# The Rise of the Chinese Security State*

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**Abstract**

Over the past two decades, the Chinese domestic security apparatus has expanded dramatically. "Stability maintenance" operations have become a top priority for local Chinese authorities. We argue that this trend goes back to the early 1990s, when central Party authorities adopted new governance models that differed dramatically from those of the 1980s. They increased the bureaucratic rank of public security chiefs within the Party apparatus, expanded the reach of the Party political-legal apparatus into a broader range of governance issues, and altered cadre evaluation standards to increase the sensitivity of local authorities to social unrest. We show that the origin of these changes lies in a policy response to the developments of 1989–1991, namely the Tiananmen democracy movement and the collapse of communist political systems in Eastern Europe. Over the past twenty years, these practices have developed into an extensive stability maintenance apparatus, whereby local governance is increasingly oriented around the need to respond to social unrest, whether through concession or repression. Chinese authorities now appear to be rethinking these developments, but the direction of reform remains unclear.

**Keywords:** security state; China; stability maintenance; political legal committee; public security

Over the past two decades, the Chinese domestic security apparatus has expanded dramatically. "Stability maintenance" (*weiwen* 维稳) operations have become a top priority for local Chinese authorities. Public security chiefs have risen in bureaucratic influence, funding and personnel for state operations aimed at controlling citizen petitioners and social protest have increased, and control of the institutions responsible for addressing these issues has been vested in progressively more senior Party authorities.

However, China remains far from being a simple police state. Although state authorities harass, detain and arrest individuals they deem a threat to their rule

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and vast numbers of state agents and informally recruited personnel have been employed to keep watch over selected political dissidents, citizen activists and public interest lawyers, heightened official sensitivity to social unrest has also led to state concessions to mobilized groups of aggrieved citizens and has facilitated strategies of "rightful resistance" among petitioners.

This article argues that the birth of these trends dates back to the early 1990s, when central Party authorities adopted new governance models that differed dramatically from those of the 1980s. They increased the bureaucratic rank of public security chiefs within the Party apparatus, expanded the reach of the Party political-legal apparatus into a broader range of governance issues, and altered cadre evaluation standards to increase the sensitivity of local authorities to social unrest and citizen protest. We argue that the origin of these changes lies in a policy response to the developments of 1989–1991, namely the Tiananmen democracy movement and the collapse of communist political systems in Eastern Europe. Over the past twenty years, these practices have developed into an extensive *weiwen* apparatus, whereby local governance is increasingly oriented around the need to respond to social unrest, whether through concession or repression. Chinese authorities now appear to be rethinking these developments, but the direction of reform remains unclear.

The past two decades have witnessed increased domestic unrest in China, despite a growing economy and rising living standards. Protests, such as those over land seizures or environmental grievances, generally target the specific actions of local officials. Rarely is the legitimacy of the Party-state itself directly challenged. While the literature on such protests has flourished, there remains limited scholarship on how China's coercive institutions have responded to these challenges.[1] We join a rising scholarly interest in coercive institutions in China, but our approach is distinctive in focusing on Party-state leaders and the internal organization of the Chinese bureaucracy.[2]

Beyond China, we also speak to the broader literature on authoritarian regimes. There has been a long tradition in the social sciences of viewing coercion as the pillar of model nation states.[3] The recent uprisings in the Arab world have again called attention to the dependence of authoritarian regimes on coercive organizations. The loyalty of such organizations is said to explain the survival of the Bahraini monarchy, while the defection of the military contributed to the breakdown of autocratic rule in Tunisia and Egypt.[4]

However, our study argues that the response of the authoritarian Chinese regime to the "survival dilemma" goes beyond simply ratcheting up the use of coercion.[5] Chinese authorities have remodelled the internal bureaucratic

1 For examples of studies on protest in China, see O'Brien and Li 2006; Chen 2012.
2 See Shambaugh 2002; Tanner, Murray Scott, and Green 2007; Guo 2012; Deng and O'Brien 2013 on coercive institutions in China.
3 Tilly 1978; Skocpol 1979; North 1990.
4 Bellin 2012.
5 The "survival dilemma" refers to the difficulty authoritarian rulers face when simultaneously minimizing threats from the elites and from the masses. See Magaloni and Kricheli 2010; Svolik 2012.

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organization of the Party-state apparatus, incentivized local authorities to respond aggressively to citizen protests (whether through repression or concession), and reworked the Party political-legal apparatus to address citizen grievances in a more flexible and coordinated manner.

Our research is based on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitatively, we manually constructed a database of Chinese political-legal leaders. It covers all chairpersons of national and provincial political-legal committees (the Party institutions charged with oversight of domestic security operations), as well all public security heads, procuratorate presidents and court presidents serving on these committees from 1978 to 2013.[6] The database includes variables measuring the Party bureaucratic positions concurrently held by these leaders. Qualitatively, we conducted a close reading of government and Party documents (including the public speeches of Qiao Shi 乔石, Party political-legal head during the late 1980s and early 1990s) to explain relevant changes in these bureaucratic practices.

The following section details our quantitative data collection methods. The article continues by offering a descriptive analysis of the rank of political-legal leaders at both national and local levels. It then identifies the early 1990s as a turning point in the development of the political-legal apparatus and provides an historical analysis of relevant shifts. We then examine recent developments and discuss the possible implications of our findings. The last section then concludes with a summary of our findings and the broader implications of the study.

## The Data

We constructed our Chinese Legal Leaders Database in three steps. First, we used the *China Law Yearbooks* (*Zhongguo falü nianjian* 中国法律年鉴) published by the China Law Society to identify Chinese national and provincial political-legal leaders, such as Party political-legal committee chairs, public security heads, court presidents and procuratorate presidents. This produced a list of names for the period 1986–2010. We supplemented this list with web searches, which extended coverage to 1978–2013. Second, we conducted internet searches for the biographies of these leaders. *Baidu Encyclopedia* (*baidu baike* 百度百科) contains information for most leaders, including their age, gender, education, and most importantly, working history.[7] Where insufficient information was available, additional internet searches of newspapers and other websites were employed to find the missing information. Third, we coded the leaders' bureaucratic ranks according to their concurrent positions. This coding scheme produced nine variables that are presented below. Examples include whether a provincial political-legal committee chairperson or high court president is on the provincial Chinese

6 Our data reflects the most recent developments after the CCP's 18th Party Congress.

7 For example, http://baike.baidu.com/subview/689642/4982664.htm?fr=aladdin. Accessed 24 March 2015.

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Communist Party (CCP) standing committee, and whether a provincial public security chief chairs the provincial political-legal committee.

