

Broadcasting Out-Group Repression to the In-Group: Evidence From China

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Abstract

Many autocrats govern with an in-group, whose support must be secured, and an out-group, which is subject to repression. How do autocrats exploit in-group/out-group dynamics to secure their survival? One strategy, we argue, is to broadcast out-group repression to the in-group as a signal of the regime's capacity for violence. Empirically, we focus on China, where the government represses ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Drawing on 1 million articles from six propaganda newspapers, we show that the regime broadcasts out-group repression to urban elites on each anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, when 10% of Beijing residents joined anti-regime protests. To understand its effects, we conducted a survey experiment balanced on the national census during the June 2020 Tiananmen anniversary. Using a list experiment to mitigate preference falsification, we show that CCP propaganda about Uyghurs during the Tiananmen anniversary discourages protests among politically engaged urban elites because they fear repression.

Keywords

ethnic politics, repression, propaganda, human rights, political survival, rebellion

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Introduction

Many autocracies feature a politically salient cleavage: ethnic, regional, religious, or otherwise. These regimes often rely on the support of an in-group, while out-groups are marginalized and subject to repression. How do autocrats exploit in-group/out-group dynamics to secure their political survival?

We argue that authoritarian regimes broadcast repression against out-groups to signal the consequences of dissent to the in-group. Our theory builds on two sources of uncertainty in autocratic politics. First, a regime's capacity for repression is difficult for citizens to observe *ex ante* (Edmond 2013; Huang 2015a). This uncertainty gives autocrats an incentive to credibly signal their capacity for violence, especially during moments of tension. Second, potential dissenters within the in-group are difficult for an autocrat to observe *ex ante*, which renders targeted repression difficult. Because indiscriminate, widespread repression fosters dissent (Rozenas and Zhukov 2019), this uncertainty gives autocrats an incentive to refrain from repressing the in-group itself. Broadcasting out-group repression lets the autocrat remind potential in-group dissenters of the regime's coercive capacity without incurring the costs of in-group repression.

Empirically, we focus on China, where the distinction between in-group and out-group is especially clear. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ongoing repression against ethnic Uyghurs is increasingly regarded as genocide (Zenz 2020). As of May 2019, the CCP has detained more than 1 million of China's 11 million Uyghurs in facilities the U.S. Government calls "concentration camps." The CCP operates at least 27 such camps and perhaps as many as 1200 (Maizland 2019). Scholars increasingly understand that China's potential in-group dissenters have a distinctive demographic profile: ethnic Han citizens who are politically engaged and located in major urban areas (Chen and Lu 2006; Jiang and Yang 2016; Lewis-Beck, Tang and Martini 2014; O'Brien and Li 2005; Pan and Xu 2017; Tang 2016; Tang, Woods and Zhao 2009; Truex 2014; Wright 2018).

We employ a two-part empirical strategy. First, we probe what the CCP tells its in-group about out-group repression. We obtained the entire history of the *People's Daily*, the CCP's flagship propaganda newspaper that targets the in-group audience. For comparison, we obtained substantial portions of five other propaganda newspapers, which circulate in several major regions and target different audiences. Our dataset counts roughly 1 million articles on 24,000 publication days. The CCP, we find, reminds China's politically engaged urban elites – the population most likely to threaten the regime's hold on power via protests (Wallace 2014; Wright 2018) – of repression in Xinjiang at five moments each year. Three of these are nationalist anniversaries, when the CCP casts itself as defending Han interests. The fourth is the anniversary of the Xinjiang Uprising of 2009, when the Uyghur community staged a 10,000-person riot in Urumqi, Xinjiang. The fifth is the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, when the CCP killed between several hundred and several thousand citizens in Beijing (Buckley 2019; Lusher 2017). Citizens now use the Tiananmen anniversary to

coordinate anti-regime protests (Carter and Carter 2020). To prepare, the CCP incarcerates dissidents (Truex 2019), amplifies censorship (King, Pan and Roberts 2013), and places security forces on high alert (Carter and Carter 2020). During the first four moments, we show, the CCP uses propaganda to underscore the cleavage between the Uyghur minority and Han majority. During the Tiananmen anniversary, the CCP instrumentalizes the cleavage: by broadcasting repression in Xinjiang to China's politically engaged urban elite.

Our theory understands this as a signal to potential dissenters within the Han in-group of the CCP's capacity for repression, intended to deter anti-regime protests on the Tiananmen anniversary. However, this pattern of Uyghur propaganda is consistent with several alternative explanations. The CCP may believe its Han constituents dislike Uyghurs (Johnson 2019) or value China's territorial integrity (Johnston and Quek 2018), which Uyghurs threaten. If so, by advertising repression against Uyghurs, the CCP may aim to generate Han support. The CCP may also believe that, by casting Uyghurs as threatening Han interests, the CCP can cast itself as the guarantor of Han interests, again generating popular support.

The second part of our empirical strategy tests our theoretical mechanism against these alternative explanations. We conducted a survey experiment balanced on the most recent population census to probe how the Han in-group interprets Tiananmen Uyghur propaganda. For verisimilitude, we timed the survey to coincide with the June 2020 anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre. We divided roughly 4000 respondents into treatment and control groups. Respondents in the treatment group read a *People's Daily* article from June 2014, which we randomly selected from all Uyghur content published during the Tiananmen anniversary since 2009. To accommodate preference falsification, we employed list experiments. To identify politically engaged urban elites, we asked respondents several questions about their ethnicity and political knowledge, and measured nightlight intensity from their IP address, which let us identify proximity to urban centers. We define politically engaged urban elites as respondents who are Han, answered all three political knowledge questions correctly, and live in counties at least as bright as a typical city with 500,000 to 1 million residents.

We find no evidence that Uyghur content published during the Tiananmen anniversary conditions respondents' feelings about Xi Jinping, the CCP, ethnic Uyghurs, Chinese nationalism, or CCP policies in Xinjiang. This suggests that the CCP's Uyghur propaganda during the Tiananmen anniversary aims not to generate regime support. Rather, consistent with our theory, Uyghur content during the Tiananmen anniversary makes politically engaged urban elites less willing to protest due to fear of repression. Rian Thum, a preeminent Uyghur historian, recently expressed shock that the CCP broadcasts repression in Xinjiang: "Officials in Xinjiang are so inured to the horrors they are perpetrating that they often publicize evidence of their crimes."¹ Publicizing the horrors, we argue, is the point.²

To be clear, our argument is not that Uyghur repression is motivated entirely by CCP efforts to secure in-group acquiescence. Uyghur repression may be motivated by several factors: providing opportunities for corruption via construction of detention

centers (Chotiner 2019), deterring Uyghur terrorism (Greitens, Lee and Yazici 2020), or encouraging “settler colonization” (Roberts 2020, 237). Rather, our theoretical aim is to understand why autocrats broadcast out-group repression to the in-group. Our empirical aim is to show that CCP security interests in Beijing are critical to understanding what it tells the Han in-group about repression in Xinjiang.

