Legal Committee

Source: Dataset compiled by the author.

Second, there are variations across space and over time. Fig. 3 shows the changes in police chiefs' ranks across 31 provinces in the period of 1992–2012.¹⁵ On the vertical axis, “1” means being a member in the leadership team and “0” means otherwise. With a few exceptions, most police chiefs have been promoted into the core decision-making organ in the last 5–7 years. In addition, some places such as Beijing, Chongqing, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shanghai, Xizang (Tibet), and Zhejiang always have their police chiefs in the leadership.



Note: This graph shows the changes in police chiefs' ranks across 31 provinces in the period of 1992–2012. On the vertical axis, “1” means being a member in the leadership and “0” otherwise. Year is on the horizontal axis.

Fig. 3. Provincial Police Chiefs' Ranks (1992–2012). Note: This graph shows the changes in police chiefs' ranks across 31 provinces in the period of 1992–2012. On the vertical axis, “1” means being a member in the leadership and “0” otherwise. Year is on the horizontal axis. Source: Dataset compiled by the author.

¹⁵ Please note that the data are not complete for all the 31 provinces in these 21 years.

The regional variation is more vivid due to the importance of security work in the locality. In “strategic” localities such as Beijing and Shanghai or provinces with ethnic tensions such as Tibet, we observe higher ranks of police chiefs. Empowering the police chiefs in these provinces also shields the center from being blamed in cases of brutal repression (Cai, 2008). On the other hand, the time-series variation is higher due to cadre qualifications. Usually, police chiefs in their first years are not promoted to the leadership teams. They are often promoted after a few years of working in the government. For example, Zhu Changjie, the current police chief in Xinjiang, took his office in 2009 but was only promoted to the leadership and Deputy Governor position in 2011.

In summary, the CCP has attempted to generate among the police chiefs “collective security,” or a “sense among power holders that their immediate and long-term interests are best served by remaining within the party organization” through granting access to “the spoils of public office” (Brownlee, 2007: 39).

4. Reach of the Chinese state

The second approach to strengthen the state’s coercive capacity is to extend the “scope” of the police. The Chinese state has extended the scope of its coercion by increasing police funding in localities where the state sector is weak.

How has the coercive capacity of the Chinese state changed in relation to massive privatization in which a large proportion of the population is freed from state control? Studies in authoritarian regimes have focused on the importance of fiscal resources for the survival of authoritarian rulers (Bellin, 2004; Greene, 2007). As Greene (2007: 6) argues, “the political economy of dominance involves creating a large and politically controlled public sector. When privatization deprives incumbents of access to illicit public resources, single-party dominance is threatened.” State access to rents extracted from natural resources has contributed to the robustness of the Middle Eastern autocracies (Ross, 2001).

However, the privatization of the economy has not weakened the Chinese state’s fiscal power. Before China started massive privatization in the late 1990s, the Chinese government carried out fiscal reforms in 1994 that significantly strengthened the extraction power of the state (Naughton, 2007: 432–433).

Another reason is that China’s privatization is not balanced across industries. As Hsueh (2011) shows, China has only liberalized the economy in non-strategic sectors, but has actually retained statist control over critical sectors such as telecommunication services, financial services, oil and petrochemicals, and power retail and transmission. Through strategic privatization and selective liberalization, the Chinese state has managed to retain its access to some of the most profitable industries.

Nonetheless, privatization has indeed threatened the state’s ability to control the population. As a large share of the workforce is under the radar, the state needs to rely on coercive organizations to substitute for the role previously played by SOEs.

The CCP has strengthened state coercive institutions, notably the police, to cope with increasing threats from social opposition. The measures include staffing, professionalization, training, raising bureaucratic rank, and increasing funding.

Sufficient police funding is particularly important for securing the loyalty of the coercive leaders and the rank-and-file. Poorly funded police departments are often unable to take action in a timely manner to crack down on protestors before they go on the street (Kang, 2003).

According to the Chinese fiscal system, the territorial governments control the “purse” of local police departments. Although the national government periodically provides fiscal aid to local police organizations, the bulk of police budgets have been paid from the coffers of the local governments (Tanner and Green, 2007: 657).