## National and Local Trends

According to some media reports, the expansion of China's domestic security apparatus in recent years is largely the result of one man: Zhou Yongkang 周永康, Politburo Standing Committee member and head of the central Party political-legal committee (PLC) from 2007 to 2012. The reports claim that Zhou capitalized on central fears of domestic unrest and employed his dual positions to build his own personal fiefdom in the political-legal arena.[8] There is an element of truth in this. The bureaucratic influence of Party political-legal authorities has indeed risen in recent years, as illustrated by Table 1, which lists the Party rank held by the chairman of the central Party PLC. In the mid-1990s, the central Party PLC was chaired by a member of the 350-person Party Central Committee; this is in sharp contrast to Zhou Yongkang's stature as one of nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee. However, explaining the rise of the political-legal apparatus as an artefact of Zhou's twin roles as a Politburo Standing Committee member and head of the central Party PLC is problematic for several reasons.

First, Zhou is not the first Politburo Standing Committee member to chair the central Party PLC. Luo Gan 罗干 held the same positions from 2002 to 2007 (after serving on the 25-person Politburo from 1998 to 2002). During the 1980s, Qiao Shi also served as a Politburo Standing Committee member and Party political-legal head. Furthermore, Qiao presided over the relatively more liberal period from 1988 to 1990, when reformist Party leaders actually dissolved (at least in name) the national Party PLC in a partial effort at decoupling Party and state government institutions. The expansion of the security state administered by the political-legal apparatus is thus not simply an outgrowth of the Party rank of the person heading the organization.

Second, it is unclear that the bureaucratic influence of the political-legal apparatus has actually changed that much over the past three decades. Figure 1 depicts the percentage of chairmen of provincial Party PLCs who simultaneously held a position on the provincial standing committee from the beginning of the reform period to the present. We find that, with a limited exception in the 1980s, the heads of provincial Party PLCs have almost always been on the provincial standing committee. Regardless of shifts in national politics, PLCs have consistently been at the core of governance at the provincial level.

Another possible narrative explanation for the rise in the domestic security apparatus focuses on slightly longer term trends. Minzner has argued that central

8 Reuters. 2012. "Exclusive: China considers downgrading domestic security tsar in next line-up," 29 August, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/29/us-china-politics-security-idUSBRE87S1F020120829. Accessed 7 October 2013.

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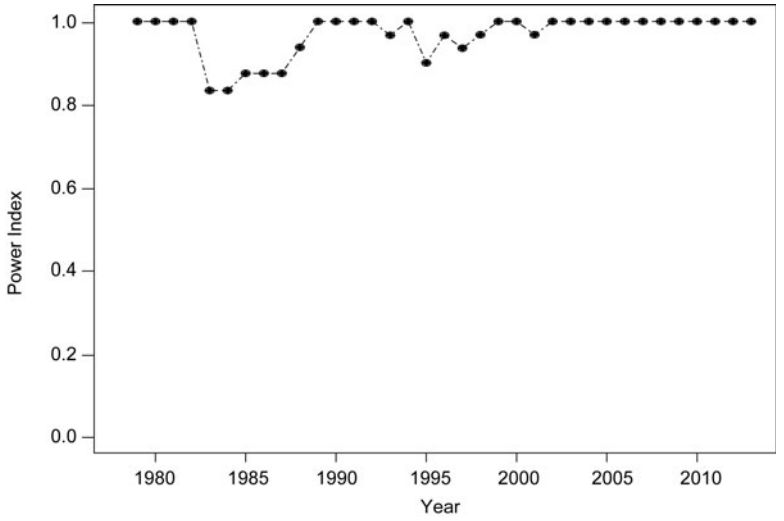
Table 1: **Party Rank of National Political-Legal Committee Chair (1980–2014)**

| Name | Period | Party Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Peng Zhen 彭真 | 1980–1982 | Politburo member |
| Chen Pixian 陈丕显 | 1982–1985 | Central Committee member |
| Qiao Shi 乔石 | 1985–1992 | 1985–1987: Politburo member<br>1987–1992: Politburo Standing Committee member |
| Ren Jianxin 任建新 | 1992–1998 | Central Committee member |
| Luo Gan 罗干 | 1998–2007 | 1998–2002: Politburo member<br>2002–2007: Politburo Standing Committee member |
| Zhou Yongkang 周永康 | 2007–2012 | Politburo Standing Committee member |
| Meng Jianzhu 孟建柱 | 2012– | Politburo member |

*Source*:
Chinese Legal Leaders Database.

Party attitudes underwent a shift between 2003 and 2005. Social stability emerged as a top Party priority, leading national authorities to backtrack on a range of legal reforms that they had launched in the 1980s and 1990s – reforms that had emphasized law, litigation, courts and a professional judiciary.[9] Similarly, Wang has identified the extent to which changed official bureaucratic practices

Figure 1: **Proportion of Provincial Political Legal Committee Chairs on Provincial CCP Standing Committee (1978–2013)**




*Source:*
Chinese Legal Leaders Database.
*Notes:*
A value of 1.0 indicates that every provincial Party political-legal head is simultaneously a member of the provincial standing committee.

9 Minzner 2011.

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resulted in a significant increase in the percentage of police chiefs being represented in Party provincial leadership teams after 2005.[10]

Both of the above analyses rely less on individuals (i.e. Zhou Yongkang) to explain changes in Party political-legal and domestic security practices. Instead, they focus on broader structural explanations. The failure of Chinese leaders to undertake meaningful institutional reform has led to the growth of social unrest (citizen petitions and riots) as a regularized form of political expression. Over the past decade, this has spurred Party leaders to expand the domestic security apparatus and raise its bureaucratic profile as a means to handle building tensions.

