

The Strategic Logic of Anti-Foreign Protest under Authoritarian Rule

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Note: This paper is based on Chapter 1 of my dissertation, “Powerful Patriots: Nationalism, Diplomacy, and the Strategic Logic of Anti-Foreign Protest”

ABSTRACT:

How does popular nationalism affect the foreign policy of authoritarian states? Conversely, can authoritarian leaders utilize public opinion to achieve their foreign policy aims? In addressing these questions, I seek to answer a specific puzzle: why do authoritarian leaders sometimes allow and sometimes repress nationalist anti-foreign protests, and what are the consequences of this choice for international relations? I argue that the decision by authoritarian leaders to allow anti-foreign protest represents a public commitment strategy in international bargaining. Anti-foreign protests in authoritarian states are analogous to “audience costs” in the democratic context, enabling authoritarian leaders to demonstrate resolve and credibly claim that their hands are tied by domestic constraints. The mechanism, however, is different. Whereas democratic leaders rely upon the threat of electoral punishment to generate audience costs, authoritarian leaders utilize the risk that anti-foreign protests will turn against the government and the escalating costs of suppression to gain bargaining leverage. Anti-foreign protests thus provide the missing microfoundations for audience costs, which to date have generally been assumed, rather than empirically or theoretically substantiated. To illustrate, I preview a case study of the 2005 anti-Japanese protests in China, presented fully in Chapter 2. Then, I test one implication of the argument—that anti-foreign protests are rarer in autocracies than democracies—via a comparison of anti-Japanese protest in mainland China and Hong Kong over the period 1978-2005.

In regard to China-Japan relations, reactions among youths, especially students, are strong. If difficult problems were to appear still further, it will become impossible to explain them to the people. It will become impossible to control them. I want you to understand this position which we are in.

— Deng Xiaoping, speaking at a meeting with high-level Japanese officials, including Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Agriculture, and Forestry, June 28, 1987¹

During times of crisis, Arab governments demonstrated their own conception of public opinion as a street that needed to be contained. Some even complained about the absence of demonstrators at times when they hoped to persuade the United States to ease its demands for public endorsements of its policies.

— Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*²

1. Introduction

Deng Xiaoping was an authoritarian leader who infamously ordered the 1989 crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protests. If Deng was able to suppress nationwide anti-government protests, what explains Deng's statement to Japanese officials? More broadly, when and how are authoritarian leaders able to utilize public opinion to advance their foreign policy goals? I address these questions by focusing on one simple puzzle: why do authoritarian leaders sometimes allow and sometimes repress nationalist anti-foreign protests, and what are the consequences of this choice for international relations? In this chapter, I present a theory of anti-foreign protest as a public commitment strategy in international bargaining and identify the domestic and international variables that make authoritarian leaders more or less likely to permit anti-foreign protest.

In China, anti-American protests were allowed in 1999 after NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia but were repressed in 2001 after a U.S. reconnaissance plane and Chinese

¹ Whiting (1989):164, in translation from *Cankao Xiaoxi*, June 30, 1987.

² Lynch (2006):75.

fighter jet collided. Anti-Japanese demonstrations were tolerated in 1985 and 2005 but were repressed in 1990 and 1996. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, antiwar demonstrations broke out in countries as far flung as Egypt, Russia and Indonesia. Yet Chinese authorities banned antiwar demonstrations, only to relent two weeks later.³ Popular demonstrations have never been allowed over the issue of Taiwan, the issue of greatest concern to Chinese nationalists. What explains this variation in government response to demands for nationalist protest? When and why does the government give the public a green, yellow, or red light to protest foreign targets?