While including local police chiefs in the leadership is a central initiative, police budget is more of a local political bargaining process that involves local governments and public security departments. Our qualitative interviews with local police chiefs show that the budgetary process is a combination of regular fiscal allocation and irregular bargaining. At the end of each year, the police departments need to prepare a budget proposal to be submitted to the territorial governments. Based on these proposals, fiscal revenue, social conditions and the last year’s budget, the government creates the budget that will then be passed by local people’s congresses. In addition to this regular routine, bargaining is involved. Our fieldwork in High County, Hainan province, shows that successful repression of social protests can significantly increase the police chief’s leverage in bargaining with the government for funding. The successful suppression of a large-scale peasant protest in 2008 brought the police department a 790,000-yuan increase in the following year (Wang, 2010).

Is police funding responsive to the decline of the state sector? With massive privatization in the late 1990s and a large number of labor protests organized by laid-off SOE employees (Cai, 2006; Lee, 2007; Chen, 2011), we expect to see an increase in police funding to substitute for the role previously played by SOEs in monitoring the population. We test the following working hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Police funding is inversely correlated with the size of state-owned enterprise employees. As the share of state-owned enterprise employees in the total urban labor force declines, police funding increases, *ceteris paribus*.

To test this hypothesis, we collected a time-series cross-section data set of provincial police funding in the 1995–2006 time period. The data frame is limited to these 12 years and to the provincial level because of data availability. The data are collected from Local Finance Statistics Reports published by the Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China. The reports were previously classified but are now public and available at Beijing's National Library.

The dependent variable is police funding. We measure it in four different ways. The first is **per capita police funding**, calculated by dividing police funding by the total population in a province. Per capita police funding measures the absolute level of police funding adjusted by population size. Second is **log transformed per capita police funding**. This measure takes the natural log of per capita police funding to test whether there is a diminishing return in the effects of the independent variables on police funding. Third is the proportion of police funding in the total government budget (**police funding/budget**), which is calculated by dividing police funding by the total government budget. This measures the priority of provincial governments given to the police. Fourth is the share of police funding in GDP (**police funding/GDP**). This is a conventional measure used in cross-national studies of welfare spending (Hicks and Swank, 1992). It measures the size of police funding adjusted by the size of the economy.

The major explanatory variable is the size of the state sector. We expect that police control should be strengthened in places where a large proportion of the population is not employed in the state sector. We measure the size of the state sector by the proportion of SOE employees in the total urban employees (**SOE labor**). It is divided by the size of urban labor force rather than the total population because SOEs in China only exist in urban areas.

To control for other ownerships, we also include the proportion of urban workforce that is employed in the private sector (**Private**). This includes the labor employed in domestic private enterprises (*siying qiye*) and those who are self-employed (*geti*). We also include the weight of foreign capital invested by ethnic Chinese from within the “China circle”—Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan—in the total GDP (**China circle**) and the weight of foreign capital invested by foreign investors in the total GDP (**Foreign**) to account for foreign ownerships and the “openness” of a province.

A province's fiscal health is also taken into account. As Bellin (2004: 144) argues, fiscal health is an important predictor for a state's coercive capacity. We include the total provincial per capita fiscal **revenue**. This includes both the government's budgetary income and extra-budgetary income. As a usual practice, the variable is log transformed to capture its diminishing marginal effect on police funding.

Tanner and Green (2007: 660) notice that “police funding levels are now principally a function of local levels of economic development and political support for security, rather than actual social order conditions.” To control for the level of economic development, we also include **per capita GDP** (log transformed) and **GDP growth** rate. We expect that richer provinces and faster-growing provinces should invest more in the police because they have more financial resources to do so, and they must address more social contradictions. In particular, rich provinces tend to have more migrant population and labor protests, and fast-growing provinces tend to have more land disputes due to real estate development. These challenges all demand that the government focuses more on security work to maintain social stability.

Local statistics on protests are never public. Only national level estimates are available for certain years. Media reports on local protests are incomplete because local governments censor most protests. To control for this “demand-side” variable, we include some proxies. First is the weight of tertiary industry in the overall GDP (**Tertiary**). A significant number of protests in recent years has been labor protests in manufacturing industries (Cai, 2006; Lee, 2007). A higher weight of tertiary industry in the economy means more migrant population, higher labor mobility, and higher possibility for labor protests. Second is the proportion of urban population in the overall provincial population (**Urban population**). This measure captures the urban bias of social movements and security work. Since most large-scale protests in China happened in urban cities, the government might be particularly concerned with security work in urban areas. We also control for the size of the population (log transformed) in a province (**Population**). If a protest is a random draw from the population, the number of protests will increase as the population size increases. Next, we control for the number of first-instance cases (log transformed) accepted by courts each year (**Cases**). This indicator, including the number of crimes, measures how contentious the society is in a province at a certain time. More social contradictions will breed more litigation, which will put more pressure on the security system. Finally, we include two variables to control for the level of legal development. One is the log-transformed number of law firms (**Law firms**), and second is the log-transformed number of lawyers (**Lawyers**). We expect that provinces with better access to legal services should be less contentious and, therefore, have lower levels of police funding. Descriptions and summary statistics of all variables are in the [Appendix](#).