We continue to adhere to the above narrative. But, three decades of data on the chairmen of provincial Party PLCs (charged with managing the courts, procuratorates and police) and provincial standing committees (the top Party institution in each province) now permit us to supplement it with an analysis of internal bureaucratic dynamics within Chinese provincial Party institutions to a degree unknown in the prior literature.

Two figures illustrate our key findings. Figure 2 depicts the percentages of provincial Party PLC chairmen who simultaneously hold the position of court president, procuratorate president, or public security bureau (PSB) head.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a clear shift in the bureaucratic weight of the different entities within the political-legal apparatus. In the 1980s, provincial Party PLCs were just as likely to be chaired by court or procuratorate presidents as by the head of the provincial public security bureau. That trend ended in the early 1990s. PSB heads began to dominate provincial PLCs, while the numbers of court and procuratorate heads chairing provincial PLCs dropped to almost zero. Such trends suggest an increase in the relative influence and power of public security chiefs, and a parallel decline in the influence and power of court and procuratorate heads.

Figure 3 examines this trend through a different lens – the percentage of provinces that had the heads of the courts, procuratorate or PSB represented at the highest institution of Party governance in the province – the provincial standing committee. In the 1980s, provincial PSB heads were only somewhat more likely to be on the provincial standing committee as their court or procuratorate counterparts. Again, that trend decisively ended in the early 1990s. Fewer court and procuratorate heads were appointed to provincial standing committees, while more and more PSB heads came in.

Since the heads of Party PLCs are almost always represented on provincial standing committees, the two graphs largely parallel each other. However, Figure 3 does help to explain one intriguing facet of Figure 2 – the decline in numbers of PSB heads chairing Party PLCs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Rather than indicating a significant decline in the bureaucratic stature of the PSB, it reflects the fact that central authorities allowed some PSB heads to

10 Wang 2014.

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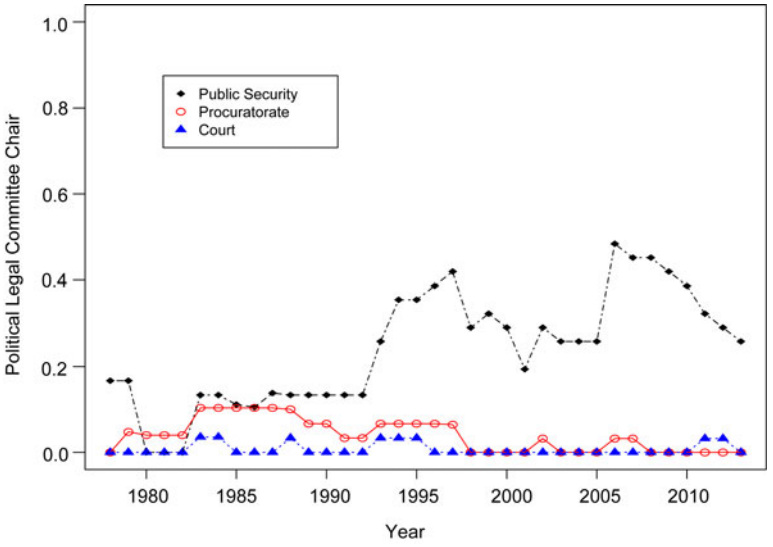
Figure 2: **Percentage of Provincial Public Security Heads, Procuratorate Presidents, and Court Presidents Heading the Provincial Political Legal Committee (1978–2013)**




*Source:*
Chinese Legal Leaders Database.
*Notes:*
These numbers do not total 100%, since it is also possible that a political-legal committee chairperson chairing neither the court, procuratorate or PSB might head the PLC.

(colour online)

serve on the standing committee entirely apart from their chairmanship of the Party PLCs. Thus, although numbers of PSB chiefs chairing Party PLCs declined, there was a much more modest decline in their representation on provincial standing committees.[11]

## The Turning Point

The above data suggests that the key shift in state policies with regard to domestic security took place not in the past five years, or even in the past ten years. Instead, the turning point appears to have occurred in the early 1990s. Central authorities seem to have adopted a qualitatively different strategy for managing political-legal institutions around that point. Marrying a bureaucratic and descriptive analysis of state security strategies both before and after this date with the above data helps to elaborate this shift.

At the beginning of the reform period in the late 1970s and early 1980s, central authorities re-established Party PLCs, which had collapsed along with other

11 The post-2006 decline in numbers of PSB heads chairing provincial PLCs, and its implications, are addressed in the concluding section of this article.

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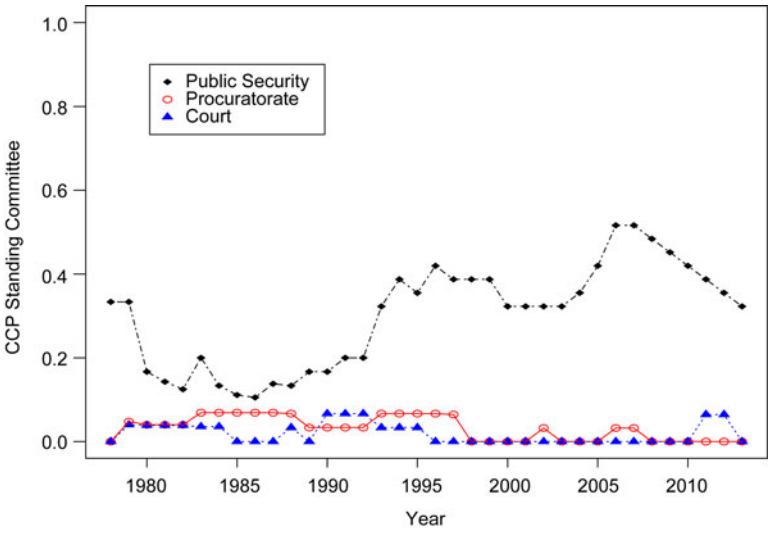
Figure 3: **Percentage of Provincial Public Security Heads, Procuratorate Presidents, and Court Presidents on the Provincial CCP Standing Committee (1978–2013)**




*Source:*
Chinese Legal Leaders Database.