Further examples from Iran and Syria illustrate the variation in how authoritarian leaders handle anti-foreign protest activity, ranging from encouragement to tacit approval to suppression.⁴ In October 2005, tens of thousands of Syrians demonstrated against the U.N. investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister, Rafik Hariri, shouting anti-American slogans and carrying photographs of Syria's president. School children who participated in the rally "were told when they arrived at school that their classes were canceled and that they would be 'spontaneously demonstrating today in support of President Assad.'"⁵

A month earlier, Islamic student associations in Iran protested outside the British embassy, formed human chains around Iran's nuclear reactors, and demanded that Iran's leaders resume uranium enrichment. The demonstrations turned violent when protesters began throwing grenades and attempted to enter the embassy. Although the police used tear gas to disperse the crowd, the police chief reportedly told a circle of students that had gathered around him:

³ Willy Lam, "China bans antiwar protests," CNN.com, March 12, 2003; "Antiwar Demonstrations Approved by Beijing Police," Wen Wei Po, March 29, 2003.

⁴ As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, to suppress is "to put down by force or authority," whereas to repress is "to keep or hold back, to restrain or check (a person) from action or advance." See also Tilly (1978):100 and Tarrow (1998).

⁵ Katherine Zepf, "Syrian Government Mobilizes a Vast Rally to Support Assad," The New York Times, October 25, 2005.

Damn those who cause the police to confront the students. A number of people had obtained permits to demonstrate here, and we cooperated with them. We have certain feelings as you do. I'm sure that you didn't have any intention of hurting the system. And we never wanted to clash with Hezbollah students.”⁶

The words of the Iranian police chief illustrate three critical features of anti-foreign protest in authoritarian states: the difficulty of reining in nationalist protest once unleashed; potential fissures between sympathetic and unsympathetic elites; and the risk that anti-foreign protest will cause broader unrest and even regime instability, thus “hurting the system.” In the theory I develop below, authoritarian leaders utilize the escalating costs of suppression and the risk to domestic stability to gain leverage in international bargaining.

Understanding the conditions that lead authoritarian leaders to allow or repress nationalist protest represents a step forward in unpacking “autocracy,” which has languished as the “residual category” in much of international relations and comparative politics. Although it was once widely believed that institutions of participation and contestation put democracies at a disadvantage in dealing with their tighter-lipped authoritarian counterparts (Wright 1965), recent scholarship has emphasized the advantages of democracy for the conduct of international relations. Democracies are purported to have the advantage over autocracies in upholding their international obligations (e.g. Gaubatz 1996; Schultz and Weingast 1996; Mansfield, Milner and Rosendorff 2002), selecting and winning wars (e.g. Lake 1992; Reiter and Stam 1998, 2002; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson et al. 1999, 2004), and sending credible signals in crisis bargaining (e.g. Fearon 1994; Schultz 1998, 1999, 2001), with only a few cautionary counterarguments (e.g. Tomz 2002; Slantchev 2006; Archer, Biglaiser and DeRouen 2007). The drive to find theories that can both explain the democratic peace and generate new testable implications has encouraged scholars to study democracies and discouraged them from prying

⁶ *Iranian Students News Agency*, FBIS IAP20050928011044, September 28, 2005.

open the black box of authoritarian politics. Given that the vast majority of interstate wars are fought in autocratic and mixed dyads, illuminating the foreign policy decisionmaking of authoritarian leaders is important to improving our understanding of international conflict.

I focus on the recent body of work that suggests that democratic leaders are better able to use the threat of electoral punishment for backing down—i.e. “audience costs”—to tie their hands in international negotiations (e.g. Martin 1993; Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001a; Gelpi and Griesdorf 2001; Leventoglu and Tarar 2005). Citizens are said to punish leaders for backing down after making a public threat, viewing concession as national humiliation. As a result, leaders who make public threats will be perceived by their adversaries as being relatively resolved, or else they would not have taken a public stance.⁷

According to the conventional wisdom in this literature, the probability that authoritarian leaders will be punished for appearing incompetent or weak on foreign policy is quite small, even though the magnitude of the punishment may be quite large in the event of a coup or other irregular turnover (Fearon 1994; Schultz 2001). Which effect dominates is a moot point if the audience costs are invisible to outsiders. Unless authoritarian leaders can convince foreign negotiators *ex ante* that the adverse consequences are real and are not part of a bluffing strategy, these audience costs will have no bite. The king’s hands may be tied, but the bonds are invisible.