Our theory is related to Padro i Miquel (2007)’s theory of autocracy in divided societies. By repressing out-groups, Padro i Miquel (2007) argues, autocrats make an in-group fear the out-group taking power, which induces in-group support. We propose a different “politics of fear.” The in-group forgoes anti-regime protests not because it fears the out-group taking power, but because it fears the incumbent’s repression, as revealed by broadcasts of out-group repression. Our theory is also related to Rozenas (2020)’s theory of demographically targeted repression. For him as for us, broadcasting out-group repression provides information to an in-group that is considering anti-regime protest. For Rozenas (2020), however, out-group repression blocks coordination between out-group and in-group, which is required to depose the regime. Our theory, by contrast, treats out-group repression as deterring in-group protests by signaling the regime’s capacity for repression. Our empirical results are consistent with our theory. We find no evidence that CCP propaganda conditions respondents’ views of the Uyghur out-group.

This paper contributes to three other literatures. First, it advances our understanding of ethnic cleavages in autocracies. Scholars have long recognized the centrality of “divide and rule” tactics: an autocrat secures power by playing one group off another (Acemoglu, Robinson and Verdier 2004). These tactics appear to be especially common in the internal security apparatus. To ensure security forces remain loyal during moments of crisis, the arguments generally go, autocrats appoint co-ethnics to key positions (Carter and Hassan 2021; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018). Still, there is strikingly little research about how autocrats instrumentalize ethnic cleavages and to what effect. We show that autocrats employ propaganda to harden ethnic cleavages and suppress in-group dissent.

Second, it is increasingly clear that autocrats manipulate the informational environments of their citizens: by employing social media campaigns (King, Pan and Roberts 2017), censoring online content (King, Pan and Roberts 2013; Qin, Strömberg and Wu 2017), and employing propaganda (Carter and Carter 2021, 2023; Enikolopov, Petrova and Zhuravskaya 2011; Gehlbach and Sonin 2014; Huang 2015a; Rozenas and Stukal 2018; Stockmann 2013; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011). Much of this literature assumes autocrats employ propaganda to generate support. A key function of propaganda, we show, is to threaten citizens with repression (Carter and Carter 2022; Huang 2015b, 2018; Wedeen 1999).

Third, this paper helps us understand Chinese politics. Many scholars believe the CCP enjoys approval ratings of around 90% (Chen, Zhong and Hillard 1997; Dickson 2015; Lewis-Beck, Tang and Martini 2014; Li 2004; Manion 2006; Shi 2000; Tang 2005; Zhong, Chen and Scheb 1998). In turn, the CCP can permit protests because they strengthen its hold on power: by identifying local policy failures and letting citizens

blow off steam (Cai 2010; Chen 2012; Lorentzen 2013). By contrast, this paper joins a growing literature that understands CCP propaganda as threatening, due, in part, to widespread popular grievances (Huang 2015a, 2018; Carter and Carter 2022), which citizens conceal in surveys that fail to protect anonymity (Carter, Carter and Schick 2023; Robinson and Tannenbergh 2019). On the anniversaries of failed pro-democracy movements, protests spike, as does CCP repression (Carter and Carter 2020). On the most sensitive pro-democracy anniversary – the Tiananmen massacre – the CCP reminds politically engaged urban elites of repression in Xinjiang.

Theory

Protests across autocracies occur at well-defined moments, when citizens are engaged in politics and aware of shared discontent: elections (Knutsen, Nygard and Wig 2017; Tucker 2007), economic downturns (Brancati 2016), major political events (Truex 2019), and sensitive anniversaries (Carter and Carter 2020). Autocrats prepare for these focal moments in advance: by incarcerating known dissidents (Truex 2019), repressing opposition leaders (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013), amplifying censorship and digital surveillance (Gohdes 2020; King, Pan and Roberts 2013), engineering social media and propaganda campaigns (Carter and Carter 2022; King, Pan and Roberts 2017; Rozenas and Stukal 2018), and blocking the internet (Gohdes 2015).

Uncertainty: The Regime's Capacity for Repression

Citizens consider many factors when deciding whether to protest. Chief among them is the regime's capacity for repression. This constitutes the first source of uncertainty in our theory. For citizens, the regime's repressive capacity is unknowable *ex ante*. To be sure, citizens have some sense for the regime's ability to suppress protests. Citizens can observe whether security forces are stacked with the autocrat's co-ethnics, who may prove especially loyal during crises (Blaydes 2018; Carter and Hassan 2021; Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2018). Citizens can observe the regime's vulnerability to international pressure, which may force it to abide citizens' rights (Carter 2022; Escribà-Folch and Wright 2015; Jo and Simmons 2016; Murdie and Davis 2012). Citizens may recall past repression or observe whether domestic legal institutions constrain human rights abuses (Davenport 2007; Hill and Jones 2014). Citizens may also observe the regime incarcerate opposition leaders (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013). Citizens cannot, however, directly observe the regime's ability to suppress mass protests (Huang 2015a). There is always the possibility of intra-elite divisions, which may compel security forces to refuse to open fire on protesters (Albrecht and Ohl 2016; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986) or otherwise secure the regime during crises (Dragu and Przeworski 2019).

This gives autocrats with a strong repressive apparatus an incentive to signal this credibly, and in ways that autocrats with relatively weak repressive apparatuses cannot (Edmond 2013). This is how many scholars understand the role of personality cults and

absurdly pro-regime propaganda. Forcing citizens to consume propaganda that everyone knows to be false serves to dominate them, and to broadcast the regime's capacity for domination to others (Little 2017). This insight underlies Wedeen (1999)'s account of Syria under Hafez al-Assad and Huang (2015a, 2018)'s work in contemporary China. Huang (2015a, 420) puts it succinctly: "Such propaganda is not meant to 'brainwash' people ...about how good the government is, but rather to forewarn the society about how strong it is."

The most credible signal of a regime's capacity for repression, however, is repression itself. Repression may also cue fear among citizens, which induces risk aversion and hence discourages protest (Young 2018).

Uncertainty: The Identities of Dissenters

Although repression is a credible signal of a regime's repressive capacity, it also forces the autocrat to choose who to repress. This underscores our theory's second source of uncertainty. Autocrats are often uncertain who the dissenters are. Here, we distinguish between known dissidents who have protested in the past and potential dissenters, who are dissatisfied with the regime and may consider joining protests in the future. Autocrats routinely target the former. The CCP, for instance, monitors past protest leaders and incarcerates them prior to politically sensitive moments (Truex 2019). By contrast, autocrats have difficulty identifying potential dissenters. They may have some idea. The CCP uses mandatory welfare programs to monitor citizens with grievances (Pan 2020). The CCP has pioneered an extensive digital surveillance program, dubbed the Golden Shield Project, which aims to identify dissenters using internet activity, facial recognition, artificial intelligence, and other technologies (Xu 2021). But the set of potential dissenters is much larger than welfare recipients or past protest leaders, as the Golden Shield Project makes clear.