(colour online)

formal institutions of governance during the internal chaos and political radicalism of the previous two decades. Their roles included supervising the courts, procuratorate and police, coordinating policy in the legal arena, and overseeing anti-crime efforts.[12]

During the 1980s, two different strategies contended for influence regarding how Party political-legal leaders should conduct these efforts. The first, "comprehensive management of public security" (*shehui zhi'an zonghe zhili* 社会治安综合治理) (CMPS hereafter), emerged in the late 1970s. CMPS emphasized the coordinated response to crime and social unrest through a broad range of government and social organs. This went beyond the simple mobilization of the police, procuratorate and courts to arrest, prosecute and jail offenders; it also involved enlisting individual workplaces or schools, assigning them responsibility for controlling their students or workers, and tailoring responses to the circumstances of each individual involved.[13]

Such efforts employed responsibility systems (*gangwei mubiao guanli zeren zhi* 岗位目标管理责任制) to accomplish these goals.[14] For officials, such systems set concrete target goals linked to official salaries and career advancement.[15] Annual

12 Zhou 2012; Hou 2013.
13 Qiao 2012, 55–76; Tanner, Harold M. 1999, 66–72.
14 Tanner, Harold M. 1994, 290–91.
15 Minzner 2009.

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bonuses received by the police, for example, were tied to their rates of success in resolving cases within their jurisdictions.[16] However, such systems were not limited to cadres. They were also used to reinvigorate rural policing strategies that relied on the participation of civilians. Villagers – either individually or in groups – would sign responsibility contracts with their village committee and township public security organs for maintaining security in a given target area. Such contracts specified designated financial rewards and inducements for success or failure in accomplishing the given tasks.[17]

Such efforts contrasted with earlier policies. China in the 1950s and 1960s relied on a classic combination of Maoist strategies to maintain social order. Public security bureaus, and the local Party authorities who supervised them, heavily emphasized ideological incentives to motivate cadres, rectification campaigns and populist "mass line" policies to pre-empt organized protest, and campaign-style policing characterized by crackdowns of short, sharp duration to suppress criminal activity.[18]

But, if CMPS policies marked a departure from Maoist populism and political mobilization, they represented a partial revival of yet earlier bureaucratic practices. Imperial Chinese authorities had relied on regular performance evaluations of local magistrates, tied to promotions and salaries, to manage a sprawling bureaucracy. And, as early as the Song dynasty, imperial authorities had formalized the use of village collective responsibility pacts (*baojia* 保甲) as a governance tool to maintain social order.

During the 1980s, however, CMPS remained relatively embryonic and undefined. As Harold Tanner notes, economic reform meant that many private entrepreneurs, migrant workers and the urban unemployed were increasingly living outside of the formal work-unit structure, which undermined the thrust of CMPS efforts.[19] In addition, responsibility systems themselves generated perverse incentives. Surveys conducted in the late 1980s revealed that large numbers of local police, faced with high quotas for resolving criminal cases, simply failed to report crime in an effort to skew their statistics and thus enhance their evaluations.[20]

A second, alternative method of social management consisted of "strike hard" (*yanda* 严打). This consisted of highly mediatized anti-crime crackdowns of specified durations, pursued with techniques drawn from Maoist political campaigns. In 1983, after a series of brutal and high profile crimes, Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 personally pushed central authorities to prioritize such campaign-style strategies.[21] The 1983–86 "strike hard" campaign followed. It was characterized

16 Dutton 2005, 277–282.
17 Tanner, Harold M. 1994, 292.
18 Dutton 2005, 258.
19 Tanner, Harold M. 1999, 70–71.
20 Dutton 2005, 282.
21 Tanner, Murray Scott 2000, 98–108; Xinhuanet. 2005. "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu yanli daji xingshi fanzui huodong de jueding" (CCP Central Committee decision regarding striking hard against criminal activity), 25 August 1983, http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-02/07/content_2558498.htm. Accessed 7 October 2013.

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by mass arrests, rapid sentencing procedures and high execution rates – with perhaps as many as 10,000 persons executed in a three-year period.[22]

As a social control strategy, "strike hard" policies required Party political-legal committees focused on the procuratorate, courts and police to coordinate their activities to deliver results. In the mid-1980s, authorities brought together court, procuratorate and police officials to staff "command posts" and carry out the "joint handling" of cases.[23] This facilitated the extremely rapid processing of cases. In one example, only 15 days elapsed between the arrest of a suspect and his execution.[24] Naturally, the combination of campaign political pressure and the erosion of bureaucratic boundaries between state organs resulted in sweeping procedural abuses.[25] State authorities themselves voiced concerns regarding such abuses (particularly during the 1983–86 campaign) and the tendency for campaigns to degenerate into routinized bursts of enforcement, which were invariably followed by a resurgence in criminal activity.[26]

The dramatic events of 1989 prompted a reset in state management of crime and social unrest in China, which led to the emergence of CMPS as the primary social control strategy and the decline (albeit gradual) in reliance on "strike hard" policies. This shift is reflected both in relevant central Party directives and the speeches of Qiao Shi, the Politburo Standing Committee member heading the political-legal affairs committee at the time.

In 1990, Party authorities re-established the central Party PLC, which had been abolished (at least in name) during Zhao Ziyang's 赵紫阳 abortive two-year experiment with political reform during the late 1980s. However, central leaders did not immediately promulgate a new strategy for the re-established PLC. Instead, they carried out short-lived "strike hard" campaigns, such as the "six evils" (*liu hai* 六害), in late 1989 and 1990.[27]

This changed in January 1991. At a central Party conference attended by all provincial political-legal heads and the representatives of 30 other organizations, Qiao Shi spelled out a new direction for Party political-legal work in a series of speeches highlighting the need to respond to the political events of the previous two years, including the unravelling of communist political systems in Eastern Europe and the USSR, the 1989 student democracy protest movement, and tensions in ethnic autonomous regions.[28]

Despite rhetorical support for continuing "strike hard" policies, Qiao's speeches marked a clear shift in favour of CMPS: "As to the relationship between 'strike hard' and comprehensive management of social stability … while adhering to 'strike hard,' more prominence needs to be given to comprehensive

22 Tanner, Harold M. 1999, 99.
23 Ibid., 87; Trevaskes 2007, 124.
24 Dutton 2005.
25 Tanner, Murray Scott 2000.
26 Trevaskes 2007, 159–164.
27 Biddulph 2007, 137; Qiao 2012, 218–220.
28 Qiao 2012, 221–252.