I argue that anti-foreign protests give authoritarian leaders a way to communicate credibly that they face domestic punishment for backing down and conceding to foreign demands. In bargaining terms, the decision to allow anti-foreign protest represents a credible commitment to stand firm as well as a costly signal of resolve. On the one hand, anti-foreign protests visibly raise the costs of diplomatic concession, increasing the government’s incentive to stand firm even under complete information. On the other hand, because anti-foreign protests

⁷ Further research has explicitly examined the decision to go public or private (e.g. Baum (2004)).

may escalate to anti-government protests, the government's willingness to run this risk differentiates it from a government that is only bluffing about its value for the disputed issue.⁸ As Schelling (1966:94) notes, "international relations often have the character of a competition in risk-taking, characterized not so much by tests of force as by tests of nerve." Anti-foreign protests provide a mechanism for authoritarian leaders to communicate resolve under conditions of incomplete information and incentives to bluff.

In this paper, I use the term "nationalist protest" and "anti-foreign protest" interchangeably, defined here as:

A public manifestation by a group of people of disapproval or dissent, containing hostile feeling towards a foreign government or people, and rooted in advocacy or support for the nation's interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of other nations.

Haas defines nationalism an ideology that makes "assertions about the nation's claim to historical uniqueness, to the territory that the nation-state ought to occupy, and to the kinds of relations that should prevail between one's nation and others" (Haas 1986:727-8).

Whereas ethnic nationalism tends to seek greater autonomy or secession for a particular nation inside a state, civic nationalism tends to focus on the strengthening of an existing state, superseding ethnic divisions to include most if not all residents of a given territory (see Snyder 1993; Kuran 1998). In the fictional world described by Gellner (1983), ethnic nationalism would seek Ruritanian independence; civic nationalism would seek the strengthening and defense of the Megalomanian empire. It is civic nationalism that I refer to when I use the term "nationalist."

It is particularly important to distinguish the phenomenon of "protest" from an official rally or other state-organized demonstration. Official rallies are organized under government or

⁸ Willingness to take risks is only one method of demonstrating resolve. See Morrow (1989):942.

party auspices and attended by a select group of pre-screened participants. Protests—including demonstrations, petitions, marches, and strikes—may receive official permission but are organized and attended by individuals acting in a private capacity, or as part of an independent organization. Thus, the theory developed here does not encompass state-orchestrated mass demonstrations such as those in North Korea or in China during the Mao Zedong era, as those protests did not carry the same risk of turning against the regime.⁹

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I identify my theoretical assumptions and derive several hypotheses. I then illustrate the logic with a brief summary of the 2005 anti-Japanese protests in China, detailed at greater length in chapter 2. Finally, I test the prediction that anti-foreign protests, although useful to authoritarian leaders as a bargaining tactic, are less frequent in autocracies than democracies because of the risk they pose to autocratic stability. To do so, I compare the incidence of anti-Japanese protest in “democratic” Hong Kong and “autocratic” China over the period 1978-2005.

2. Theory

Assumptions

The theory developed here makes four basic assumptions about the nature of protest and authoritarian politics: 1) international outcomes affect domestic outcomes; 2) authoritarian leaders seek to retain office; 3) nationalist anti-foreign protests are risky in the authoritarian context; and 4) protests are easier to nip in the bud, i.e. the costs of suppression are higher *ex post* than *ex ante*. The first two are relatively uncontroversial; the third and fourth assumptions are the core assumptions driving the theory.

⁹ This does not preclude the possibility of cases in which an official rally is substituted for protest in an attempt to appease citizens. If opposition groups succeed in taking over the rally, then the rally has marginally decreased the costs of collective action against the government. But this presumes a failure of state capacity to control even its own activities, which is a special circumstance and not the general case.