Before we engage in regression analysis, we will first show some descriptive patterns of the data. [Fig. 4](#) shows the trend of the dependent variable (Per capita police funding) and the independent variable (SOE labor) over the period of 1995–2006 across provinces in China.¹⁶ It is evident that in all provinces, SOE labor has decreased over time, while per capita police funding has increased. This provides preliminary evidence that the police are filling the gap left by the decline of the state sector. The Chinese government has increased police funding in provinces where the state sector loses control over the population.

¹⁶ Beijing and Shanghai are excluded in [Fig. 4](#) because of their high values of per capita police funding. Including these two provinces makes the graph less readable. However, the patterns shown in these two provinces are not different from those of other provinces. A graph is available upon request.

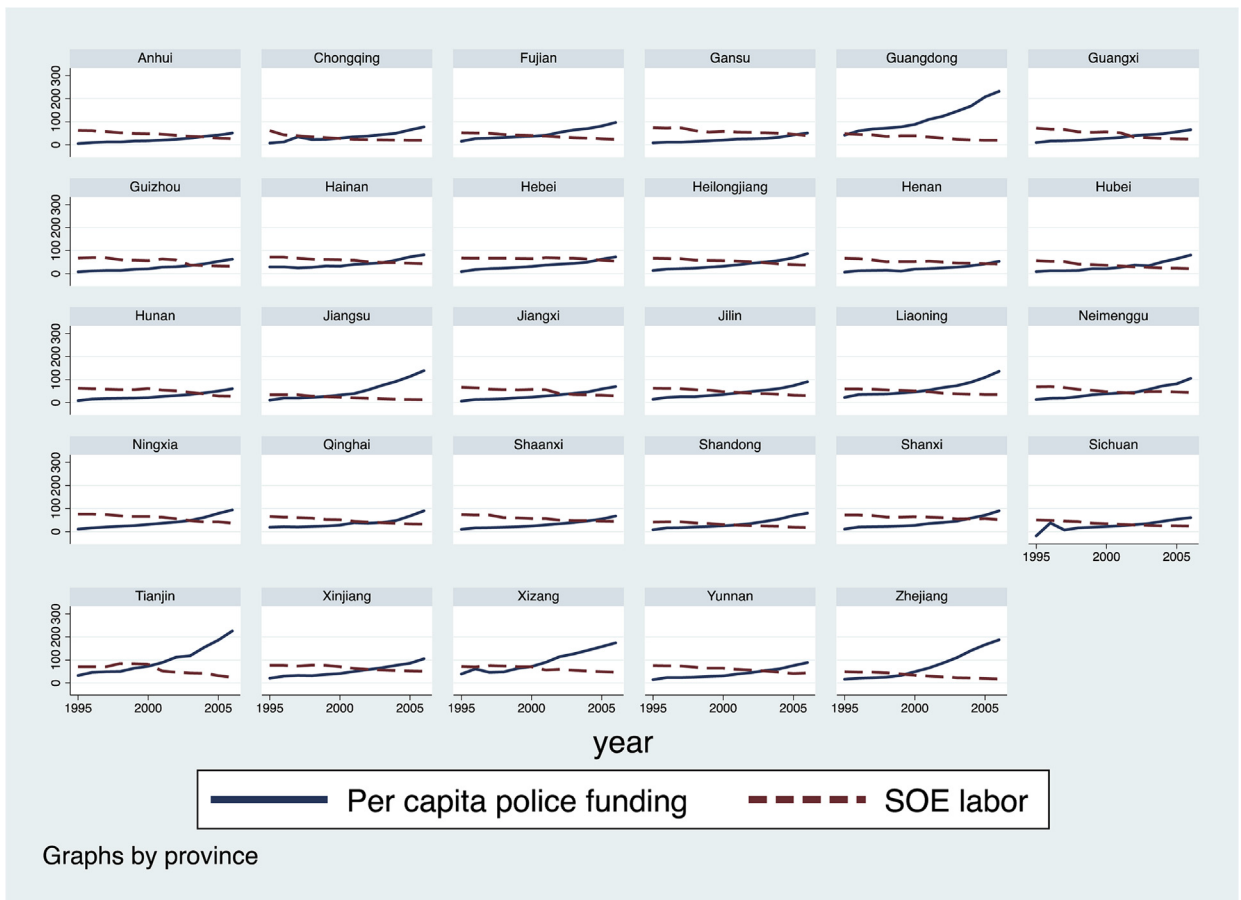


Fig. 4. Trends of per capita police funding (yuan) and SOE labor across Chinese provinces (1995–2006). Sources: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2009).

We test the hypothesis using regressions. A problem of the data set is missing data. While most variables are complete, some control variables have non-ignorable missing values, for example, cases, law firms and lawyers. A conventional way to deal with missing data is listwise deletion. However, as King et al. (2001: 51) argue, if the missing process is *non-ignorable*—that is, if the probability that a cell is missing depends on the unobserved value of the missing response—listwise deletion can bias conclusions. To create balanced matrices for time-series cross-section analyses, we employed the multiple imputation technique to impute five multiple matrices with complete data on each variable.¹⁷

A pooled time-series cross-section analysis allows us to examine the variation of police funding both across space and over time. All the 31 provinces over the time period of 1995–2006 ($N = 31, T = 12$) are included in the following analysis. To test the hypothesis, an error correction model (ECM) is specified as follows¹⁸:

$$\Delta \text{Police funding}_{i,t} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Police funding}_{i,t-1} + \beta_0 \Delta \text{SOE labor}_{i,t} + \beta_1 \text{SOE labor}_{i,t-1} + X\beta + \lambda_t + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