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management of social stability."[29] Qiao emphasized that "strike hard" needed to be increasingly localized – with campaigns directed by individual local authorities in response to the specific problems they faced. In contrast, CMPS was to be adopted as a long-term, nationwide strategy, pursued under the leadership of a central body and demanding the support of all Party authorities. Such proposals were not entirely new. As early as 1986, in an indirect criticism of the just-concluded nationwide "strike hard" campaign, Qiao had called for greater emphasis on CMPS strategies, heightened use of responsibility systems tied to the salaries and promotions of local officials, and the creation of a more coordinated Party-led CMPS apparatus.[30]

Now, however, Qiao's words translated into immediate shifts in policy. Less than a month after the conclusion of the January 1991 conference, the Central Party Committee and State Council issued a joint directive on strengthening the comprehensive management of public security.[31] The directive set CMPS as a national priority. It established a central Committee for the Comprehensive Management of Public Security to manage these efforts and coordinate state responses to social unrest and crime. Furthermore, it ordered the creation of CMPS branches at the county level and higher, and the establishment of CMPS "leadership organs" at the township and village levels.

These policies reshaped Party governance in two critical ways. First, they expanded the portfolio of Party political-legal heads. The 1991 directive clearly placed CMPS work under the auspices of Party PLCs, explicitly co-locating CMPS committees in the same offices with Party PLCs. Unsurprisingly, in the past two decades, every national chair of the Party PLC has also chaired the national CMPS committee. Where 1980s-era Party political-legal authorities were tasked with managing the courts, procuratorates and police, their successors have found themselves additionally charged with coordinating (through the CMPS committees) a much wider web of governmental activity surrounding crime and social unrest. Comparing the membership of the two institutions illustrates this point. In 2007, the central Party PLC consisted of five entities: the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of State Security, and the Ministry of Justice. In the same year, the membership of the national CMPS committee consisted of over 40 organizations, including the five above, but also the National Tourism Agency, the People's Bank of China, the State Ministry of Work Safety, the Ministry of Personnel, and the People's Liberation Army.

The 1991 decision had a second effect as well. It explicitly raised social stability to a core place within internal Party cadre evaluation policies. It instructed Party

29 Ibid., 246–252.
30 Ibid., 50–54.
31 "Zhonggong zhongyang, guowuyuan guanyu jiaqiang shehui zhi'an zonghe zhili de jueding" (CCP Central Committee, State Council decision regarding strengthening the comprehensive management of public security), 2 February 1991, http://www.alt.gov.cn/Article/ShowArticle.aspx?ArticleID=38470. Accessed 10 October 2013.

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leaders at all levels to construct CMPS target responsibility systems tied to the salary and career promotion prospects for local leaders. These were to be "fused with responsibility systems for economic development" that had developed in the 1980s. Further, CMPS social order targets were also to be granted status as "priority targets with veto power" (*yipiao foujue* 一票否决), which means that failure to attain them could cancel out an official's positive work performance in other fields.[32] Subsequent implementing opinions required relevant organization bureau officials to solicit the input of CMPS leaders in personnel advancement decisions.[33]

Of course, policy changes at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy did not generate sweeping changes in internal practices overnight. There were renewed national "strike hard" campaigns in 1996, 2001 and 2010.[34] Implementation difficulties hampered central efforts to build a CMPS institutional framework. In 1996, for example, central CMPS authorities issued directives complaining of the laxity of local Party authorities, and demanding that they devote more attention to constructing the required CMPS institutions – particularly at the township and village levels.[35]

However, the early 1990s did mark a "critical juncture," unleashing a gradual evolution in official strategies of social control.[36] The three subsequent national "strike hard" campaigns were of a lesser duration and intensity compared with the campaign waged between 1983 and 1986. The seven-month long 2010 campaign, for example, was restricted to the public security apparatus, with limited participation from judicial organs.[37]

Bureaucratic institutions gradually expanded in the wake of shifts in central policies. Authorities began to work social stability considerations into relevant evaluations of local officials. Numbers of CMPS personnel grew and their responsibilities ballooned. For example, central Party directives issued in 2001 specified that private enterprises should be brought into the CMPS web and should assume responsibility for incidents of crime and social unrest committed

32 Ibid.

33 Chinalawedu.com. 1993. "Guanyu shixing shehui zhi'an zonghe zhili lingdao zerenzhi de ruo gan guiding" (Relevant rules on implementing responsibility systems for cadres in leadership positions regarding the comprehensive management of public security), 14 November, http://www.chinalawedu.com/news/1200/22598/22604/22705/22727/2006/3/hu766237403618136002218 55-0.htm. Accessed 10 October 2013.

34 Biddulph 2007, 134–35; Trevaskes 2007, 187–89.

35 Chinalawedu.com. 1996. "Zhongyang shehui zhi'an zonghe zhili weiyuanhui guanyu jiaqiang shehui zhi'an zonghe zhili jiceng gongzuo de yijian" (Opinion of the Central Committee for the comprehensive management of public security regarding strengthening grassroots work), 7 November, http://www.chinalawedu.com/falvfagui/fg22598/36434.shtml. Accessed 10 October 2013.

36 At critical junctures, events set a specific trajectory of institutional development and consolidation that become increasingly difficult to reverse. See Collier and Collier 1991. We do not argue that after 1991 the trend was irreversible, but once Chinese authorities began to build up the *weiwen* apparatus as the primary institutional means to deal with social protest, it became progressively difficult to alter course. The *weiwen* apparatus itself began to acquire larger and larger entrenched interests (money, power), while citizens themselves become increasingly incentivized to behave in a particular way (increasingly disruptive protests). Since 1991, the two trends have begun to feed on each other in an increasingly vicious cycle.