The first assumption is that international outcomes affect the domestic standing of leaders and vice versa. Authoritarian leaders are no exception to the “two-level game” of strategic interaction between international and domestic politics (Putnam 1988). Although autocrats are not held accountable to the citizenry via open and competitive elections, they are nevertheless accountable to a certain “selectorate” or “winning coalition” (Shirk 1993; Roeder 1993; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 1999). In ordinary times, authoritarian leaders may be accountable to the military, the bureaucracy, or some other constellation of powerful actors. Below, I argue that anti-foreign protests give potential force to the evaluations of protestors and ordinary citizens outside the selectorate or winning coalition.

The second simplifying assumption is that authoritarian leaders seek above all else to maximize their probability of survival in office. Authoritarian leaders strive to retain power as a first-order preference, just as U.S. politicians seek re-election (Mayhew 1974). Politicians may have other goals, including ideological or policy objectives, but holding office generally makes it easier to achieve those goals.¹⁰ The process of rising to power also tends to favor those who have an appetite for it, weeding out those who do not (see Geddes 1991:374). Once in power, autocrats may have even stronger incentives than democrats to stay in office, given the irregular and violent manner in which autocrats are often removed (Goemans 2000).

An implication of this assumption is that authoritarian leaders prefer to suppress or co-opt potential challengers rather than make political concessions. This assumption does not preclude the possibility that liberalization can be part of a strategy to maximize long-term survival, if the costs of concession are less than the expected increase in long-term “rents” from holding office. Although regimes vary in the level of repression and exclusion, it is not too great a simplification

¹⁰ An exception may be “tin-pot” or “bandit” leaders, whose strategy is to steal resources, flee the country, and enjoy the illicit gains during retirement. [CITE]

to assume that political concessions such as popular elections or consultation mechanisms are costly to authoritarian leaders, at least in the short run. To the extent that authoritarian leaders value popular participation, they prefer to guide it, not be guided by it—“to have every citizen organized as a cheering, active member of a party-controlled organization” (Pool 1973: 464).

The third assumption is that nationalist, anti-foreign protests pose a risk to regime survival in authoritarian societies. Protests in general present a risk to authoritarian stability for several reasons identified in the literature:

- *Demonstration effects, tipping points, and information cascades*: Protests, once begun, can trigger the sudden realization that protest is acceptable, even safe, leading more and more people to join the protest. Once a critical mass has gathered in the streets and authorities have not suppressed the protest, the protest can rapidly swell to a size unimaginable the day before (Schelling 1978; Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994; Laitin 1998).
- *Resource mobilization*: Protests beget protests by lowering the costs of collective action for other groups that have fewer resources, activating new networks and facilitating the spread of protest techniques and repertoires from hard-core activists to previously passive groups and individuals (Tarrow 1998).
- *Elite splits*: Protests may expose weaknesses in the government that may not have been widely apparent, revealing sympathetic allies among the elite (Tarrow 1998:87) and potential regime-threatening fissures between hardliners and moderates (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). As Pool notes, “The kind of unity and cohesion created by [authoritarian] methods is fragile. Whenever the structure of controls breaks down, the apparent unanimity collapses quickly” (Pool 1973).
- *Countermobilization by other groups in society*: Protests by one group may spark fear among other groups, leading those groups to mobilize to protect their interests (see Tarrow 1998:145). This phenomenon has been the subject of both theoretical and empirical research on ethnic conflict (e.g. de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999) as well as “outbidding” among terrorist groups (e.g. Bloom 2005). When groups cannot count on the state to protect their interests—and may even

fear that the mobilizing group will be bought off by the government—the logic of the security dilemma applies, and groups that feel threatened may thus mobilize counter protests.