Identifying potential dissenters is critical because indiscriminate violence is costly: it exacerbates the grievances it aims to suppress (Balcells 2012; Finkel 2015; Gurr 1970; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Opp and Roehl 1990; Rozenas and Zhukov 2019). These backfire effects are persistent, even if individuals falsify their preferences (Wang 2020).³ Repression may also generate focal moments, which help citizens coordinate future protests (Carter and Carter 2020).

In-Group Compliance and Out-Group Repression

The autocrat's central problem is this: Repression is the best signal of his capacity for violence, yet potential dissenters are difficult to identify and indiscriminate repression exacerbates citizen grievances. For the autocrat, the presence of a well-defined in-group and out-group provides a solution. By broadcasting out-group repression, the regime can signal its repressive capacity to the in-group without incurring the costs of indiscriminately repressing its members.

Our conception of in-group and out-group builds on existing literature (Acemoglu, Robinson and Verdier 2004; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Padro i Miquel 2007; Rozenas 2020). To retain power, the regime must secure the support of at least some portion of the in-group, likely with some combination of public and private goods. This leaves open the possibility of in-group dissent, which especially threatens regime survival. By contrast, the out-group is excluded from political decision-making and subject to more repression. The in-group/out-group cleavage may have its origins in ethnicity (Blaydes 2018), religion (Wilkinson 2004), geography (Bates 1983), economic activity (Padro i Miquel 2007), or other markers.

Out-group repression is generally less costly for the autocrat than in-group repression. The differential costs of repression between in-group and out-group are often linked to the origins of group status. In Bates (1983)'s account of urban bias, since urban protests are more threatening in the presence of weak electoral institutions, the regime effectively subsidizes urban elites by forcing rural farmers to accept low prices for agricultural produce. Alternatively, if the autocrat's most critical appointees are co-ethnics, the regime may prefer to avoid violence directed at the co-ethnic in-group, either because co-ethnics prefer not to repress each other for identity-based reasons or because violence against co-ethnics may anger high-level officials. To be clear, our argument is not that in-groups always support the incumbent or are never repressed. Rather, our argument is that, for an autocrat, it is generally less costly to employ violence against an out-group than an in-group.

Of course, the fact that an out-group is "othered" may compel members of the in-group to believe that out-group repression poses no threat to them. In some Western democracies, ethnic minorities often regard police violence against civilians as "an extremely or very serious problem," while few members of the ethnic majority agree (The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research 2020). In autocracies, however, this dynamic is less likely for two reasons. First, autocrats generally induce in-group acquiescence through a combination of patronage and repression. In-group repression may be less overt and brutal than out-group repression, but it remains central to political life. In China, politically engaged urban elites are more likely to recall the regime's violence against citizens during the 1989 pro-democracy movement. Since pro-democracy anniversaries are focal moments for in-group protest (Carter and Carter 2020), the CCP preemptively arrests dissidents (Truex 2019) and amplifies the security presence around sensitive locations (Wines 2009). Elite members of the in-group who speak out against the regime, like billionaire princeling Ren Zhiqiang, are subject to targeted, well-publicized repression. Members of the in-group know that the state's security apparatus could be used against them.

Second, the experience of shared repression can create empathy between members of the in-group and out-group, further underscoring to in-group members that they too could be subject to state violence. This dynamic was apparent in the December 2022 protests against Xi Jinping's Zero-COVID policy. In late November, at least 10 citizens died in an apartment building fire in Urumqi, Xinjiang, unable to escape because the government locked the building. Protests spread across China overnight, with slogans

that reflected empathy between the out-group and in-group, which was subject to the same oppressive lockdowns: “Stand with Urumqi,” “We are all Xinjiang people,” and “Liberate Xinjiang” (Dorjee 2022). Said one protester in Hunan province: “We are all in the same building, only the fire hasn’t reached us yet” (The Economist 2022). Guoguang Wu (2022), a former speechwriter to Premier Zhao Ziyang and editorialist for the *People’s Daily*, was explicit about growing empathy between in-group and out-group:

The shared experience of the Great Prison [Xi’s zero-COVID policies] has created empathy among people across the country. ...Today, tragedy strikes the victims of the Urumqi apartment fire, who were locked in a burning building. Tomorrow, it could be anybody’s turn to suffer.

For exiled Chinese artist Baidiucuo, Xi’s Zero-COVID policies represent the “Xinjiang-ization” of Han China (Millward 2022). Put simply, since autocracies occasionally subject in-groups and out-groups to similar repression, members of the in-group are far more likely to regard out-group repression as potentially threatening, or at least a credible signal of the state’s coercive capacity.

When are autocrats most likely to secure in-group compliance by broadcasting out-group repression? Our theory suggests that the benefits to the regime of signaling its repressive capacity to the in-group must be relatively high. This is most likely during moments of crisis between the in-group and incumbent government. Out-group repression constitutes a vivid reminder of the regime’s capacity for violence and its willingness to employ it, potentially even against the in-group. This yields our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Propaganda apparatuses are most likely to broadcast out-group repression during periods of in-group mobilization against the regime.

Demographic Predictors of In-Group Dissent in China

Scholars of Chinese politics increasingly understand that the in-group members most likely to dissent against CCP rule have a distinctive demographic profile: politically engaged, ethnic Han, and located in major urban areas (Chen and Lu 2006; Jiang and Yang 2016; Lewis-Beck, Tang and Martini 2014; O’Brien and Li 2005; Pan and Xu 2017; Tang 2016; Tang, Woods and Zhao 2009; Truex 2014; Wright 2018). These citizens are more supportive of political and economic liberalization (Chen and Lu 2006; Pan and Xu 2017; Tang, Woods and Zhao 2009) and more critical of the central government (Lewis-Beck, Tang and Martini 2014; Truex 2014). They are also more likely to protest (O’Brien and Li 2005; Tang 2016). Wright (2018, 168) puts it succinctly: “Nearly all of those that have participated in political protest activities in the post-Mao period have been urban-based and relatively well educated.” Wallace (2014, 5) does too: “[Urbanites] enjoy an advantage in collective action due to their proximity

to each other and the seat of government [and so] pose a more immediate threat to regime stability.”

Jiang and Yang (2016) make clear that the politically engaged, urban Han elite is especially sensitive to signals of the regime’s coercive capacity. Since they often benefit financially from political connections, they have more to lose from open dissent. Since they reside in urban areas where the repressive apparatus is better funded, they know the regime’s threats of repression are credible. Since they are more knowledgeable about government policies, they are better at interpreting signals that threaten repression. In our setting, they are also likely to know more about CCP policies toward minority groups and hence have context for understanding implied threats of repression. This yields a final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: In China, the politically engaged urban elite will be especially sensitive to broadcasts of out-group repression.

Scope Conditions

We conclude with two scope conditions for our theory. First, our theory requires a cleavage between in-group and out-group. Second, our theory assumes that broadcasting out-group repression to the in-group is relatively costless. This is most likely when the identity-based cleavage between in-group and out-group is so substantial that violence against the out-group does not generate grievances among the in-group. This may also occur when the out-group is already fiercely opposed to the regime and unable to credibly threaten its survival, such that broadcasting repression has few costs from the out-group. When broadcasting out-group repression to the in-group is costly, we may observe a different outcome than our theory predicts.