In Equation (1), $\Delta \text{Police funding}_{i,t}$ is the first-differenced dependent variable, which is measured in four different ways—per capita, log transformed per capita, percentage in total budget, and percentage in GDP; α_0 is the intercept, and α_1 is the marginal effect of the lagged dependent variable. Lagged dependent variables are included to eliminate serial correlation of the errors (Beck and Katz, 2011). Another rationale of including the lag is that the budgeting process is incremental: this year’s budget is based on last year’s (Wildavsky and Caiden, 1997). β_0 is the marginal effect of the first-differenced SOE labor, which is measured by the change in the share of SOE labor in the total urban labor from time $t-1$ to t . As De Boef and Keele show, β_0 measures the short-run effect of SOE labor (De Boef and Keele, 2008). β_0 is expected to be negative because SOE labor should have a negative

¹⁷ For multiple imputation, we used Amelia II (Version 1.5-5, built: 2011-11-2) designed by James Honaker, Gary King and Matthew Blackwell. Please refer to <http://gking.harvard.edu/amelia/> for more information. For analyses of multiple imputed data sets, we used the STATA *mist* package contributed by Kenneth Scheve.

¹⁸ To follow the suggestions of De Boef and Keele (2008), the model is specified in a general way, which puts no restrictions on the dynamic components.

impact on police funding. The quantity $\beta_1 - \beta_0$ gives the short-run effect of SOE labor $_{i,t-1}$, which is the one-year lag of the independent variable. \mathbf{X} is a vector of controls including *Private*, *China circle*, *Foreign*, *Per capita fiscal revenue (log)*, *GDP per capita (log)*, *Tertiary*, *GDP growth*, *Urban population*, *Population (log)*, *Cases (log)*, *Law firms (log)*, and *Lawyers (log)*. λ_t is the time “fixed effect” that includes dummy variables for each year. The year dummies capture the remaining serial variation not explained by the independent variables, such as national policy shift, for example, crackdown campaigns (*yanda*). Finally, γ_i is the unit “fixed effects,” or rather, province dummy variables. These dummies take into account unexplained regional heterogeneity, for example, historical factors. $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ is the error term.

Pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with panel corrected standard errors are used to estimate Equation (1) (Beck and Katz, 1995).

Table 2 presents the results. Column 1 shows the estimates when per capita police funding is the dependent variable, column 2 when log transformed per capita police funding is the dependent variable, column 3 when percentage of police funding in total budget is the dependent variable, and column 4 when percentage of police funding in GDP is the dependent variable.