Nationalist protest is especially risky because it has the potential to shake the foundation of state legitimacy, particularly those that rely upon nationalist mythmaking to bolster their credentials with the public (see Snyder 1991; van Evera 1994). Nationalist protests are particularly risky because they have broad appeal. As historian John Breuilly notes, “Even if nationalist movements do not have active popular support, they claim to speak for the whole nation” (Breuilly 1994:19). Nationalist protests advance goals that may challenge the foundation of the government’s legitimacy, goals that may be beyond the reach of the existing government, such as “the historical mission of the nation, ranging from quiet self-perfection to conquest or the restoration of some golden age,” including “how the nation ought to be governed” (Haas 1986:727-8). Nationalism promotes love of the nation, not love of the government, meaning that nationalist protest can easily escalate to demands for revolution if the public feels that the government has failed to defend the nation from foreign depredations. As Jack Snyder notes, “Often, nationalists claim that old elites are ineffective in meeting foreign threats and that a new, popular government is needed to pursue national interests more forcefully” (Snyder 1993:16; see also Shirk 2007:256).

The magnitude of this risk, which may be termed the “fragility” of the system at a given moment, depends on a range of factors. These include the level of societal discontent, the level of resources and organization among opposition groups, and the strength of the elite pact against defections. Here it is not necessary to assume that any given protest has a large likelihood of turning against the regime, only that there be some probability—exogenous to the government’s handling of foreign policy and the outcome of the international negotiations—that protesters will

change direction, for example, and picket government offices rather than foreign offices.

Nevertheless, the magnitude of this risk—especially as perceived by outsiders—is an important variable that affects the expected utility of anti-foreign protest as a bargaining tactic. I return to this issue later.

The fourth assumption is that protests are easier to nip in the bud than to suppress after they have begun. That is, the government must go to greater effort and absorb higher costs when curtailing a protest that has become large or widespread. Repression is always costly, but dispersing a large crowd is more costly than hauling away a few “early risers” at the scene (Tarrow 1998) or warning off activists on the eve of protest. The costs of suppression take three forms: physical, psychological, and reputational. Physically, more manpower is required to deal with a large crowd, whether by force or persuasion. More government resources must be mobilized to corral protesters and clear the scene without bloodshed. Psychologically, the crowd’s willingness to resist suppression is likely to increase with the experience of protest. By the logic of prospect theory, people care disproportionately about what they stand to lose than what they stand to gain (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). The implication of loss-aversion is that people will fight harder for what they have than for something they do not yet have. Accordingly, participants will place greater value on the right to protest after they have joined the demonstration than when it is still hypothetical. The psychological cost of suppression thus increases once a protest has begun.

The government also faces higher reputation costs of suppression once protests have attracted domestic and international scrutiny. The larger and more prominent the protest, the more likely international and domestic observers are to condemn the government for violating human rights. Once a large crowd has assembled, the government’s handling of the protests

becomes more visible. The government is thus more likely to face censure for suppressing protest once it has grown in size and scale. Domestically, even members of the public who disagree with the protesters' demands may be spurred to defend the right to protest, e.g. liberals who favor political reform and openness to popular participation. Nationalist protests are especially costly to suppress in this regard because suppression can often appear anti-patriotic, a betrayal of the national myth. Clever protesters seeking to gain sympathy and avoid suppression have often used this to their advantage. In China, for example, nationalist protesters often chant the slogan, "Patriotism is innocent!" The reputation costs of suppression thus increase once protest has begun, varying with the extent to which observers view the protests as legitimate.

It is important to note that the assumption of escalating costs implies that anti-foreign protests are unlikely to "fizzle out" in the absence of satisfaction—in the form of foreign concessions or a positive change in the status quo—or suppression. That is, the government cannot wait out the protests and assume that people will go home once they are tired, regardless of the outcome. This assumption is reasonable in the short term, particularly during the initial "rapid diffusion" phase of the protest cycle (Tarrow 1998:141). Over the long term, protests may subside as exhaustion sets in.

I thus take a relatively instrumental view of protest. Protestors may participate for many different reasons, including thrill-seeking and blowing off steam, but many are also purposive, seeking to effect policy change. Although some participants will satisfy their appetite for protest after a short period of participation, others in the crowd will find that the experience has whetted their appetite for protest, stirring them and others to continue pressing their demands. I thus make the simplifying assumption that the "mobilization" effect of protest dominates the "venting" effect. That protestors act instrumentally holds even if nationalist protest is insincere, a

mask or outlet for anti-government grievances. In an insincere protest, protesters are still unlikely to disperse without achieving their objectives, in this case domestic concessions rather than foreign policy demands.

