

## Ch.20 Reports of Social Unrest: Basic Characteristics, Trends and Patterns, 2003-12

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A persistent question that preoccupies scholars who study authoritarian China is social stability and durability of the communist regime. The authoritarian government that is obsessed with social stability looks for any sign of unrest which may pose a threat to the regime. It invests in hundreds of millions of dollars every year in stability maintenance, Internet monitoring, and propaganda to root out would-be protestors.

Despite that, gleaned from various media reports, we surmise that the number of social unrest cases—a major threat to the Communist Party’s rule—has been on the rise. While that may be true, the frequency, size, scope, grievances and impact on the regime of social unrest are still rather illusive. Publicly available official figures had indicated a total of 8,700 “mass incidents” in 1993, and it increased by ten-fold to 87,000 in 2005. However, the authorities have ceased issuing any official figures since then. A frequently cited estimate by Sun Liping, a researcher at Tsinghua University, suggests that there were 180,000 incidents in 2010. (Orlik, T., 2012)

This chapter addresses these important issues by analyzing a dataset of social unrest in China constructed from more than 2,500 cases during 2003-2012. The dataset is constructed based on coding of unrest cases reported in the Chinese language and English media.

The chapter begins by analyzing official definitions of the term “mass incidents”, which is used in China to describe social unrest cases. Despite its frequent usage, the meaning of “mass incidents” is shrouded in confusion and little understood. We underline three important characteristics in the official definitions, which are illegality, mobs and public order disturbance nature of “mass incidents”. Next, the chapter introduces the social unrest in China (SUIC) event dataset we have built which covers a 10-year period from 2003 to 2012. The chapter will introduce definitions, basic characteristics, trends and patterns of the cases included in the dataset. Land-related grievances, namely those that have arisen due to land expropriations, demolitions, evictions and relocations, account for nearly 40 percent of all cases. Labor disputes in state-owned enterprises, and private and foreign-owned firms are the next major motivators of social unrest. We highlight the saliency of “social anger-venting incidents” due to their magnitude, frequent violence, and ability to mobilize a large number of participants who are not directly impacted by the events.

## Official Definitions of “Mass Incidents”

The Chinese concept of social unrest is rather dissimilar to western notions. While western conception of social unrest typically connotes some forms of political actions, be it collective actions, social movements, social resistance, riots or revolutions, the Chinese understand the term to mean a congregation that is unsanctioned by the authorities, and commitment of an act that disturbs public order. Granted, genuine political revolutions, social resistance or movements, are rare events in authoritarian China. Therefore, the Chinese concept is a much broader umbrella that encompasses a large number of scenarios and activities that do not fall within the western confines. That is why the Chinese have used the term “mass incidents” (*quntixing shijian*) to describe ‘social unrest’ as understood in the west.

Notwithstanding that, the official lexicons had evolved over time. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the term “mass incidents” was often used in conjunction with “troublemaking” (*naoshi*), “outburst” (*tufa*), or “security” (*zhi’an*). The official terms used to describe incidents of these nature included “mass outbursts” or “mass spontaneous incidents” “mass troublemaking”, and “mass security incidents”. It was only from 2003 onwards that “mass incidents” became the single unified official terminology for these events. (Xiao, T., 2012)

In addition, the authorities have never provided an unambiguous definition for the term. According to the *Dictionary of Party Building* “mass incidents” refer to ‘events that are triggered by social conflicts, which involve groups of people who come into formation spontaneously, form congregations that lack a legal basis, engage in behavior that create verbal or physical clashes, in order to express their own demands or advocate their own interests, or to vent their dissatisfaction, the outcome of which is serious adverse impact on social order and social stability.’ (Ye and Lu, 2009)

According to Xiao (2012), relevant Public Security regulations issued in the 1990s and in 2000 underscored two common characteristics of these events—unlawfulness (*weifa*), and involvement of a mass of people (*qunti*) or a mob (*juzhong*). All congregations are deemed unlawful in China unless organizers have successfully secured an approval from the authorities. This renders any sort of rallies, marches, demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and protests—unlawful—by definition. Collective petitioning involving more than five people is also considered an unlawful assembly. A mob obviously involves a group of people, though the number required for it to pass the threshold of a “mass incident” has never been explicitly spelt out.

In 2000, the Public Security Bureau issued a regulation on “mass incidents” that included the following examples: a) unlawful rallies, marches, and demonstrations that involve a large number of people; b) any rally, march, demonstration, and collective petitioning that seriously disturbs public order or endangers public security; c) any socially destabilizing strike action; d) large scale congregations organized by any illegal

organization or cult; e) mobbing or attacks on any government agency, party or military unit, radio or television station, foreign embassy or consulate; f) mobbing or attacks on any public transportation hub or public place; g) mobs or riots in large-scale events or celebrations; g) mobbing or looting of any government or private warehouse or logistic hub; h) large-scale mob fights; and i) any group act that seriously endangers public security, and social order. (Public Security Bureau, 2000)

The exhaustive list underlines the fact that any event that poses a threat to public order or public security could be officially deemed a “mass incident”. This broadens the scope considerably to cover incidents such as attacks on private properties, football hooliganism, drunken fights, and other events that lack any social grievance. They fall within the ambit owing to their unruly nature, and threat to “public order disturbance”.

Additionally, a 2004 central government-issued work document underlined “mass incidents” as events that have arisen from “conflicts between and among private individuals”, as opposed to the anti-system or anti-regime protests. In our view, this central document provides an *additional* dimension to the definitions instead of giving it a strict qualification. In other words, we understand official definitions of “mass incidents” to include all unlawful and mob-like activities, driven by anti-system or anti-government sentiments, as well as by conflicts among private individuals. It is worth emphasizing that “mass incidents” go beyond what are commonly perceived as anti-government or anti-regime group actions.