37 Xie 2013, 53; Xie 2012, 7.

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within their ranks.[38] By the late 1990s, when Party authorities established specialized offices to deal with emerging concerns (such as social stability (*weiwen*) offices to respond to outbreaks of unrest, or the "610" anti-cult departments to deal with organizations deemed heretical[39]), these were invariably grouped with the CMPS offices under the purview of Party political-legal authorities. As these institutions evolved, their personnel, leadership and daily responsibilities remained highly intertwined with the fused CMPS/political-legal committee framework established in the early 1990s.[40]

The increased emphasis on social stability was associated with the rise in bureaucratic rank of police chiefs. Local police chiefs – rather than their court or procuratorate counterparts – managed the daily operations of the newly established *weiwen* offices.[41] And, in 2003, central Party authorities explicitly instructed that provincial, municipal and county-level public security organs should be headed by Party standing committee members or deputy government heads, thereby outranking their local government and court counterparts (and generating the peak shown in Figure 3).[42]

Such developments have led to the widespread "securitization" of local governance in China. This is not without precedent. The American pursuit of the war on terror has led an ever-expanding array of foreign policy concerns – AIDS, economic development, information collection and monitoring – to be regarded as challenges to be comprehensively managed through a national security lens.[43] Similarly, the Chinese state's focus on domestic stability, coupled with the post-1991 bureaucratic shifts discussed above, have meant that an increasing number of seemingly unconnected fields of governance, for instance, food safety, environmental accidents and ordinary civil disputes, are being sucked into the *weiwen* vortex. This has generated intense pressure on local officials. In 2013, one Sichuan township deputy head pointed to precisely such pressures as the reason for his resignation, asserting that they effectively required him to spend four months per year carrying out *weiwen* work, leaving only four months to spend on "real" government work.[44]

These developments have also led to increasing conflict with legal norms promoted by Chinese authorities themselves. At the central level, the heavy state use

38 Xie 2013, 148

39 The "610" offices, named after the date 10 June 1999, were established to suppress the *falun gong* spiritual movement.

40 Liebman 2013; Cook and Lemish 2011.

41 Xie 2013, 145.

42 People.com.cn. 2003. "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang yu gaijin gong'an gongzuo de jueding" (Decision of the CCP Central Committee regarding further strengthening and improving public security work), 18 November, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66691/4494638.html#. Accessed 1 December 2011.

43 Higgott 2004.

44 Xinhuanet.com. 2013. "Fuzhenzhang wangshang fa cizhi ganyan: sigeyue weiwen sheng sigeyue ganzhengshi" (Deputy township secretary publishes internet statement regarding his resignation: four months spent handling stability maintenance work leaves only four months to handle "real" work), 5 July, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-07/05/c_124959920.htm. Accessed 10 October 2013.

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of top-down responsibility systems that tie officials' career and financial incentives to their success or failure in attaining given targets (in particular, social stability targets) as a governance tool has fuelled the expansion of a "rule by mandates" which is at odds with rule-of-law norms.[45] At the local level, the stability imperative has promoted the emergence of an expansive, well-funded, extra-legal *weiwen* apparatus. Faced with increasingly tough career sanctions whenever outbreaks of citizen petitioning occur within their jurisdictions, local Chinese authorities have resorted to both the widespread use of hired thugs to intercept petitioners seeking to reach higher authorities and the calculated application of pressure on petitioners' families and friends ("relational repression") to convince them to give up their petitioning efforts.[46]

Increasing securitization of local governance contributed to the decision of Chinese authorities to turn against their own late 20th-century legal reforms. State efforts to promote courts, litigation and rule-of-law rhetoric gave rise (by 2003) to a cadre of Chinese public interest lawyers and advocates (such as Chen Guangcheng 陈光诚 and Xu Zhiyong 许志永), capable of organizing aggrieved citizens, invoking central rule-of-law language, and launching savvy litigation and media challenges to state policies. By 2005, Party political-legal authorities concluded that such efforts were inconsistent with the expanded domestic stability apparatus and its aims. As a result, they have since progressively moved to close down "rhetoric (constitutionalism), channels (court trials), and social forces (lawyers) that activists had used to mobilize for greater change."[47]

Ironically, few appear to have initially appreciated the extent to which the new bureaucratic structures and social control policies advanced in the early 1990s would ultimately generate the levels of conflict with legal norms seen in the last decade. At the time, some foreign criminal law experts depicted the emergence of CMPS strategies as a rationalized, professionalized and desirable alternative to the excesses of campaign-style policing.[48] Furthermore, in the 1990s, at least some Chinese officials clearly envisaged that the domestic security shifts discussed above were consistent with legal reforms emphasizing judicial professionalism and greater access to the courts for aggrieved Chinese citizens. Indeed, less than a year after Tiananmen, Qiao Shi himself advocated the adoption of the CMPS policies described above while at the same time also saying:

> Historically, it was the case that officials brought suit against citizens. [Now,] the newly implemented Administrative Procedure Law authorizes citizens to bring suit against officials – this must be regarded as an advance for democracy and the rule of law. Implementation of some laws will increase "trouble" (*mafan* 麻烦). But this trouble is extremely necessary, and is beneficial to better protecting citizen rights.[49]

45 Birney 2013; Minzner 2009; Dutton 2005. Naturally, many of these policies are themselves modern incarnations of earlier practices found in the early PRC or imperial periods.
46 Deng and O'Brien 2013; Lam 2012.
47 Minzner 2013, 69.
48 Biddlulph 2007, 150.
49 Qiao 2012, 92 (authors' translation).

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## Recent Developments

Developments since 2012, including the dramatic fall of Politburo member, Bo Xilai 薄熙来, the retirement (and subsequent prosecution) of his ally, Zhou Yongkang, and Xi Jinping's 习近平 ascension to power, have prompted some observers to parse the tea leaves for signs of reform in the political-legal system.