Table 2
Determinants of provincial police funding in China (1995–2006).

Model	Pooled OLS with panel-corrected standard errors			
	Δ pc police funding	Δ pc police funding (log)	Δ police funding/budget	Δ police funding/GDP
Variable	Coefficient (P.C.S.E)	Coefficient (P.C.S.E)	Coefficient (P.C.S.E)	Coefficient (P.C.S.E)
pc police funding $_{i,t-1}$	0.051 (0.037)	–	–	–
pc police funding (log) $_{i,t-1}$	–	–0.714*** (0.070)	–	–
police funding/Budget $_{i,t-1}$	–	–	–0.487*** (0.077)	–
police funding/GDP $_{i,t-1}$	–	–	–	–1.169*** (0.082)
Δ SOE labor $_{i,t}$	–0.193** (0.091)	–0.003** (0.001)	–0.016*** (0.005)	–0.002* (0.001)
SOE labor $_{i,t-1}$	–0.150** (0.076)	–0.004*** (0.001)	–0.008** (0.004)	–0.004*** (0.001)
Δ Private $_{i,t}$	0.075 (0.114)	–0.002 (0.001)	–0.012* (0.007)	–0.001 (0.001)
Private $_{i,t-1}$	0.186** (0.079)	0.000 (0.001)	0.004 (0.004)	–0.002*** (0.001)
Δ China circle $_{i,t}$	–0.017 (0.159)	0.000 (0.002)	–0.001 (0.008)	0.000 (0.004)
China circle $_{i,t-1}$	–0.038 (0.219)	0.001 (0.003)	–0.003 (0.008)	0.000 (0.005)
Δ Foreign $_{i,t}$	0.036 (0.107)	0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.005)	0.000 (0.003)
Foreign $_{i,t-1}$	0.002 (0.101)	0.002 (0.002)	0.004 (0.005)	0.001 (0.003)
Δ Revenue $_{i,t}$	24.777*** (3.788)	0.727*** (0.055)	–0.970*** (0.176)	0.218*** (0.036)
Revenue $_{i,t-1}$	16.274*** (4.398)	0.536*** (0.065)	0.049 (0.185)	0.294*** (0.042)
Δ Per capita GDP $_{i,t}$	–22.326* (13.141)	–0.176 (0.210)	–0.376 (0.885)	–0.471*** (0.169)
Per capita GDP $_{i,t-1}$	–8.827 (6.583)	–0.348*** (0.113)	–0.464 (0.346)	–0.698*** (0.134)
Δ Tertiary $_{i,t}$	0.009 (0.047)	0.000 (0.001)	–0.001 (0.005)	0.001 (0.001)
Tertiary $_{i,t-1}$	–0.129 (0.159)	0.003 (0.002)	–0.010 (0.008)	0.008** (0.003)
Δ GDP growth $_{i,t}$	0.314 (0.342)	0.001 (0.005)	0.014 (0.021)	–0.002 (0.003)
GDP growth $_{i,t-1}$	0.416 (0.313)	0.000 (0.005)	0.018 (0.019)	0.000 (0.005)
Δ Urban population $_{i,t}$	0.267** (0.107)	0.002 (0.002)	0.012 (0.009)	0.000 (0.001)
Urban population $_{i,t-1}$	0.291*** (0.096)	0.005*** (0.002)	0.026*** (0.006)	0.003 (0.002)
Δ Population $_{i,t}$	59.895 (68.273)	–0.490 (0.540)	0.180 (2.524)	–0.090 (0.443)
Population $_{i,t-1}$	42.031** (19.147)	–0.511** (0.215)	–0.731 (0.854)	–0.204 (0.269)
Δ Cases $_{i,t}$	–0.022 (1.061)	–0.019 (0.022)	0.054 (0.061)	–0.018 (0.025)
Cases $_{i,t-1}$	0.014 (1.466)	–0.022 (0.024)	0.098 (0.101)	–0.029 (0.036)
Δ Law firms $_{i,t}$	6.223 (3.925)	–0.079 (0.062)	–0.169 (0.229)	–0.015 (0.064)
Law firms $_{i,t-1}$	11.527 (6.193)	–0.117 (0.067)	0.071 (0.254)	–0.083 (0.090)
Δ Lawyers $_{i,t}$	–0.320 (3.465)	0.023 (0.048)	0.044 (0.148)	0.026 (0.044)
Lawyers $_{i,t-1}$	–4.172 (2.804)	0.021 (0.033)	0.064 (0.172)	0.038 (0.037)
Intercept	–379.050** (179.251)	7.334*** (1.883)	8.872 (7.247)	7.326* (2.758)
Province dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	328	327	328	328

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Dataset compiled by the author.