Empirical Setting

China is an attractive empirical setting. First, it features a well-defined in-group and out-group. The CCP casts itself as the guarantor of Han interests (Friend and Thayer 2017; Tobin 2020) and has long repressed non-ethnic Han (Weiner 2020). Second, since its founding in 1949, the CCP has repressed several pro-democracy movements by Han citizens, which now constitute focal moments for protest. The Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 is the most sensitive.

Ethnic Cleavages in China

Uyghurs constitute the most marginalized of China’s ethnic groups. Of Xinjiang’s 22 million residents, 11 million are Uyghurs. Concentrated some 2000 miles from Beijing, Uyghurs are distinct from the Han majority. Uyghurs are largely Muslim, of Central Asian descent, and speak a distinctive language. Xinjiang enjoyed de facto autonomy in the 19th and early 20th centuries as the Qing Dynasty collapsed.

After founding the People's Republic in 1949, Mao Zedong forcibly incorporated Xinjiang into China. Since then, Uyghurs have revolted against Beijing rule on several occasions. Of these, the Xinjiang Uprising of 2009 is most notable. The Uprising was sparked by events in Shaoguan, Guangdong. The CCP transported some 800 Uyghurs to a toy factory months earlier as part of a resettlement program. One former employee alleged that two Uyghur men raped a Han woman, at which point the factory's 16,000 Han workers rioted. Two Uyghurs died; 120 were injured. News of the riot spread to Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, with pictures that allegedly showed Han citizens standing over dead Uyghurs, arms raised in victory. On 5 July, nearly 10,000 Uyghurs protested to demand an investigation (Brady 2012). The demonstration turned violent, police intervened, and the CCP paramilitary was called in. Officially, nearly 200 people were killed and 1700 people injured, mostly Han. Uyghur groups put the death toll between 1000 and 3000. The CCP imposed a curfew, closed mosques, expanded police patrols, and blocked the internet for months. The CCP detained over 1000 Uyghurs and issued nearly 30 death sentences.

The CCP attempts to pacify Uyghurs in several ways. The CCP offers Han citizens tax incentives to resettle in Xinjiang, a 10,000 yuan annual payment to incentivize Han-Uyghur intermarriage (Chen 2014), and 3000 yuan grants to Uyghur couples who have no more than two children (AFP 2015). For Uyghurs, these financial incentives are substantial. In 2018, Xinjiang's per capita GDP was just 6656 yuan. These efforts have succeeded. In 1949, Xinjiang's population was 76% Uyghur and 6% Han. Now, its population is 40% Uyghur and 40% Han.

The CCP also employs repression. After taking power in 2016, Xinjiang CCP Secretary Chen Quanguo forbade "excessively long beards," veils in public, and traditionally Muslim names (Maizland 2019). He launched the "Physicals for All" program, which forced Uyghurs to give fingerprint, voice, and face scans, and donate blood samples for biometric tracking. As of May 2019, the CCP has detained between one and three million Uyghurs in facilities the U.S. Government calls "concentration camps." There are 27 confirmed camps and as many as 1200 (Maizland 2019). The campaign is increasingly recognized as genocide (Zenz 2020). The Xinjiang Papers – 11 secret Chinese government documents totaling some 300 pages – document that repression in Xinjiang is organized at the highest levels of the government (Xi 2014; Zenz 2021).

The Tiananmen Massacre as a Focal Moment

Since seizing power in 1949, the CCP has repressed several pro-democracy movements led by Han citizens, which now constitute focal moments for anti-regime protests. The anniversaries of failed pro-democracy movements occasion 30% more protests than other days, and participants are more likely to use the language of democratic resistance. Protests during pro-democracy anniversaries are 2.5 times more likely to be repressed (Carter and Carter 2020).

Of these failed pro-democracy movements, the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 is by far the most sensitive. Accordingly, the CCP aims to purge Tiananmen from historical memory. As the Tiananmen anniversary approaches, the CCP censors seemingly innocuous terms: “that day,” “that year,” “today,” “candle,” candle emojis, “black clothes,” “blood,” “anniversary,” and “when spring becomes summer.” The regime censors “pictogram,” which could recall the famous tank man, as well as “eight squared,” which equals 64 and hence June 4, the date of the massacre. The Shanghai Stock Exchange once dropped 64.89 points, recalling the date of the massacre; the regime blocked the search terms “stock exchange” and “index.” On 4 June 2015, some WeChat users were unable to make “red envelope” money transfers that contained either 64 or 89 (Henochowicz 2016).

Broadcasting Out-Group Repression to the In-Group

Data

To understand what CCP propaganda tells citizens about Uyghur repression, we collected six propaganda newspapers. Our primary newspaper of interest is the *People's Daily*, which is the CCP's flagship newspaper and prints government viewpoints that are widely regarded as authoritative. It uses sophisticated language and targets an urban, elite audience of politically engaged readers. Government offices are required to maintain a subscription. The [Online Appendix](#) documents that *People's Daily* readers are more politically engaged than the average citizen.

For comparison, we collected five other newspapers that target different audiences. The *Workers' Daily* circulates widely among workers in China's secondary cities. Though more colloquial and focused on labor issues than the *People's Daily*, it is still considered an official newspaper and is funded by state subsidies. We also collected four “commercial” newspapers. Like all Chinese media outlets, these are majority state-owned, but are funded primarily by advertising revenue. In turn, they are more subject to market forces and perhaps more persuasive to readers. The *Economic Observer* is a national financial newspaper. *Caijing* is a financial magazine, known for investigative reporting on corruption and social issues. The *Beijing News* and the *Yangtze Evening Post* are major regional newspapers. The [Online Appendix](#) reports readership statistics for each outlet.⁴

The Calendar of Uyghur Coverage

To document the calendar of Uyghur coverage, we computed mean daily references to “Xinjiang,” “Urumqi,” and “Uyghur.” We did this before the Xinjiang Uprising of 2009 and after. The results appear in [Figure 1](#). The top panels focus on the *People's Daily*. The bottom panels focus on the five newspapers that target a non-elite audience.

