

**HOW REBELLIOUS IS CHINESE SOCIETY?
AN ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL FIGURES
AND SURVEY DATA**

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Executive summary

1. In recent years, strikes, demonstrations, mass riots, and other forms of popular protest in China have become increasingly frequent. This rising disobedience has major implications for state-society relations, governance, and potentially for the stability of the current political regime.
2. Official figures on institutionalized means of contention suggest that Chinese citizens have since the early 1990s, become more inclined to challenge the authorities or their employers through administrative litigation, labor arbitration, and petitioning.
3. However, numbers reveal that citizens' chances of winning administrative lawsuits have worsened over time and many have been withdrawn by citizen-litigants.
4. Moreover, in recent years, case numbers in labor arbitration and petitioning are on a decline. A major force behind these trends is the state's effort to push disputes out of institutionalized channels.
5. In terms of non-institutionalized contention, statistics suggest that popular protests had proliferated over the first decade of the 21st century and expanded particularly rapidly in the later part of this period. In most recent years, the frequency of incidents seems to have either stabilized at a high level, or declined somewhat.
6. Survey data shows that more than two thirds of protests are targeting the state. Over 30 million citizens had directly participated in such incidents in recent years, and almost two million had gained experience as protest leaders. The young and well-educated are most inclined to approve of and join demonstrations.

7. Yet, incidents have become smaller over time and a majority still disapproves of protest as a form of political participation. China's protest participation rates also remain far below those in most Asian and South American societies, and are dwarfed by European countries. Thus, Chinese society has become much more rebellious, but unrest does not yet appear to be out of control.

8. The state's pushing of contention out of the system helps to direct pressure away from the regime in the short-term, but encourages citizens to take to the streets, weakening the already feeble institutions for conflict resolution and posing significant risks for China's mid- and long-term development.