Models with different measures of police funding show a consistent result, that is, police funding is inversely correlated with SOE labor. The marginal effect of SOE labor on police funding is significantly negative across all four models. The magnitude of the effect is very substantial. For example, a 10% decrease of the share of SOE labor in total urban labor would immediately bring an average 1.93 yuan/person increase in police funding. Considering the average per capita police funding is about 50 yuan/person, this is almost a 4% raise. Based on the formula put forth by De Boef and Keele (2008: 191), we also calculate the long-term effect of SOE labor on per capita police funding to be –2.95, and this effect is significant at the 0.01 level. This means that over a long period of time, a 10% decrease in the share of SOE labor in total urban labor would bring a 29.5 yuan/person increase in police funding, which is over half of the average per capita police funding. The findings are supportive of hypothesis 1.

Among other ownerships, the effect of Private is mixed. In column 1, the effect of Private is positive, which is consistent with our expectation, while in other columns, it is negative. Similarly, the effects of China circle and Foreign are also mixed. While Foreign has a consistently positive effect, the influence of China circle is inconclusive. None of these effects is significant. Our interpretation of the mixed effects of other ownerships is that these variables do not completely capture the population outside the state sector. As Cai et al. (2008: 203–204) show, a notable feature of the labor market in China is informalization, that is, a large proportion of workers are working in the “unregulated private sector.” The share of the informal labor force in the total urban labor started rising in the late 1990s when privatization began and reached 40% in 2003. These workers, however, are not counted in official statistical yearbooks because they or their employers are not officially registered. The rise of informal employment, rather than labor in the official private sector and foreign enterprises, might explain the rise in police funding. However, due to data limitations, we are not able to test this hypothesis.

Among the control variables, we first find that the budgetary process is quite “sticky.” The amount in the previous year has a big impact on the funding next year, and this impact is negative. This suggests that provinces with higher levels of police funding tend to have slower increases. Second, the findings confirm Bellin’s (2004) argument that fiscal health is crucial to sustaining the coercive organizations. We find that per capita fiscal revenue has a significantly positive effect on police funding. One exception is in column 3, where the share of police funding in total fiscal budget is the dependent variable; the effect is negative. This suggests that as the “pie” grows larger, provinces tend to allocate a smaller “slice” to the police, although the absolute amount has increased. Third, the level of economic development, surprisingly, has a negative effect on police funding, meaning that the police in developed provinces receive less funding. We propose two possible explanations. First, as Cai (2008) shows, there is a trade-off between concessions and repression. Provinces with more wealth are more able to make concessions, for example, providing compensations. Second, it might be because the welfare in these rich provinces gives the residents a sense of satisfaction and, therefore, decreases the need for coercion. This is an interesting topic for future research. In addition, our proxies for social opposition show expected results. Provinces with a large urban population are more likely to fund their police. This reflects the urban bias for repression. The prior experience of urban uprisings strengthens the CCP’s grip in urban areas. Finally, the “rule-of-law” proxies do not show any significant results, implying that the court system plays a very limited role in maintaining social stability.

In summary, the findings support our major hypothesis, that is, higher levels of police funding are associated with weak state control of the population through SOEs. This implies that the CCP has strengthened the police financially in places where the state sector loses its control of the population. By financing the police, the CCP has extended the “scope” of its coercion in the face of massive privatization. However, we also find many unexpected results such as the effects of private and foreign ownerships and the level of economic development. These are beyond the focus of this study but create topics for future research.

5. Concluding remarks

Single-party regimes survive longer than military regimes or personalistic dictatorships because of elite cohesion (Geddes, 1999). Grzymala-Busse (2011) reminds us that regime durability—the capacity to survive crises—is different from regime stability. Facing a series of crises including the 1989 democratic movement, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, the 1999 *Falun Gong* protest, ethnic unrest in Western regions, numerous domestic demonstrations, and “waves” of democratization globally, the CCP has manifested an exceptionally high level of durability. The prolonged and intensive struggle during early stages of the Party formation and development certainly taught the Party the importance of building institutions (Huntington, 1968; Smith, 2005). Facing the challenges emerging during the reform era, the CCP manages to consolidate its rule by employing the *nomenklatura* system and the fiscal system to enhance the “cohesion” and extend the “scope” of its police.

