

**MIDDLE-CLASS PROTESTS
IN URBAN CHINA**

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Executive Summary

1. Popular protest is not rare in contemporary urban China. However, there have been drastic changes in terms of the characteristics of the protests.
2. The first decade of the new century had seen an increase in rights-protection protests in urban China. The main participants of these protests were local middle class residents who initiated protests to raise issues on specific economic and social problems as opposed to abstract socio-political issues.
3. Middle-class citizens have started to claim rights granted to them by law in principle but which are never actually delivered. Therefore, compared to early reactive struggles to highlight specific problems, the recent middle-class protests were mostly proactive in nature.
4. The social-political changes, such as pluralism within the administration system, the central government's relative tolerance of local citizens' protests, the relaxation of government control over the mass media, the gradual improvement of legislation and the establishment of civil associations, have facilitated the emergence and success of middle-class protests.
5. The protest activists include white-collar workers, managers, engineers, university lecturers, lawyers, and former government officials. In terms of political membership, the protest activists who are mostly in their forties and above include not only ordinary citizens and members of "democratic parities", but also Chinese Communist Party members.
6. Many activists participate in protests for their own interests or as an indication of membership to the privileged middle class. Some neighborhood elites become leaders of protests because of their personalities, their sense of justice and community pressure, or a combination of these factors.

7. To reduce political risks, middle-class citizens are generally moderate in their approach and tend to avoid direct confrontations with the central government. Instead of initiating disruptive protests, most middle-class protestors adopt non-violent strategies to avoid over-irritating the authorities, especially the central government.
8. In the face of many constraints, local governments usually, depending on the situations, adopt diverse strategies to deal with middle-class protests, which include accommodation, compromise, collaboration and repression.
9. Middle-class protests have affected the values and behavior of urban citizens. They have contributed to the improvement of local governance and positively reshaped local politics. However, their influence on the macro political structure of China is yet to be seen.