

**CHINA'S ANTI-PARAXYLENE
MOVEMENTS AND
GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES**

SHAN Wei

EAI Background Brief No. 944

Executive Summary

1. A series of anti-paraxylene (PX) demonstrations in Xiamen, Dalian, Ningbo, Chengdu, Kunming and Maoming took place in China in the recent years, reflecting a major public relations hiccup for the Chinese government and its chemical industry.
2. The anti-PX movements are an exemplification of rising nimbyism, or the “not in my backyard” mentality of China’s middle class. These protests are a reaction to the building of public or industrial facilities deemed harmful to the neighbourhood.
3. Almost all the anti-PX campaigns took place in metropolitan cities, and most participants are from the urban middle class who are demanding for better life quality and their rights.
4. The demonstrations are mostly spontaneous, without a centralised or well-organised mobilisation mechanism. Mobilisation is based on discussion in the internet or cell phone SMS (short message service).
5. PX projects become a target for environmental campaigns largely due to the non-transparent decision-making process. Local officials have made very little effort to inform citizens of the projects, and even less effort to earn their approval for the projects.
6. Public distrust of the local government is evident. Despite promises to ensure proper and strict supervision of the projects, the public still resort to protest to put their message across.
7. These protests also highlighted a lag in China’s environmental regulations, which are way behind world standards. The country is still working on improving its laws and legal institutions on environmental protection.

8. Since Xi Jinping's administration assumed office, a large public relations and propaganda campaign has been promoted to improve the public image of PX projects.
9. Yet more needs to be done. In the short term, local party officials may have to improve their communication with the people. China may want to learn from Japan, Korea, and Singapore.
10. In the long term, China may need to change its GDP (gross domestic product)-first approach and give more consideration to social and environmental issues, and allow non-governmental organizations to play a more important role in environmental issues.