Contrary to most existing theories of authoritarian resilience in China, we offer a new perspective. We argue that the strong state coercive capacity, in addition to economic and societal variables, explains the exceptional robustness of the Chinese authoritarian state. Relying on mixed methods, we demonstrate that the CCP has granted police chiefs “spoils of public office” to secure their loyalty and increased police funding to extend the scope of the police control.¹⁹

The findings challenge the conventional wisdom that privatization undermines authoritarian rulers’ grip of power by depriving their access to resources or by breeding a vibrant civil society. The famous Washington Consensus also assumes that market reforms and democratization would develop in unison. However, we demonstrate that market reforms have increased the capacity of the Chinese coercive organization, which as a consequence has contributed to the durability of the authoritarian regime.

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¹⁹ At the November 2013 Party plenum, Chinese authorities announced the creation of a new State Security Committee—charged with supervising both foreign and domestic security matters—and chaired by Xi Jinping himself. As of submission of this article, details of the committee and its responsibilities have not yet been released. Presumably, these will be released by the National People’s Congress meeting in the spring of 2014.

Appendix. Summary statistics

Variable	Definition	N	Mean	Std. Err.
Δpc police funding $_{i,t}$	First difference of per capita police funding	341	9.457	0.612
pc police funding $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of per capita police funding	341	50.912	2.967
Δpc police funding (log) $_{i,t}$	First difference of per capita police funding (log transformed)	340	0.174	0.010
pc police funding (log) $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of per capita police funding (log transformed)	340	3.595	0.042
Δ police funding/Budget $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of police funding in total fiscal expenditure	341	0.056	0.028
police funding/Budget $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of police funding in total fiscal expenditure	341	3.892	0.051
Δ police funding/GDP $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of police funding in GDP	341	0.030	0.007
police funding/GDP $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of police funding in GDP	341	0.523	0.015
Δ SOE labor $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of SOE labor in total urban labor	341	-2.851	0.200
SOE labor $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of SOE labor in total urban labor	341	49.885	0.846
Δ Private $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of private sector labor in total urban labor	341	2.137	0.214
Private $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of private sector labor in total urban labor	341	24.195	0.770
Δ China circle $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of "China circle" capital in GDP	341	-0.357	0.629
China circle $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of "China circle" capital in GDP	341	3.011	0.715
Δ Foreign $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of foreign capital in GDP	341	-0.023	0.721
Foreign $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of foreign capital in GDP	341	1.824	0.694
Δ Revenue $_{i,t}$	First difference of per capita fiscal revenue (log transformed)	341	0.149	0.008
Revenue $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of per capita fiscal revenue (log transformed)	341	6.161	0.044
Δ Per capita GDP $_{i,t}$	First difference of per capita GDP (log transformed)	341	0.117	0.002
Per capita GDP $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of per capita GDP (log transformed)	341	8.932	0.035
Δ Tertiary $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of service industry in GDP	341	0.636	0.160
Tertiary $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of service industry in GDP	341	39.399	0.363
Δ GDP growth $_{i,t}$	First difference of GDP growth rate	341	0.148	0.086
GDP growth $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of GDP growth rate	341	10.793	0.126
Δ Urban population $_{i,t}$	First difference of percentage of urban population in total population	341	0.830	0.127
Urban population $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of percentage of urban population in total population	341	32.841	0.900
Δ Population $_{i,t}$	First difference of total population (log transformed)	341	0.009	0.000
Population $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of total population (log transformed)	341	7.996	0.049
Δ Cases $_{i,t}$	First difference of number of first-instance court cases (log transformed)	333	-0.004	0.031
Cases $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of number of first-instance court cases (log transformed)	337	12.077	0.049
Δ Law firms $_{i,t}$	First difference of number of law offices (log transformed)	341	0.042	0.009
Law firms $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of number of law offices (log transformed)	341	5.654	0.036
Δ Lawyers $_{i,t}$	First difference of number of lawyers (log transformed)	341	0.039	0.014
Lawyers $_{i,t-1}$	One year lag of number of lawyers (log transformed)	341	7.969	0.041

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