### **Event Identification in SUIC: Sources, Criteria and Definition**

SUIC is a hand-coded dataset. The coders scoured the English and Chinese-language Internet sites and media databases for reports on “mass incidents”. English sources were particularly useful for incidents that occurred in the first-half of the 2000s when the Chinese-language Internet sites were relatively undeveloped at that time. A number of incidents in the earlier years were obtained from the Lexis-Nexis database that collects media reports from the South China Morning Post, AFP and AP. In the second half of 2000s, several human rights organizations based in China and overseas began reporting and documenting incidents on a regular basis. The SUIC has benefited tremendously from the emergence of 64Tianwang, Molihua, Radio Free Asia, the China Labor Bulletin. The dataset has also drawn cases from national and local Chinese-language newspapers, such as *Xinhua* (New China News Agency) Daily, *Fazhi Ribao* (Legal Daily), Southern Weekend, *Caijing* (Finance) among others. When certain reports lack or present conflicting details, the coders make an attempt to crosscheck facts from other news sites.

On criteria of inclusion in the dataset, we follow the official definitions of the Chinese authorities because one of SUIC’s objectives is to capture a snapshot of what qualify as “mass incidents” in China. The search terms include “*kangyi*” (protests), “*jingzuo*” (sit-ins), “*saoluan*” or “*baoluan*” (riots), “*shiwei*” (demonstrations), “*jihui*” (rallies), “*youxing*”

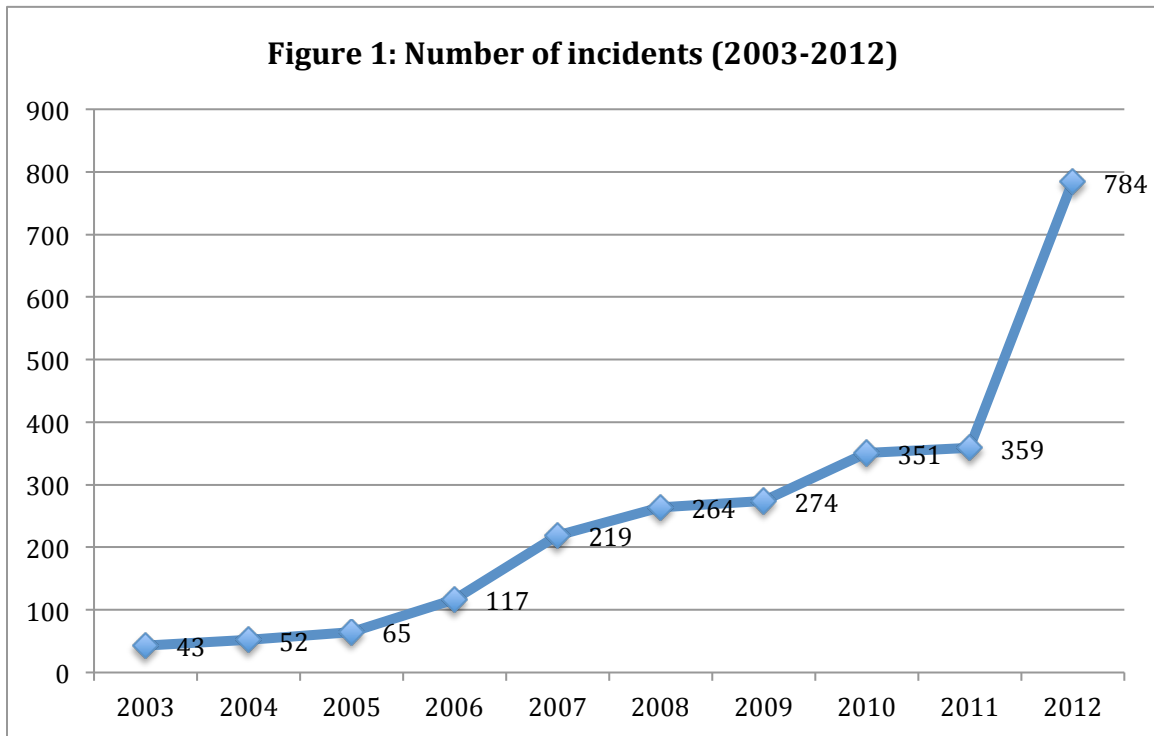
(marches), “*minyuan*” (grievance), “*quntixing shijian*” (mass incidents), and “*raoluan shehui zhixu*” or “*raoluan gonggong zhixu*” (public order disturbance). Notwithstanding that, incidents of a public-order-disturbance nature that occur on a daily basis could be countless. We were therefore quite selective in including these events, especially if they inform little about underlying social grievances.

As mentioned, the authorities have never made clear about the threshold for the number of participants in a “mass incident”. Some Chinese scholars suggest incidents involving 10 or 15 more participants should be considered “mass incidents”. An overwhelming majority of the events in SUIC consists of more than 10 participants. For collectively petitioning, we adhere to the official definition of more than five individuals for an event to qualify as a “mass incident”. However, we also include self-immolation cases often involving a single individual because we perceive that as a protest of desperation. Self-immolation cases have risen in the recent years, owing to the increased salience of land-related and religious reasons.