Before the Uprising, Uyghur coverage in the *People's Daily* was uncommon and random. Since the Uprising, the *People's Daily* has covered Uyghurs at five moments

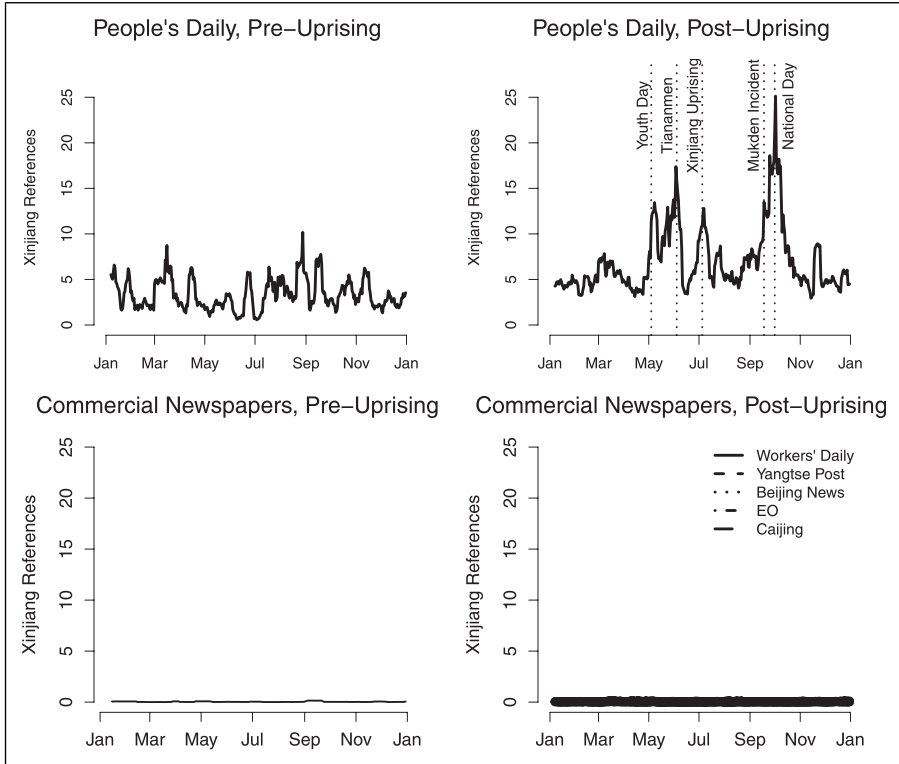


Figure 1. Seven day moving average of Uyghur references in the elite-focused *People’s Daily* (top) compared to other outlets (bottom), before and after the Xinjiang Uprising.

each year. Four of these spikes suggest a propaganda strategy that aims to harden the Han/Uyghur cleavage: the anniversary of the Xinjiang Uprising and three nationalist holidays, when the CCP casts itself as defending the national interest.⁵ The final spike is the Tiananmen anniversary, the most sensitive date each year.

The bottom panels reveal that CCP propaganda outlets that target a non-elite audience discuss Uyghurs less frequently and with no temporal pattern. After the 2009 Uprising, the *People’s Daily* referenced Xinjiang seven times a day on average and as many as 25 times a day during spikes. By contrast, other newspapers mention Xinjiang once every three to 4 days. Xinjiang discourse is politicized exclusively in official media that targets the regime’s core constituents: CCP members and urban elites, who comprise the politically engaged in-group.

In the [Online Appendix](#), we confirm these patterns by estimating models of the form:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta (\text{Tiananmen Window}_t) + \phi X_t + \kappa_i + \gamma_s + \epsilon \tag{1}$$

where i indexes newspaper, s indexes year, and t indexes day. *Tiananmen Window* equals 1 if day t falls within 3 days on either side of June 4 and 0 otherwise. This 3-day window on either side of June 4 reflects the fact that the risk of protest remains elevated, since citizens are still cued to the regime's historical atrocities. This, indeed, is why the CCP employs propaganda, censorship, and repression in the run-up to sensitive anniversaries and in their immediate aftermath (Carter and Carter 2020; King, Pan and Roberts 2013, 2017; Truex 2019). The vector X_t includes analogous indicators for the four other dates suggested by Figure 1. Our first outcome variable records the total number of references to "Xinjiang," "Urumqi," or "Uyghur" in newspaper i on day t . To accommodate differences across newspapers, our second outcome variable standardizes this quantity by the total number of words published in newspaper i on day t . We include newspaper fixed effects κ_i to accommodate unobserved differences by newspaper and year fixed effects γ_s to accommodate unobserved differences by year. The results are substantively identical to the descriptive statistics in Figure 1.

The Content of Uyghur Coverage

To understand the narratives in these spikes, we coded each article about ethnic Uyghurs since the 2009 Xinjiang Uprising. Between 2009 and 2017, the *People's Daily* published 90 articles about Xinjiang during Tiananmen anniversary windows, defined as the 3 days before and after the anniversary. The *People's Daily* published 560 articles during the other four windows. Outside of these spikes, the *People's Daily* published 100 articles about Uyghurs. After reading each article, we identified roughly 60 coverage topics. We then recorded each topic's presence in each article. The [Online Appendix](#) reports our full set of topic labels and plots of raw topic frequencies during Tiananmen, the four other sensitive windows, and all other days.

Tiananmen anniversary: Suppressing protests. The left panel displays coverage during the Tiananmen anniversary. The most frequent coverage topic is Islamic terrorism, which appears in more than 10% of all Uyghur Tiananmen coverage. The third most frequent topic is "social stability," which accounts for 9% of Uyghur coverage during the Tiananmen anniversary, and is twice as common as otherwise. The term, Huang (2015a, 426) writes, "is broadly understood as a code word for maintaining the stability of the existing regime."⁶ The term is associated with Deng Xiaoping's response to the Tiananmen massacre: "Stability overrides everything." Citizens regard allusions to social stability in CCP propaganda as threats of repression. When these allusions spike, the rate of protest declines (Carter and Carter 2022). The term "rule of law" is similar, and appears in 5% of Uyghur coverage during the Tiananmen anniversary. Discussion of ethnic unity and Uyghur culture are also more common during Tiananmen. These allude to Han dominance and, again, social stability, particularly given the CCP's policies designed to promote Han settlement and to restrict expressions of Uyghur culture (Maizland 2019; Roberts 2020; Tobin 2020).

One article from 7 June 2014, underscores how the CCP uses Uyghur coverage – including about “terrorism” – during the Tiananmen anniversary to broadcast its capacity for repression.⁷ The article’s title was “Xinjiang Corps: Earnestly Fulfilling the Mission of Cultivating and Reclaiming the Frontier, and Doing Utmost to Maintain Social Stability in Xinjiang.” It announced that the Xinjiang Party Committee “clearly stated” that the “core task of their work in Xinjiang was to maintain social stability and long-term security.” In response to “the current high incidence of violent terrorist activities in Xinjiang,” the Party Committee emphasized it would “take a heavy hand, make a heavy punch, fight the enemy first, and resolutely quash the arrogance of violent terrorists.” The CCP, the article noted, dispatched over 2.75 million militias to patrol the 15 prefectures and cities in Xinjiang to “maintain local social stability.”

On 6 June 2016, the *People’s Daily* covered the threat posed by Uyghur “religious extremism” to the Han majority. The article emphasized the CCP’s repressive capacity: The CCP will “resolutely crack down on the ‘East Turkistan’ terrorist forces” and “learn from the experience of the international community in preventing the infiltration of religious extreme ideas, ‘de-extremation,’ and combating cyber terrorism.”

