

**REGIME-INSPIRED CONTENTIOUS
POLITICS IN CHINA**

TANG Wenfang

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Executive Summary

1. Public protests, or mass incidents, have risen rapidly in recent years in China. There were 180,000 mass incidents in 2010, compared to only 10,000 in 1994 and 74,000 in 2004.
2. Recent high-profile incidents—such as the land dispute in Wukan, the mining plant dispute in Shifang, the waste water processing plant dispute in Qidong, protests against a chef's death in Shishou and a young girl's drowning in Wengan—have been reported by the media.
3. These incidents have generated considerable excitement among Chinese dissidents and some Western media outlets, which tend to describe them as the harbinger of political change, a stepping stone towards democracy, or the beginning of the collapse of the authoritarian regime.
4. If the "collapse" view is true, declining public support for the Chinese government should be expected. However, public opinion surveys conducted by Chinese and Western scholars, including a recent survey by the Washington-based Pew Research Center, show a persistently high level of support for the Beijing government.
5. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has successfully used mass incidents to promote and consolidate its power. For example, the Wukan protest over a land grab was ultimately calmed when provincial officials intervened and removed the local officials.
6. By shifting public anger to economic organizations, central, provincial and local governments and officials have bypassed normal judicial procedures and local bureaucratic institutions to establish direct dialogue with the public, thereby gaining people's trust and support.

7. This approach may encourage public disobedience of the legal system and even nurture the development of mob mentality. China is returning to a populist authoritarian society where leaders and the masses are directly linked without the "buffer zone" of a civil society, such as elections, rule of law and autonomous social organizations.
8. In its frantic appeal to public opinion, government leaders frequently disrupt the legal system by compensating petitioners who refuse to accept court decisions.
9. In many of the incidents, protesters held banners calling for direct intervention by Beijing, while condemning local officials. The response from the top satisfies those at the bottom and in return, generates political loyalty and support for the CCP. This process however moves China further away from civil society and democracy.