SUIC contains a total of 2528 cases from 2003 to 2012. Though many of them occurred for more than one day, subsequent events are not counted, but coded as a different duration. Despite that SUIC captures only a snapshot of the frequently cited 180,000 “mass incidents” annually, we believe that repeated cases may partly account for the disparity. Public order disturbances that do not exhibit an anti-government tendency which are largely excluded from the current dataset could be another reason for the discrepancy. SUIC is also subject to the following caveats. To the extent that media reports are biased towards larger incidents, and those that create more damages to properties and result in more casualties, our dataset is predisposed to those cases. A potentially significant drawback is development of the Internet and independent journalism in China has resulted in higher density of cases reported in the second half of the period covered in the dataset. We should bear these caveats in mind when interpreting the data, particularly the time series trends.

### **Descriptive Statistics: Trends and Patterns**

The number of incidents increased steadily throughout the period from 2003 to 2012, as Figure 1 illustrates. Notably, it increased steadily from 2003 to 2011, and rose sharply in 2012. However, the trend over time should be interpreted with caution. The Internet in China was more developed in 2012 than was the case in the early 2000s. Most independent journalist organizations from which most of the cases in the dataset were drawn did not even exist in the earlier period. Thus, we had to rely on traditional newspaper outlets, such as South China Morning Post and the People’s Daily, for notification of incidents that happened in the earlier period.



Two-thirds (67 percent) of the cases happened in urban areas, referring to prefecture-level cities, provincial capitals, and municipalities, according to official definitions. The other one-third (33 percent) happened in rural areas, which are county-level cities, townships and villages.

In terms of duration, 90 percent of cases occurred only for a single day, 9 percent occurred for between two and seven days, while the remaining 1 percent were long-term incidents that persisted for more than seven days, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Duration of cases (N=2528)**

Duration	Number of cases	Percentage of total
1 day	2263	89.5
2-7 days	229	9.1
> 7 days	36	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2528</b>	<b>100</b>

Size of protest is measured by number of people involved in the actions, not including the police or security personnel sent to maintain order or contain the actions. Protest size seems to be normally distributed. As Table 2 suggests, the largest category is 101-

1000 people (38 percent), followed by 24 percent in the 1001-10000 category, and 17 percent in the 11-100 category. 4 percent of the cases involved fewer than 10 people, and 3 percent involved more than 10,000 people.

**Table 2: Size of protests (N=2528)**

<b>No. of people involved</b>	<b>No. of incidents</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1-10</b>	109	4.3
<b>11-100</b>	421	16.7
<b>101-1000</b>	967	38.2
<b>1001-10,000</b>	605	23.9
<b>&gt;10,000</b>	71	2.8
<b>NA</b>	355	14.0
<b>Total</b>	2528	100

Cases related to land expropriation, demolition and relocation were the single largest category, accounting for more than one-third of the total (36 percent). We decided to group these three categories together because it is often challenging to disentangle them: land expropriation is usually followed by demolition, and demolition and relocation usually go hand-in-hand together. The second largest category is labor disputes in private or foreign-owned companies, most frequently involving migrant workers (14 percent), labor disputes in state-owned enterprises (11 percent), environment-related incidents (6 percent), and cases instigated by brutality of the police or city patrol (5 percent), respectively. See Table 3 for definitions of various grievances, and Table 4 for their frequencies.

**Table 3: Types of Grievances and Examples**

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Grievances</b>	<b>Examples</b>
ED	Education-related	Incidents staged by teachers over low wages and poor working conditions; parents against shoddy construction that killed children during Sichuan earthquake
ET	Ethnically-motivated	Incidents staged by the Uighurs and Tibetans, or disputes between the Hans and ethnic minorities
EV	Environment	PX plants and other chemical factories; dams and hydropower plants; air pollution; contaminated drinking water
FD	Freedom & Human Rights	One-child policy, human rights, religions, falungong, etc
HE	Health-related	Disputes taken place in hospitals, and over health-issues, such as AIDS and food safety

HO	Homeowners	Incidents staged by urban homeowners
IV	Investment	Investors' protests over fraud and ponzi schemes
LR	Land rights	Related to land expropriations, demolition, relocation in rural and urban areas, often over low compensation, corruption, violence, etc.
MD	Labor disputes in private firms	Labor disputes in private and foreign-owned firms, often involved migrant workers' complaints of low, owed wages and poor working conditions
MJ	Miscarriage of justice	Incidents triggered by what participants saw as a miscarriage of justice, even though they are not directly affected by the incidents.
MS	Miscellaneous	Incidents that do not come under any other category, such as collective petitions for unknown or unreported reasons
NP	Nationalist	Connected to nationalism, such as Anti-Japan protests
PB	Police brutality	Incidents caused by brutality and unjustified use of force by the police and city patrol ( <i>chengguan</i> )
PM	Private Matters	Disputes between and among private individuals, but not against the state
SD	State-owned enterprise labor disputes	Labor disputes in state-owned enterprises, often over enterprise restructuring, inadequate retrenchment packages and pension schemes, etc.
TB	Taxi and Peditaxi cabs	Incidents staged by taxi and peditaxi drivers, often over low fares
TX	Tax-related	Incidents triggered by high taxes in rural and urban areas
VE	Veterans	Veterans' displeasure towards low or inadequate pensions

As we have argued elsewhere (Ong and Goebel, 2014), most of the protests in China are aimed at gaining redress for material grievances. Factory workers protest because they are paid low wages or are owed wages, or they suffer poor working conditions. Peasants resist because they receive inadequate compensation for giving up their land and houses. People take environmental grievances to the street because their drinking water has been contaminated, or air will be polluted by construction of a chemical plant. These grievances have not been generally framed as advocacy for improvement of labor or peasants' rights, even though they could have been that way. Following this logic, participants are restricted to the individuals whose material interests have been directly affected; those who are not direct victims have no reason to coalesce. Therefore, most protest size tends to be relatively small, and areas contained or localized, with no mobilization across regions or segments of the population.