Changes have indeed occurred. At the top of the system, the bureaucratic rank of the chairman of the central Party PLC has been reduced. Unlike the period between 2002 and 2012, the current chairman (Meng Jianzhu 孟建柱) no longer holds a spot on the Politburo Standing Committee. There has also been a reallocation of influence within provincial PLCs. In 2005, over 40 per cent of provincial Party PLCs were chaired by provincial PSB heads. That figure has now fallen by roughly half (Figure 3). Instead, the emerging trend appears to be vesting the chairmanship of the provincial PLC with a designated deputy Party secretary who heads neither the court, procuratorate or the PSB. Percentages of PLCs chaired by deputy Party secretaries have now risen to over 20 per cent.[50]

How to interpret such developments? Naturally, one possibility would be to view them as an effort to curtail the power of the Party political-legal apparatus and weaken the security state.[51] Such an interpretation would arguably be further reinforced by Figure 3, which shows a post-2005 decline in the percentage of PSB chiefs seated on provincial Party standing committees, from over 50 per cent to under 40 per cent.

But our data suggests that such changes remain limited in nature. On the provincial level, there has been absolutely no change in the practice of having the Party political-legal head represented on the provincial standing committee (Figure 1). That trend has continued in every single province (including after the 2012 leadership handover). Further, as Yuhua Wang has demonstrated, the decline in PSB chiefs heading Party PLCs does not mean that their influence has been diminished.[52] Rather, it has been accompanied by a parallel trend – an increasing number of PSB chiefs being transferred to the Party group (*dangzu* 党组) in the provincial government, and holding positions such as assistant to the governor (*shengzhang zhuli* 省长助理) or deputy governor (*fu shengzhang* 副省长). Consequently, public security heads have not suffered a demotion in rank, because members on the government Party group have the same bureaucratic rank as a member on the provincial CCP standing committee, vice-ministerial level (*fu buji* 副部级).[53]

Instead, the key trend appears to be a steady diversification of the number of leaders bearing responsibility for domestic stability work. Take, for example, the

50 Infzm.com. 2011. "Jianfu hou, zhuanzhi fushuji ganshenme?" (After "deputy reductions," what are full-time deputy Party secretaries doing?), 9 December, http://www.infzm.com/content/65959. Accessed 7 October 2013.

51 BBC. 2012. "China leaders reassert control over security portfolio," 21 November, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-20422303. Accessed 10 October 2013.

52 Wang 2014.

53 Ibid.

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relationship between the CMPS committees and Party PLCs. Central authorities are in the process of separating the leadership of the two institutions. As mentioned above, until recently, their leadership was intertwined. The Party PLC head would bear direct responsibility for leading the work of the courts, procuratorate and public security bureau, and simultaneously (in his role as head of the CMPS committee) be charged with mobilizing, coordinating and enlisting a wide range of other government bureaus in social stability work. Since 2011, Party leaders have been dividing the leadership of these two institutions by appointing either the provincial Party secretary or a designated deputy Party secretary as chair of the CMPS committee, and having a separate individual head the provincial Party PLC. About 15 of China's provincial-level governments have now adopted such a bureaucratic division of responsibilities.[54] Party leaders may be responding to (and rethinking) the expanded role that the PLCs have enjoyed in recent years – not by reducing the bureaucratic rank of the committees, but by dividing up the responsibilities for domestic security work among a range of different subordinates.

The implications of such developments are unclear. On one hand, such developments might lead to the emergence of partial checks on state power. For example, the increasing division of power within the security apparatus might result in Party political-legal authorities losing the voice that they have enjoyed in recent years over a range of other enforcement organs.

On the other hand, these shifts might suggest a more negative trend. Social stability appears to be migrating ever higher within the bureaucratic hierarchy as a Party concern. Consider the general shifts over recent decades. In the 1980s, the domestic security portfolio on provincial Party standing committees was typically held by a Party political-legal head, who himself was not the provincial police chief. In the 1990s, it was increasingly held by the provincial police chief serving simultaneously as a Party standing committee member, head of the provincial PLC and chair of the CMPS committee. That represented an intensification of provincial security responsibilities in a single individual. Since 2006, however, the security portfolio at the provincial Party level has increasingly taken the form of multiple individuals – first, a Party political-legal head represented on the Party standing committee, second, a CMPS committee head also represented on the standing committee, and third, a provincial police chief – also represented on the standing committee or on the Party group within the government. This represents an intensification of security responsibilities among a greater number of people at the provincial level.

Rather than representing a weakening of the political-legal apparatus, such developments may be another step towards escalating the "securitization" of the Chinese

54 Takunpao.com. 2012. "Zhou Yongkang zhuguan zongzhiwei bianshen yiniankao: xuanchuan lingyu jiaqiang" (A year since the name change of the Central Committee for the Comprehensive Management of Public Security run by Zhou Yongkang: propaganda work strengthened), 27 September, http://www.takungpao.com/news/content/2012-09/27/content_1171613.htm. Accessed 10 October 2013.

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state. As domestic security challenges have risen in importance over the past two decades, and the *weiwen* apparatus has ballooned in size, the Chinese bureaucratic state may have found it necessary to task ever-increasing numbers of senior officials with responsibility for domestic security work. Concurrently, the domestic security portfolio may have emerged as such a concentrated locus of power that increasingly senior leaders find it undesirable to allow others to control it.

Developments since the 2012 leadership transition appear to bolster such an interpretation. The Party general secretary (Xi Jinping) has emerged as the Politburo Standing Committee member clearly responsible for the political-legal portfolio (i.e. directly managing Meng Jianzhu) – a distinct contrast with prior practice (Zhou Yongkang, rather than Hu Jintao 胡锦涛, running the PLC). Moreover, at the November 2013 Party plenum, Chinese authorities announced the creation of a new state security committee charged with supervising both foreign and domestic security matters and chaired by Xi Jinping himself. This represents an unusual concentration of power over the security portfolio in the hands of China's top leader.[55]

## Implications

First, the rise of the Chinese security state in recent years is not merely the result of political decisions taken by individual Party leaders. Nor is it simply the result of social and economic dislocations caused by the process of economic reform. Instead, the expansion of the Chinese state *weiwen* apparatus is the result of the gradual accretion of power by a political-legal bureaucratic apparatus that was significantly restructured in the wake of the dramatic events of 1989–1991 to address central Party concerns regarding social stability and domestic unrest. Specific events over the past two decades, such as the *falun gong* protests of 1999, increased citizen petitions regarding land grabs in the early 2000s, and the ascension of Luo Gan and Zhou Yongkang to the Politburo Standing Committee, have contributed to state decisions to ratchet up the power and influence of this apparatus. But the fundamental framework – the rise in the bureaucratic stature of the police, the emergence of social stability as a core element of cadre evaluation mechanisms, the expanded responsibility for political-legal authorities for coordinating state responses to social unrest across all fields of governance – is the product of state policies taken in the early 1990s. The creation of a national state security committee merging these functions under the direct command of China's top leader may simply be the latest step in a two-decade long evolutionary rise of the Chinese security state.