Xinjiang Uprising and nationalist anniversaries: Hardening the cleavage. The middle panel displays coverage during the three nationalist anniversaries and the Xinjiang Uprising anniversary. Economic development constitutes 12% of Uyghur coverage. The next four topics celebrate the CCP’s efforts to advance ethnic Han interests: ethnic unity as a euphemism for Han leadership, Chinese culture as great, patriotism as well-deserved, and Xi Jinping as a steward of all these. By contrast, CCP propaganda casts Uyghur dissent as threatening. This is why social stability, Islamic terrorism, and territorial integrity appear as the next three most prominent topics.

One article, from 5 May 2014, underscores how CCP propaganda covers the Han/Uyghur cleavage. The article quoted Xi Jinping on the need “to build, develop, and stabilize Xinjiang.” “Xinjiang’s social stability and long-term stability,” Xi proclaimed, “are related to the overall situation of national reform, development and stability, the reunification of the motherland, national unity, national security, and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” The *People’s Daily* concluded:

When the frontiers are stable, the interior is safe; when the borders are chaotic, the country is unsafe. Seeking stability, peace, and development are the fundamental interests of the 22 million people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang and the common will of 1.3 billion people across the country. With social stability and long-term stability as the focus of our work, we can thwart all attempts to divide and destroy, pour the copper and iron walls of frontier security, and build the solid foundation of the Happiness Mansion, making Xinjiang hard-won. We will maintain the results of reform and development, protect the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, and realize the great development and prosperity of Xinjiang.

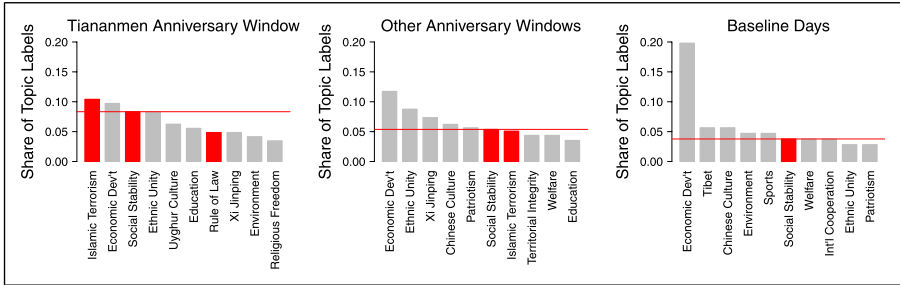


Figure 2. Uyghur coverage topics.

Baseline days: Advertising economic development. The right panel of Figure 2 displays coverage topics outside the five spikes from Figure 1. During normal days, 20% of Uyghur content focuses on CCP efforts to foster economic growth.⁸ Just 4% of Uyghur coverage focuses on social stability.

The Politics of Fear

The calendar and content of Uyghur coverage is consistent with our theory. The Uyghur coverage spikes during nationalist anniversaries and the Xinjiang Uprising anniversary suggest that the CCP uses Uyghur coverage to harden the Han/Uyghur cleavage. During the Tiananmen anniversary, the CCP broadcasts Uyghur repression. Our theory suggests the CCP does so to discourage Han protests. This interpretation is consistent with recent qualitative evidence. Uyghurs, Roberts (2020, 159) observes, have been “increasingly demonized as an existential threat.” Tobin (2020, 225) writes: “China’s nation-building project in Xinjiang exacerbates insecurity and hardens ethnic boundaries.”

Though our theory suggests the CCP broadcasts Uyghur repression to discourage protests by Han dissenters, the pattern of Uyghur coverage is consistent with several alternative explanations. The CCP may believe its Han constituents dislike ethnic Uyghurs (Johnson 2019) or value territorial integrity (Johnston and Quek 2018). If so, by broadcasting Uyghur repression, the CCP may seek popular support. The CCP may believe, by casting Uyghurs as dangerous to Han interests, it can cast itself as the guarantor of those interests, again generating popular support. To adjudicate among mechanisms, we conducted a nationally representative survey experiment.⁹ We hired a private survey company to recruit approximately 4000 respondents. The company used quota sampling to balance on the 2010 population census on age, gender, income, and province. The Online Appendix contains more information about the survey, including balance statistics and a discussion of research ethics. To leverage the Tiananmen anniversary’s intrinsic sensitivity, we fielded the survey in June 2020.

Design

We first asked a range of demographic questions: gender, province of residence, ethnicity, age, education, profession, household income, religion, and party membership status. We then asked questions about political engagement: to correctly answer questions about domestic politics and economics.¹⁰ Next, we randomly assigned respondents to treatment and control groups. The treatment group read an article from the 7 June 2014, edition of the *People's Daily*, which we randomly selected from Uyghur content during all Tiananmen anniversary windows. The article, which we discussed above, appears in the [Online Appendix](#). The control group did not read an article.¹¹ We then asked respondents direct questions about their support for the regime, willingness to engage in anti-regime protests, and views about Uyghurs. These prompts appear in [Table 1](#). For comparison, several of these questions were drawn from previous surveys in China ([Huang 2018](#); [Jiang and Yang 2016](#); [Robinson and Tannenbergs 2019](#)).

Citizens in autocracies have incentives to self-censor ([Blair, Coppock and Moor 2020](#); [Kuran 1997](#)). To accommodate preference falsification, we then asked the direct questions in [Table 1](#) as list experiments.¹² Within the list experiment block, we randomized respondents into two groups. One group received three nonsensitive items from which they were asked to indicate all that applied to them. The other group received the same three nonsensitive items plus one sensitive item, which correspond to the direct question prompts in [Table 1](#). Our full list experiments, including sensitive and nonsensitive items, appear in the [Online Appendix](#).

To mitigate concerns about online surveillance, we made the non-sensitive items as non-verifiable as possible. For instance, rather than “I attend a sports match once a week,” we used the ambiguous “I consider myself a sports fan.” To avoid ceiling and floor effects ([Blair and Imai 2012](#)), we chose nonsensitive items that are negatively

Table 1. Direct Question Prompts.

Regime Support

I support Comrade Xi Jinping's leadership.

Overall, the government is working for the people and is responsive to the needs of the people.

China's system of government is better than any other I can think of.

I approve of government propaganda work.

Protest

I would be willing to protest or participate in a collective walk against the government.

If No: Because I am afraid of the consequences.

Because I support the government's policies

If given the opportunity, I would like to move abroad to study, live, or work.

Uyghurs

I would prefer not to patronize a Uyghur owned business.

I approve of the government's policies in Xinjiang.

correlated with each other (Glynn 2013). To avoid design effects, we chose non-sensitive items that are unambiguous and for which respondents likely have strong opinions (Blair and Imai 2012). We omit the 25 respondents who failed an attention check: reporting the date of New Year's Day. The median survey response time was 8.9 minutes. We restrict attention to respondents who completed the survey in between 3 and 25 minutes, which we found was a reasonable amount of time during pilots. We also omit respondents who failed a "satisficing" check: that is, whose responses to nonsensitive questions asked directly (whether respondents enjoyed hiking, travel, and whether they preferred urban life to rural life) diverged from their responses when asked in the form of list experiments. Kramon and Weghorst (2012) attribute this divergence to the cognitive difficulty of counting items in response to survey questions. In Kenya, they found a satisficing rate of 40%; in China, ours is 55%.