Notwithstanding, there are some exceptions to these trends, as SUIC data has revealed. The exceptions are grievances such as miscarriage of justice, police or city patrol

brutality, and freedom or human rights cases, which are contestations of certain values or rights. Miscarriage of justice cases are incidents the immediate causes of which do not fit squarely into other categories. They often attract participants and onlookers, who are sympathetic over injustice in such cases, rather than those directly impacted by the events. In 2006, hundreds of people in Shaoyang, Hunan staged a protest because a local reporter who exposed corruption of a government official was given a jail sentence. In 2007, death of a student in Guang'an, Sichuan provoked more than a thousand people, including students and residents in the city, to protest because the alleged killer escaped justice because of he was related to the head of the local police. It is noteworthy that these cases are capable of mobilizing sympathizers across different segments of the populations, though the participants are still locality-specific.

Another similar grievance capable of marshaling a large number of participants who are direct victims is the brutality of the police or city patrols (*chengguan*). City patrols are para municipal officials tasked with enforcing local urban management by-laws, and maintaining urban management order. They are notorious for using unjustified force and whole gambits of violent tactics in their dealings with street vendors, hawkers, and migrant workers. These incidents are typically stories of some disadvantaged groups of societies, such as migrant workers, who die in police custody or are beaten to death by city patrol. Oppressive acts by those who misuse their powers against the weak often provoke widespread public anger, especially among migrant societies who feel they share the same plight. However, these cases are also typically contained within the localities, and have no cross-regional mobilization effect.

Freedom and human rights cases, such as protests over the one-child policy and the *Falun gong* cult, which could mobilize a large number of people across the society and geographical boundaries, are rare. Since they are typically targeted at the central government, they are promptly suppressed and participants prosecuted. The 1989 Tiananmen protests are classic examples of resistance over freedom and human rights.

**Table 4: Grievance Type and Frequency (N=2528)**

Grievance	Number of cases	Percentage of total
Education (ED)	75	3.0
Ethnic (ET)	69	2.7
Environment (EV)	142	5.7
Freedom/Rights (FD)	72	2.9
Health (HE)	27	1.1
Homeowners (HO)	30	1.2
Investment (IV)	31	1.2
Land Expropriation, Demolition & Relocation (LR)	900	35.6
Labor disputes in Private & Foreign-owned Companies (MD)	362	14.3



Miscarriage of Justice (MJ)	38	1.5
Miscellaneous (MS)	91	3.6
Nationalist (NP)	35	1.4
Police & City Patrol Brutality (PB)	137	5.4
Private Matters (PM)	48	1.9
State-owned Enterprise Labor Disputes (SD)	281	11.1
Taxi & Pedi cabs (TB)	141	5.6
Taxes (TX)	9	0.4
Veterans (VE)	37	1.5
Total	2528	100

There are several striking trends in the changes in proportion of grievances over time, as Table 5 illustrates. The percentage accounted for by land-related cases rose steadily throughout the 2000s, but peaked in 2010. At that point, land-related issues accounted for more than half of all cases. On the one hand, worker disputes in private and foreign owned companies that were almost non-existent in the early 2000s, climbed steadily to 20 percent in 2011 and 2012. On the other hand, state-owned enterprise worker disputes fell steadily throughout the period from 37 percent in 2003 to 6-8 percent in 2010-12. Taken together, the last two trends reflect the growing importance of private and foreign-owned companies in the economy, and the decline of the state-owned enterprises, and accompanying trends in labor unrest.

**Table 5: Proportions of Grievance Types (2003-2012) (N=2528)**

Grievance	Percentage of Total for the Year									
	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12
ED	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	1.8	5.7	3.7	3.1	2.5	2.4
ET	0.0	3.9	0.0	0.9	1.8	8.0	3.7	1.7	1.1	2.7
EV	0.0	3.9	7.7	3.4	5.9	7.2	6.9	5.4	4.2	6.3
FD	2.3	0.0	3.1	2.6	1.8	1.5	1.1	0.9	0.6	6.4
HE	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	1.8	0.4	0.7	1.1	1.7	1.2
HO	2.3	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.5	1.9	2.2	0.3	0.6	1.5
IV	2.3	1.9	1.5	2.6	0.5	3.0	2.2	0.3	0.0	1.2
LR	32.6	26.9	30.8	39.3	38.4	24.6	41.2	52.4	41.8	26.8
MD	0.0	9.6	7.7	5.1	12.3	11.7	8.0	10.3	20.3	20.0
MJ	2.3	1.9	1.5	2.6	1.8	1.1	1.5	1.7	1.1	1.4
MS	4.7	3.9	3.1	7.7	0.5	2.7	3.7	3.4	1.4	5.2
NP	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.1	0.0	2.9	0.0	2.7
PB	11.6	5.8	4.6	9.4	6.4	6.8	5.1	2.6	2.5	6.5
PM	2.3	0.0	0.0	3.4	2.7	3.0	1.1	4.0	1.4	0.9

<b>SD</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>8.4</b>
TB	0.0	7.7	6.2	2.6	4.1	8.7	2.2	2.6	12.5	4.9
TX	2.3	1.9	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.3
VE	0.0	0.0	4.6	0.0	2.7	1.1	1.8	1.1	1.4	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of provincial distribution of incidents, Guangdong and Sichuan have the highest proportion of cases, followed by Beijing, Hubei, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shanghai, respectively. These seven provinces and municipalities combined account for over 50 percent of total reported cases.