Second, these policies may themselves be partially responsible for the rise of social unrest in China today. As others have documented, the rise in collective

55 Unlike the Soviet Union, China has traditionally not had a vertical command structure over an extensive security apparatus vested directly in the top leader. Historically, Mao himself primarily relied on mass movements, rather than the secret police, to dominate both the state leadership and society at large. Guo 2012 11–12.

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petitions and citizen protests since the 1990s and the emergence of "rightful resistance" as a strategy for popular contention have been facilitated by state sensitivity to the threat of social unrest.[56] Precisely because central officials apply pressure on local authorities (through cadre responsibility systems) to avoid all instances of mass petitions, citizens can, and increasingly are, "gaming the system" by tactically using the threat of organized petitioning as a tool to try to wring concessions from local authorities in conflicts ranging from land grievances to commercial disputes to environmental protests, often regardless of whether their claims have underlying legal merit. These developments may be a direct outgrowth of the bureaucratic changes of the early 1990s. The decision of Chinese authorities to expand the responsibility of political-legal leaders for coordinating state responses to social unrest across different areas of governance and also to increase the career sanctions on local authorities for outbreaks of social discontent may have enabled the growth of social protest by altering key bureaucratic incentives for both citizens and officials alike.

Ironically, both the rise in the Chinese state repressive apparatus and the increase in social instability may have their roots in exactly the same government policies.

## Concluding Remarks

An analysis of more than three decades of data on Chinese political-legal leaders shows that the Chinese state has become increasingly "securitized." The rank of public security chiefs vis-à-vis court and procuratorate leaders has been raised within the Party apparatus, the reach of the Party political-legal apparatus has been expanded into a broader range of governance issues, and the incentive structure of local officials has been altered to increase the sensitivity of local authorities to social protest. We show that the rise of the security state can be traced back to the early 1990s when the Party-state systematically restructured the security apparatus as a response to the events of 1989.

We also observe a pluralization of security work in recent years. Domestic security work in the mid-1980s largely consisted of coordinated campaigns of court, procuratorate and police personnel led by Party PLC officials. Recent years have seen the emergence of a more pluralized organizational structure involving a wider net of Party, government and social institutions. In part, this reflects the fact that an increasingly complex Chinese society is generating a more complicated set of disputes. Individual government bureaus cannot handle these on their own. Before 1978, labour disputes might be successfully managed within the confines of a single state-owned enterprise. Now, handling a mass

56 O'Brien and Li 1999, 2006; Minzner 2006; Cai 2006; Chen 2012; Lorentzen 2013. This has been exacerbated by post-1978 policies that moved away from Maoist tactics of political mobilization, such as rectification campaigns, as tools for pre-empting and addressing outbreaks of mass protest. See O'Brien 1999. As citizens lost the channels for political participation provided by regular Maoist political campaigns, organized discontent began to take the form of the citizen activism discussed in the text – organized petitions and protests aimed at pushing the buttons created by the adaption of CMPS policies and associated responsibility systems.

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protest by the employees of a construction company might require the coordination of local police, the courts, the labour bureau, labour unions and the private enterprise – not to mention the state media and propaganda authorities (to control the dissemination of information via social media).

But the pluralization of security work also reflects the fact that, rather than facilitating the emergence of independent institutions (such as courts) endowed with the autonomy and legitimacy to handle such disputes, Chinese authorities are blurring the distinction between security and non-security Party work. Housing management bureaus (*fangwu guanliju* 房屋管理局), which might not have been considered part of the domestic security apparatus in the 1980s, are now expected to be directly involved in settling protests arising from land seizures. As one Chinese state cadre fumed after learning of directives instructing him to prevent family and relatives from engaging in protest activity surrounding a local construction project, at the cost of his own job, "Now, as long as you are part of the state bureaucracy, you are part of the *weiwen* apparatus."

China's regime stability in the last 30 years is not simply the result of coercion; it is far more. The China field has provided a wide spectrum of theories explaining the macro-level stability of the regime, including the CCP's revolutionary tradition and cultural resources,[57] institutionalization of elite politics,[58] the cadre evaluation system,[59] the media,[60] nationalism,[61] the Party's co-optation strategy,[62] and foreign direct investment.[63] To this list, we would add the bureaucratic shifts within the Chinese political-legal system that the state has adopted to respond to escalating levels of social conflict. The ultimate success or failure of these efforts, of course, will be left for history to answer.

**摘要:** 在过去的 20 多年中, 中国的国内维稳体系经历了大幅的扩展, 维护社会稳定成为地方政府工作的重中之重。我们提出这一趋势源于 90 年代初期党中央采取的一系列有别于 80 年代的治理模式。这一模式提高了公安部门领导在整个官僚体系中的地位, 扩大了党的政法系统对一系列治理领域的影响, 以及将社会稳定纳入到了地方干部考核体制中。我们认为这些变化是政府对 1989 至 1991 年间的事件–即天安门民主运动和东欧共产党政权的倒台–的政策回应。经过 20 多年的发展, 这些政策已经促成了一个庞大的维稳体系。在这一体系中, 地方治理的重心日益围绕着如何应对社会抗争进行, 或是妥协或是镇压。中国政府正在重新考量这一体系, 但改革的方向尚不明朗。

**关键词:** 维稳型国家; 维稳; 政法委; 公安

57 Perry 2012.
58 Nathan 2003.
59 Whiting 2004; Landry 2008.
60 Stockmann 2012.
61 Zhao 1998; Weiss 2013.
62 Dickson 2003; Tsai 2006.
63 Gallagher 2002.

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