Identifying the Politically Engaged Urban Elite

We expect the politically engaged, urban Han elite to be most sensitive to propaganda-based signals of out-group repression. These are the in-group members whose protests would most threaten regime survival. This hypothesis is consistent with the propaganda strategy we documented in Figure 1. The CCP reserves Uyghur content during the Tiananmen anniversary for the *People's Daily*, which circulates among the urban elite, rather than the *Worker's Daily* or the CCP's market-driven newspapers.

Guided by our theoretical expectations, we identified the politically engaged urban elite as follows. To measure in-group status, we asked whether respondents were ethnic Han. To measure political engagement, we asked respondents to correctly answer questions about domestic politics and economics. To measure urbanization, we located respondents' IP addresses within China's 3000 counties, which are approximately the size of U.S. counties. We then computed each county's average nighttime lights in 2019, using high quality satellite imagery data from the Visible and Infrared Imaging Suite developed by the Earth Observation Group (Elvidge et al. 2021). We define the politically engaged urban elite as the 30% of respondents who are ethnic Han, correctly answered all three questions about China's domestic politics and economy, and reside in areas with a nighttime lights score of 0.2 or higher, equivalent to a city of around 500,000 to 1 million residents. The average respondent in this group is a 38 years old, nonreligious Han woman, who graduated from college, earns around 65,000 RMB a year, lives in a major city, and consumes two news sources per day. Descriptive statistics appear in the Online Appendix.

In the robustness check section, we discuss other ways to identify the politically engaged urban elite. In the Online Appendix, we show that the results are substantively unchanged with these alternatives.¹³

Results

The list experiment results appear in [Figure 3](#). The top and middle panels show what Uyghur Tiananmen content does not change. For the statements along the x -axes, the y -axes present the estimated share of respondents in the treatment and control groups that agree, as well as the estimated difference between those two groups. When the confidence intervals of this estimated difference exclude 0, the treatment effect is statistically significant at the 95% level, indicating that the two groups have a statistically significant difference in means.¹⁴ The top panel shows results for politically engaged urban elites. The middle panel shows results for other citizens.

The top and middle panels reveal that Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda has no clear or consistent effect on support for the CCP, anti-Uyghur racism, or the CCP's policies in Xinjiang. Across treatment and control groups, the list experiments estimate aggregate support for the CCP at between 50% and 90%: higher when Xi Jinping is explicitly referenced and lower when not. This is consistent with [Robinson and Tannenberg \(2019\)](#), whose list experiment puts CCP support at roughly 60%. To be clear, these constitute upper bounds. These list experiments may also be subject to some residual preference falsification, especially given concerns about online surveillance.

From the top panel, among the politically engaged urban elite, the only statistically significant effect of Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda is to reduce the probability that respondents believe "the government is working for the people and is responsive to the needs of the people." From the middle panel, among all other citizens, the only statistically significant effect of Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda is to reduce the probability that respondents agree that they "support Comrade Xi Jinping's leadership." This suggests that the CCP's Uyghur propaganda during the Tiananmen anniversary does not serve to generate regime support, either by casting the CCP as preserving territorial integrity or as defending ethnic Han interests from a threatening Uyghur minority. If anything, Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda makes the CCP less popular among citizens.

The bottom panel of [Figure 3](#) reveals what Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda does change and for whom. Among the politically engaged urban elite, Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda induces fear. Model 1 presents the results for politically engaged urban elites. Model 2 corrects for floor and ceiling effects, which we discuss in more detail in the robustness check section. Roughly 5% of respondents in the control group would decline to protest due to fear of CCP repression. For members of the treatment group, this rises to nearly 40%, yielding a treatment effect of nearly 35 percentage points. Models 3 and 4 present the analogous results for other citizens. For them, Uyghur Tiananmen propaganda has no effect.

The [Online Appendix](#) includes analogous results for direct questioning. We find widespread evidence of preference falsification. Across treatment and control groups, support for the CCP under direct questioning hovers around 90%, well above the list experiment estimates.

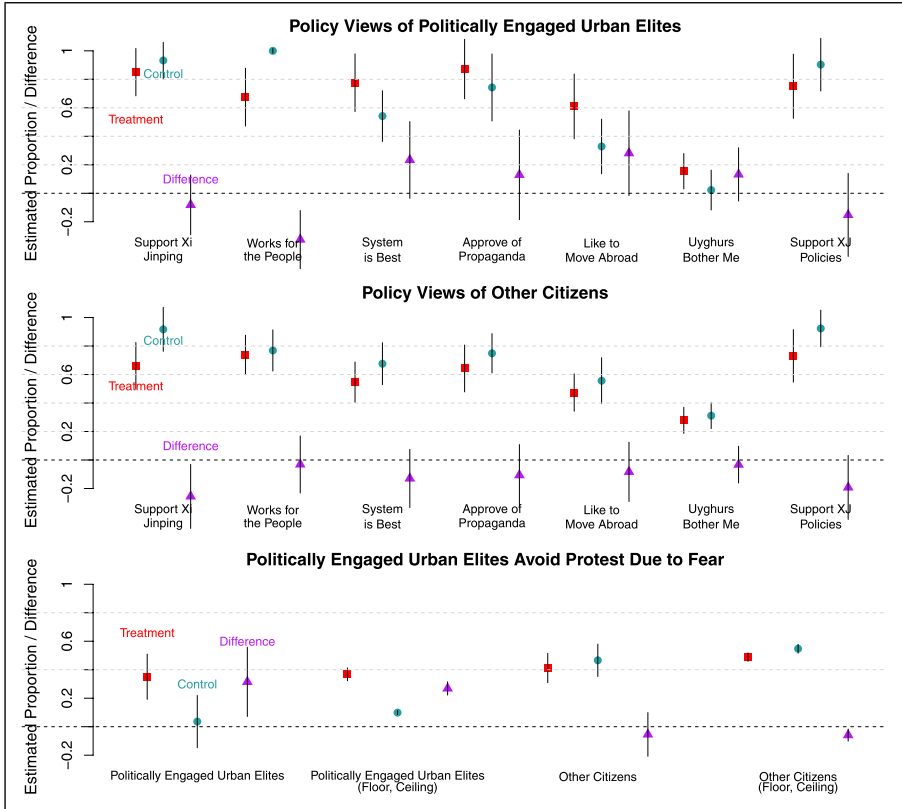


Figure 3. The top panel corresponds to politically engaged urban elites. The middle panel corresponds to all other respondents. The bottom panel shows that the CCP’s Uyghur propaganda during the Tiananmen anniversary induces fear of state repression among politically engaged urban elites. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Robustness Checks and Alternative Explanations

The [Online Appendix](#) reports several robustness checks. We find no evidence of design, floor, or ceiling effects in the list experiments. Although we identified survey completion time thresholds based on pre-testing with native speakers, we confirm that our results are robust to different survey completion times. Our survey was relatively well balanced on the 2010 census, but we also confirm that our results are robust to re-weighting the sample to match the census more precisely on age, income, sex, and region. We show that the results are robust to focusing exclusively on non-CCP members and to reasonable changes in the night lights threshold for identifying urban-based respondents.