Are social unrest cases more likely to happen in economically developed regions? The number of incidents per se does not appear to be correlated with ranking of provincial or municipal income per capita. However, if we were to take into account the number of incidents on a per capita basis, it appears to be positively correlated with the per capita income ranking. If income per capita increases by 1 percent, the number of incidents per million people rises by 0.016. Beijing, Guangdong and Shanghai manifest the highest number of incidents on a per capita basis.

**Table 6: Per capita income ranking and number of incidents (N=2528)**

<b>Province/ Municipality</b>	<b>Ranking of provincial/municipal disposable income per capita</b>	<b>No. of incidents</b>	<b>Number of incidents per million people</b>
Shanghai	1	112	4.9
Beijing	2	173	8.8
Zhejiang	3	143	2.6
Guangdong	4	527	5.1
Jiangsu	5	133	1.7
Tianjin	6	28	2.2
Fujian	7	70	1.9
Shandong	8	96	1.0
Liaoning	9	22	0.5
Inner Mongolia	10	17	0.7
Chongqing	11	64	2.2
Hunan	12	86	1.3
Guangxi	13	83	1.8
Yunnan	14	52	1.1
Anhui	15	51	0.9

Hainan	16	34	3.9
Hubei	17	146	2.6
Shaanxi	18	89	2.4
Hebei	19	30	0.4
Henan	20	95	1.0
Shanxi	21	37	1.0
Sichuan	22	233	2.9
Jilin	23	20	0.7
Jiangxi	24	39	0.9
Ningxia	25	5	0.8
Guizhou	26	38	1.1
Tibet	27	12	4.0
Xinjiang	28	9	0.4
Heilongjiang	29	29	0.8
Qinghai	30	20	3.6
Gansu	31	35	1.4

Table A1 (in the Appendix) provides details of reported grievances in provinces and municipalities. In Guangdong, 38 percent of the cases were labor disputes in private and foreign-owned companies, another nearly 30 percent was related to land. In Sichuan, 34 percent of the cases were land-related, while 17 percent were state-owned enterprise labor disputes. In Beijing, 36 percent were due to land issues, and about 19 percent fall under “miscellaneous” category, which most commonly reflect collective petitioning. In Hebei, while 43 percent of the cases were land-related, 27 percent were labor disputes in state-owned enterprises. In Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, half of the cases were related to land-related issues. Taken together, these patterns suggest land-related issues were the primary grievance across most regions regardless of income level. Labor disputes in private and foreign-owned firms commonly involve migrant workers were most frequent in Guangdong, Shanghai and Jiangsu, where most of these firms populate. High proportion of labor disputes in state-owned enterprises could be found in the provinces of Jilin, Chongqing, Hubei, Hebei, and Shandong. Unsurprisingly, regions with the highest proportion of ethnic-related conflicts were those with significant minority populations, namely, Tibet, Qinghai, and Xinjiang.

### **Violence, Protest Size, and “Social Anger-Venting” Incidents**

Roughly half of the cases involved violence.<sup>2</sup> In particular, police or city patrol brutality (90 percent of which were violent), taxes (89 percent), ethnic (72 percent), land-related (64 percent), miscarriage of justice (61 percent), and environment (57 percent). Conversely, violence was noticeably absent in a significant proportion of these cases:

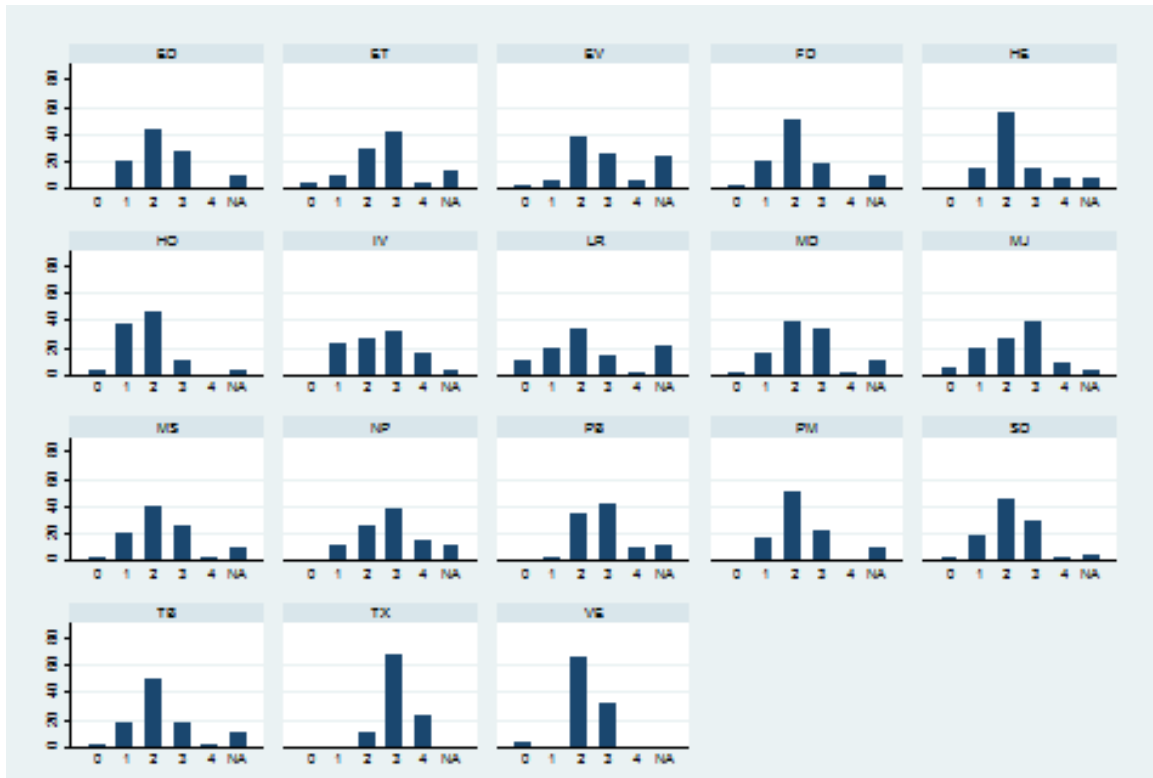
taxi or pedi cabs (84 percent), veterans (81 percent), education-related (83 percent), nationalist (77 percent), state-owned enterprises (75 percent), and private or foreign enterprises (71 percent), as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Use of Violence by Grievance Type (N=2528)**

