

**CHINA'S POLITICS IN 2011: MAINTAINING
STATUS QUO AND PREPARING FOR
LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION**

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Executive Summary

1. In 2011, the Chinese government overcame a string of challenges ranging from inflation and corruption, to social unrest.
2. However, the government's soaring fiscal revenue in the aftermath of a global financial crisis has sparked a domestic backlash of *guofu minqiong* (the state is rich, the people are poor).
3. Social protests, particularly Internet-based ones, in 2011 were largely driven by global upheavals elsewhere. The flurry of "independent candidates" for grass-root parliamentary elections and the arrest of political critic Ai Weiwei reflected the growing tension between state and society.
4. In December, violent protests erupted in the fishing village of Wukan in Guangdong Province when its negotiator over land grabs died in police custody. Provincial leaders relented by offering rare concessions to protesters including returning the remains of the negotiator and extending recognition to protest leaders.
5. Local protests and riots are on the rise, most of which are triggered by land seizures and corruption that infringe on people's economic interest. Protesters are seldom driven by political motives and their targets are usually local officials instead of the central government in Beijing. Wukan's unrest is unlikely to affect Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang's political career.
6. On the Party front, the Chinese Communist Party has been busy reshuffling thousands of Party and administrative officials at various levels to prepare for the leadership succession scheduled for the 18th Party Congress next year.
7. Bo Xilai, a hopeful candidate for the next Politburo Standing Committee, was lauded by leftists for leading a high-handed campaign against corruption and

crime, launching egalitarian welfare programs and initiating the singing “red (revolutionary) songs” campaign in Chongqing.

8. A more liberal approach in the form of “Guangdong Model” has been advocated by Wang Yang, Bo’s rival. The “Guangdong Model” prioritizes marketization and democratic reform over the state-centric interventionism of the “Chongqing Model.”
9. No massive incidents of ethnic unrest comparable to the Tibet (March 2008) and Xinjiang (July 2009) riots have broken out this year; however, two deadly attacks in Xinjiang and a number of self-immolations by Tibetans reflected slow progress in the handling of the ethnic minority issue.
10. The focus for China in 2012 will be on maintaining stability to ensure a smooth leadership transition. It is unlikely that Beijing will introduce any radical measures to liberalize its rigid political system despite the intellectuals’ call for political reform.