Our focus on the politically engaged urban elite is motivated by existing literature. Scholars of Chinese politics have documented that the in-group members most likely to dissent from the CCP have a distinctive demographic profile: politically engaged, ethnic Han, and located in major urban areas. We propose two alternative approaches to identifying the in-group members most likely to dissent from the CCP. First, we focus on ethnic Han citizens in urban areas who express opposition to the regime in direct questioning. We think of these as the committed dissenters among the urban Han in-group. Second, we use principal components analysis (PCA) to construct an index that measures the extent to which a respondent is a member of the politically engaged urban elite. It consists of three subcomponents: Han ethnicity, political knowledge, and urbanization measured by county-level night lights. We extract the first principal component of the three outcome variables, which yields an index of the underlying feature that gave rise to the correlation among them. This technique has been used to generate indices in a variety of settings, including racism (Baker 2015). We define politically engaged urban elites as those whose index values rank among the top quartile, yielding 527 respondents. The results are robust to these alternatives.

Finally, we rule out an alternative explanation for the calendar of Uyghur propaganda that we document in Figure 1: the CCP may craft Uyghur propaganda to build support among CCP members for future appointments to Xinjiang.¹⁵ We find no evidence that references to “aid Xinjiang” – a CCP policy to pacify Xinjiang through Han settlement – spike during our five anniversary windows. We also replicated our list experiments, but restricted attention to CCP members. We find no evidence that the CCP’s Uyghur coverage builds support among CCP members for its Xinjiang policies. This suggests that the propaganda strategy we document is not driven by efforts to prepare CCP members for appointments in Xinjiang.

Conclusion

Authoritarian regimes, we argue, can broadcast repression against out-groups to signal the consequences of dissent to in-groups. This signal may provide information about the efficacy of the repressive apparatus or cue fear, which induces risk aversion and hence discourages anti-regime protests.

The CCP has detained at least 1 million of China’s 11 million Uyghurs. Since the Xinjiang Uprising of 2009, the CCP’s Uyghur propaganda coverage has spiked at five moments. Three are nationalist anniversaries, when the CCP brands itself as the guarantor of Han interests. The fourth is the anniversary of the Xinjiang Uprising itself, when the CCP advertises its investment in Xinjiang. The final spike is the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, when 10% of Beijing residents joined anti-regime protests. This content appears only in the *People’s Daily*, which targets the urban elite: those most likely to again descend upon Tiananmen and demand change. We employ list experiments to document the effect of this coverage on citizens’ beliefs. To leverage the date’s intrinsic sensitivity, we timed these experiments to coincide with the 31st anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre. This propaganda strategy makes politically

engaged urban elites less likely to engage in anti-regime protests because they fear repression. It has no effect on CCP support or views about ethnic Uyghurs, which suggests that the CCP's Uyghur propaganda during the Tiananmen anniversary does not serve to cast the CCP as preserving territorial integrity or defending ethnic Han interests from a threatening Uyghur minority.

We conclude with suggestions for future research. Though scholars have long regarded preference falsification as endemic in autocracies (Blair, Coppock and Moor 2020; Kuran 1997), some treat direct question surveys as accurate measures of CCP support (Chen 2004; Chen and Dickson 2008; Chen, Zhong and Hillard 1997; Chen and Shi 2001; Dickson 2015; Guang et al. 2020; Kennedy 2009; Lei and Lu 2016; Lewis-Beck, Tang and Martini 2014; Li 2004; Manion 2006; Shi 2000, 2001; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011; Stockmann, Esarey and Zhang 2018; Tang 2005; Truex 2017; Zhong, Chen and Scheb 1998), which repeated direct question surveys put at 90% or higher. From this, many scholars conclude the CCP's censorship and propaganda strategies have produced genuine popular support. This paper joins a growing literature that regards the CCP's hold on power as more tenuous (Carter, Carter and Schick 2023; Jiang and Yang 2016; Robinson and Tannenber 2019), and based primarily on force rather than consent (Carter and Carter 2023; Huang 2015a). In our view, many CCP policies should be understood as an effort to block protests by frustrated citizens. How does the CCP recruit for its repressive apparatus and ensure its loyalty? How does the CCP co-opt young elites? Does targeted elite repression induce acquiescence? To what extent have the December 2022 protests following the Urumqi apartment fire conditioned how ethnic Han regard ethnic Uyghurs and the CCP's policies in Xinjiang? These are critical questions for students of Chinese politics.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online

Notes

1. @RianThum, 22 September 2020.
2. The CCP has mounted an aggressive international campaign to justify its policies in Xinjiang. However, in the [Online Appendix](#), we show that there is little evidence that the CCP has sought to censor information about Uyghur repression within China, apart from social media content that criticizes CCP policies in Xinjiang or calls for solidarity with Uyghurs. For more, see [Brouwer \(2022\)](#).
3. Targeted repression can induce obedience without backlash ([Blaydes 2018](#); [Lichbach 1987](#)).
4. Our corpora cover the following periods: *People's Daily* (2000–2017), *Workers' Daily* (2009–2018), *Yangtze Evening Post* (2012–2019), *Beijing News* (2012–2019), *Economic Observer* (2006–2019), *Caijing* (2015–2019).
5. The Mukden Incident marks Japan's invasion of China in 1931; National Day marks the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949; Youth Day marks the birth of modern Chinese nationalism in 1919.
6. See also [Yang \(2017\)](#) and [Wang and Minzner \(2015\)](#).
7. <http://xj.people.com.cn/n/2014/0607/c188514-21368142.html>.
8. The leaked Xinjiang Papers reveal that the regime sees economic development as secondary to social stability. Xi made the interesting point that high levels of economic development did not prevent Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia from leaving from the Soviet Union, and that development and separatism had been rising simultaneously in Xinjiang. Xi concluded that “economic development does not automatically bring long-term stability, and development issues cannot be used to replace stability issues.” ([Xi 2014](#), 7).
9. We follow [Grimmer, Roberts and Stewart \(2022, 299\)](#), who argue that “we learn the most from our data when inferences are iterative and sequential. ... When we have hypotheses that are developed when performing an analysis, thinking sequentially means that we can test those hypotheses with new data and the next research design.”
10. We drew demographic questions from [Johnston and Quek \(2018\)](#).
11. Here we follow [Huang \(2018\)](#). Because all Chinese media is majority state-owned and many foreign news sources are blocked, a control article could induce its own effects.
12. The ordering of direct and indirect questions appears not to affect results ([Frye et al. 2017](#)).

13. To be clear, many respondents in the pool of our politically engaged urban elites may express support for the CCP, which provides preferential access to credit and government services for Han urbanites (Huang 2008).
14. For more, see [Blair and Imai \(2012\)](#) and [Glynn \(2013\)](#).
15. We thank Victor Shih for this insight.

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