Grievance	Violence Involved?				Total Number
	NO (Number)	NO (%)	YES (Number)	YES (%)	
ED	62	82.7%	13	17.3%	75
ET	19	27.5%	50	72.5%	69
EV	63	43.5%	82	56.6%	145
FD	42	58.3%	30	41.7%	72
HE	13	48.2%	14	51.9%	27
HO	22	73.3%	8	26.7%	30
IV	18	58.1%	13	41.9%	31
LR	327	36.3%	573	63.7%	900
MD	258	71.3%	104	28.7%	362
MJ	15	39.5%	23	60.5%	38
MS	61	67.0%	30	33.0%	91
NP	27	77.1%	8	22.9%	35
PB	13	9.5%	124	90.5%	137
PM	21	43.8%	27	56.3%	48
SD	212	75.4%	69	24.6%	281
TB	119	84.4%	22	15.6%	141
TX	1	11.1%	8	88.9%	9
VE	30	81.1%	7	18.9%	37
Total	1,323	52.3%	1,205	47.7%	2,528

Size of protest is defined as the number of people involved, not including armed police or security personnel sent to repress the crowd or maintain order. As shown in Appendix A2, size of protest divided into five categories: (0) 1-10 people; (1) 11-100 people; (2) 101-1000 people; and (3) 1001-10,000 people; and (4) more than 10,000 people. Most of the grievances have a normally distributed protest size, as Figure 2 illustrates. However, notably, close to half of these categories involved more than 1,000 people, i.e. they fall into protest size categories (4) and (5). These cases are nationalist protests (51 percent), and driven by grievances such as ethnicity (45 percent), miscarriage of justice (48 percent), failed investment schemes (48 percent), police or city patrol brutality (50 percent), and taxes (89 percent, but with only nine cases).

Figure 2: Grievances and their Protest Size



### Anger-venting Incidents

“Social anger-venting incidents” (*shehui xiefen shijian*) have entered the official lexicons of social stability and control. The term, first coined by prominent Chinese Academy of Social Science researcher, Yu Jianrong, has the following characteristics: a) spontaneous events caused by accidents (*ouran*), rather than premeditated; and their exact causes are often unclear b) no distinct organizers, as most participants have no direct relationship with incident victims; c) text messaging and social media aiding transmission of information and rumors to potential participants; d) compared to other incidents, “social anger-venting incidents” have a greater likelihood of criminal conduct such as beating, smashing, looting, burning. This could turn them into riots that often result in significant damages to private and public properties. (Yu, J., 2009)

These incidents are anger-venting because most of the people who take part in the actions are venting their anger, either against the authorities, government officials who are known for unjustified use of violence, such as the police and city patrols, or rich and powerful individuals who escape justice because of their social status or resources.

An incident that happened in Chizhou, Anhui in 2005 is a good example of such cases. An Anhui student who was riding a bicycle home from the school was hit by a sedan with a Jiangsu registration plate. While the car sustained some paint scratch, the

student suffered injuries from the accident. The student requested the driver to take him to the hospital. The owner refused. The driver and his passengers got into arguments with the student and some bystanders who sided with the student. During the ensuing heated arguments, the driver uttered, “If I were to beat an Anhui person to death, it would only cost me 300,000 *yuan* in compensation”. That provoked a fight between the sides, and resulted in injuries. The police came and brought all of them into custody. Later, a crowd consisting of friends and supporters from both sides started gathering outside the police station. Rumors began flying around alleging the police had let the driver go free because of his *guanxi*, and that the student had died from the injuries. The rumor about his death was untrue, but the other rumors could not be justified. Meanwhile, the scene outside the police station began to gather as many as 10,000 spectators. The crowd became emotionally charged and began smashing the sedan and setting fire to some police vehicles. Two sides got into a standoff with the crowd throwing rocks at armed police officers. More riot police was sent to the scene and the mob was finally rounded up.

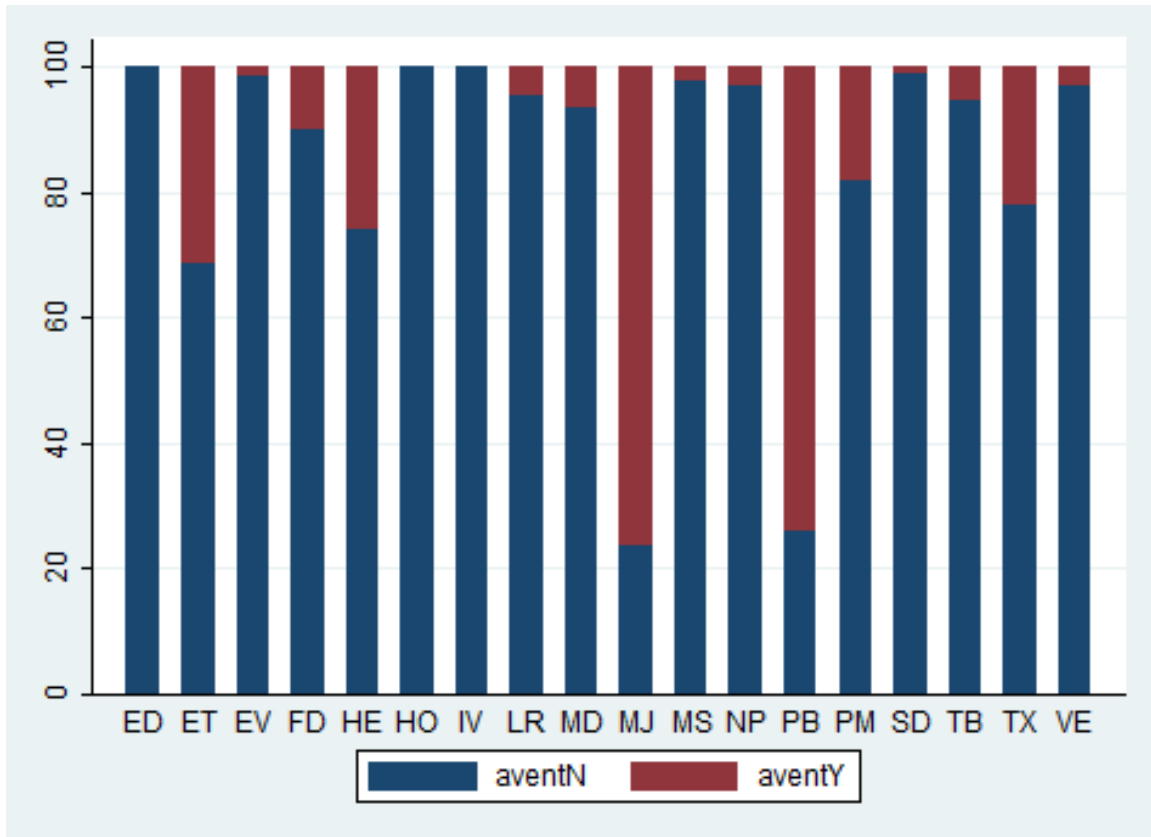
This case underscores various common elements of “social anger-venting incidents”. Most of the people who took part in the actions were not directly affected by the incident in the first place. Their participation was largely motivated by underlying public distrust of the police, and societal tensions between ordinary folks and the rich and powerful. Put simply, the incident thereby provided an opportunity for the “have-nots” in the society to vent their deep-seated discontentment and anger towards the “haves”. The lightning rod of the incident, which is the traffic accident in this case, became relatively insignificant. Information transmission was aided by modern technology. Though some were sheer rumors that turned out to be untrue, they inflamed the public and helped gather more sympathetic onlookers.

What types of cases exhibit the characteristics of “anger-venting incidents”? Our data analysis, as shown in Table 8 and Figure 3, suggests that cases motivated by miscarriage of justice (74 percent), and police or city patrols brutality (76 percent) are mostly likely to be “anger-venting”. This is unsurprising because while these cases often lack an unambiguous cause, they are capable of evoking deeply seated sentiments among some segments of the population, and provoke them to rally irrespective of the immediate cause. The sentiments could be social wrath against the rich and powerful, and local authorities, disdain for the police and public officials, or animosity towards certain ethnic groups. It does not take a great deal to ignite the flame long simmering in the society. If the breakdown of “anger-venting” incidents is taken together with those of violence and protest size, it is discernible that these cases tend to be violent, and involve a large number of people, typically more than 1,000 people.

**Table 8: “Anger-venting incidents” by grievance type (N=2528)**

Grievance	Anger-Venting				Total
	NO (Number of incidents)	NO (%)	Yes (Number of incidents)	YES (%)	
ED	75	100.0%	0	0.0%	75
ET	48	69.6%	21	30.4%	69
EV	143	98.6%	2	1.4%	145
FD	65	90.3%	7	9.7%	72
HE	18	66.7%	9	33.3%	27
HO	30	100.0%	0	0.0%	30
IV	31	100.0%	0	0.0%	31
LR	860	95.6%	40	4.4%	900
MD	343	94.8%	19	5.3%	362
<b>MJ</b>	10	26.3%	28	<b>73.7%</b>	38
MS	88	96.7%	3	3.3%	91
NP	34	97.1%	1	2.9%	35
<b>PB</b>	33	24.1%	104	<b>75.9%</b>	137
PM	38	79.2%	10	20.8%	48
SD	278	98.9%	3	1.1%	281
TB	136	96.5%	5	3.6%	141
TX	7	77.8%	2	22.2%	9
VE	36	97.3%	1	2.7%	37
Total	2,273	89.9%	255	10.1%	2,528

Figure 3: Grievance type and “anger-venting” incidents



### Social unrest cases

Despite various caveats about the dataset, there are clear signs that the number of social unrest cases rose from 2003 to 2012. Land-related cases are the single largest grievance source, accounting for about half of all cases. That said, protests by migrant workers in private and foreign owned factories are rising rapidly. There is some degree of positive correlation between regional per capita income and frequency of incidents, with Beijing, Guangdong and Shanghai registering the highest number of incidents. Violent cases are mostly caused by grievances such as police and city patrol personnel brutality, land claims, miscarriage of justice, and ethnic imbalance. Some kinds of protest are mostly likely to involve more than 1,000 people: nationalist protests, ethnic claims, miscarriage of justice, failed investment schemes, and police or city patrol brutality. In particular, cases caused by miscarriage of justice, police or city patrol brutality are most likely to be “anger-venting” attracting a large number of participants who are unrelated to the actual incidents.





Appendix A1: Percentage of Provincial/Municipal Total (N=2528)

Province	ED	ET	EV	FD	HE	HO	IV	LR	MD	MJ	MS	NP	PB	PM
Anhui	3.9	0.0	7.8	0.0	5.9	0.0	2.0	37.3	5.9	9.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.9
Beijing	0.6	1.2	4.6	11.6	1.2	2.3	2.3	36.4	2.9	2.9	18.5	2.3	2.3	0.6
Chongqing	6.3	0.0	4.7	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	14.1	6.3	3.1	6.3	3.1	10.9	6.3
Fujian	1.4	0.0	17.1	4.3	0.0	0.0	1.4	47.1	8.6	1.4	1.4	0.0	5.7	1.4
Guangdong	1.1	0.4	6.1	1.1	0.4	1.1	0.4	28.5	38.1	0.4	2.9	1.9	4.9	2.9
Gansu	0.0	25.7	0.0	5.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.1	0.0	0.0	5.7	2.9	14.3	2.9
Guangxi	12.1	0.0	9.6	2.4	0.0	0.0	1.2	51.8	6.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	6.0	6.0
Guizhou	2.6	0.0	2.6	5.3	5.3	0.0	0.0	36.8	7.9	2.6	5.3	0.0	13.2	2.6
Henan	4.2	2.1	0.0	15.8	4.2	0.0	3.2	30.5	3.2	1.1	1.1	2.1	7.4	0.0
Hubei	7.5	0.0	2.1	0.7	1.4	1.4	1.4	33.6	4.1	0.7	3.4	0.7	4.1	1.4
Hebei	6.7	0.0	0.0	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.0	43.3	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hainan	0.0	2.9	26.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.5	11.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	2.9
Heilongjiang	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	55.2	3.5	3.5	0.0	0.0	6.9	0.0
Hunan	5.8	0.0	7.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	5.8	27.9	9.3	3.5	1.2	0.0	9.3	2.3
Jilin	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	30.0	10.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
Jiangsu	2.3	0.0	6.0	0.8	2.3	0.0	0.8	52.6	18.8	0.0	0.8	0.0	6.0	1.5
Jiangxi	5.1	0.0	5.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	43.6	12.8	2.6	0.0	0.0	7.7	2.6
Liaoning	9.1	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	31.8	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Inner Mongolia	11.8	11.8	11.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	41.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9
Ningxia	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Qinghai	5.0	65.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	10.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
Sichuan	4.3	8.6	3.4	0.9	0.4	1.3	0.9	34.3	4.3	2.2	4.7	2.2	9.0	0.9
Shandong	3.1	3.1	3.1	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	39.6	10.4	0.0	1.0	2.1	2.1	0.0
Shanghai	0.9	0.0	5.4	9.8	3.6	4.5	0.0	33.9	18.8	1.8	7.1	1.8	4.5	0.0
Shaanxi	3.4	0.0	1.1	2.3	0.0	1.1	1.1	42.7	9.0	0.0	2.3	3.4	1.1	2.3
Shanxi	0.0	0.0	2.7	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	59.5	10.8	0.0	5.4	2.7	5.4	0.0
Tianjin	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.0	7.1	7.1	17.9	28.6	10.7	3.6	7.1	0.0	3.6	0.0
Xinjiang	0.0	55.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0
Tibet	0.0	75.0	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Yunnan	1.9	1.9	7.7	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	44.2	9.6	0.0	1.9	0.0	3.9	3.9
Zhejiang	0.0	0.0	12.6	0.7	0.0	3.5	0.7	46.2	10.5	2.1	0.0	1.4	5.6	2.1

**Appendix A2: Number of people involved (percentage in each category) (N=2528)**

<b>Grievance</b>	<b>1-10</b>	<b>11-100</b>	<b>101-1000</b>	<b>1001-10,000</b>	<b>10,001-</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Total cases</b>
ED	0.0	20.0	44.0	26.7	0.0	9.3	75
ET	4.4	8.7	29.0	40.6	4.4	13.0	69
EV	1.4	6.2	37.9	24.8	6.2	23.5	145
FD	1.4	20.8	50.0	18.1	0.0	9.7	72
HE	0.0	14.8	55.6	14.8	7.4	7.4	27
HO	3.3	36.7	46.7	10.0	0.0	3.3	30
IV	0.0	22.6	25.8	32.3	16.1	3.2	31
LR	9.7	19.9	33.2	14.2	1.6	21.4	900
MD	1.7	15.2	38.1	33.2	1.1	10.8	362
MJ	5.3	18.4	26.3	39.5	7.9	2.6	38
MS	3.3	20.9	39.6	25.3	2.2	8.8	91
NP	0.0	11.4	25.7	37.1	14.3	11.4	35
PB	0.0	2.9	35.0	41.6	8.8	11.7	137
PM	0.0	16.7	50.0	22.9	0.0	10.4	48
SD	0.7	18.5	45.2	28.8	2.5	4.3	281
TB	0.7	18.4	49.7	17.7	2.1	11.4	141
TX	0.0	0.0	11.1	66.7	22.2	0.0	9
VE	2.7	0.0	64.9	32.4	0.0	0.0	37

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<sup>1</sup> The team of research assistants in this project includes Menglu Cai, Tony Zhang, Zhe Yuan, Pujan Modi from the University of Toronto, Jin Shi from Peking University, Ken Zeng and Yi'ang Zhang from Renmin University of China. The author is particularly grateful for excellent research assistance provided by Menglu Cai and Ken Zeng, but takes final responsibility for quality of final product.

<sup>2</sup> A case is coded as a “violent” incident when the Chinese term *baoli* is mentioned. This involves use of violence by protestors or the armed police, or both.