The Strategic Logic of Anti-Foreign Protest

Building upon these assumptions, the logic developed here describes a two-level game in which the international and domestic levels are interdependent.¹¹ Negotiations at the international level are described by a standard model of crisis bargaining between two states (e.g. Morrow 1989; Powell 1990; Fearon 1994; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow and Zorick 1997), one of which is comprised of a government and a domestic public. At the international level, the two states negotiate over the division of some good, which may represent anything from natural resources to territory to a particular policy. The source of conflict is distributional: which state will get the better end of the bargain if a deal is reached. Each state is uncertain about the other state's willingness to hold out for a better deal and risk the collapse of negotiations. In canonical models of crisis bargaining, the failure to reach agreement implies escalation to war. Here, the war outcome can simply be thought of as the absence of cooperation, i.e. a Pareto-inefficient outcome that leaves both states worse off than if they had reached an agreement (see Milner 1997; Powell 2002).

Given incomplete information, both states have strategic incentives to misrepresent their willingness to stand firm, making credible communication difficult (Fearon 1995). To signal resolve, however, "cheap talk" will not suffice; states must take costly actions that distinguish their statements from mere bluffs. One way to signal resolve is to take actions that increase the risk of bargaining failure (Powell 1990; Schelling 1960; Fearon 1997). A recent body of

¹¹ Not presented here is a formal model to explicate the theory, which I am currently developing.

literature has suggested that public posturing is one way for state leaders to send a costly signal of resolve during diplomatic negotiations (e.g. Martin 1993; Fearon 1994; Smith 1998; Schultz 2001a; Leventoglu and Tarar 2005). By “going public” before domestic audiences, the government increases the potential costs of subsequently backing down. These “audience costs” make it harder for the government to offer concessions, increasing the risk that the government will be locked into a position it cannot yield. The decision to go public signals resolve; the ensuing threat of incurring audience costs ties the government’s hands.

Here, my main theoretical contribution is to provide microfoundations for audience costs, and in a new context: authoritarian systems. The microfoundations of audience costs have recently been the subject of some controversy (e.g. Schultz 2001b; Smith 1998; Slantchev 2006). In a seminal article, Fearon (1994) suggests that domestic audiences punish leaders who back down for betraying the “national honor.” Audience costs are assumed as an exogenous parameter; the public does not actually have the opportunity to act. This raises two questions about the credibility of audience costs. First, is it rational for citizens to punish their leaders for backing down? Second, under what conditions are citizens able to impose punishment?

Most work on the microfoundations of audience costs has focused on *why* citizens would punish their leaders. Smith (1998) argues that backing down during a crisis reveals a lack of leadership competence. If failure to follow through with past commitments reflects poorly upon a leader’s competence, then voters may rationally punish leaders for backing down in a crisis despite being content with the outcome, i.e. having avoided war or some other form of “foreign entanglement” (Smith 1998: 623). An alternative line of argument suggests that being caught bluffing destroys a country’s reputation for honesty (e.g. Guisinger and Smith 2002; Sartori 2002). In this view, voters have incentives to remove leaders who back down in order to restore

the nation's credibility. Nevertheless, as Schultz points out, it is unclear why citizens would punish their leaders for getting caught bluffing, since bluffing can be an optimal strategy (Schultz 1999:237).

A smaller subset of literature on audience costs has addressed *how* institutional conditions affect the ability of citizens to punish their leaders. In order to threaten punishment credibly, citizens must be able to obtain reliable information about the foreign policy performance of their leaders. In Schultz's (1998) depiction of democracy, competition between the leadership and opposition is public, unrestricted, and informative. However, Ramsay (2004) and Slantchev (2006) point out that the information-revealing properties of democratic competition rest upon a critical assumption, namely, that the opposition speaks credibly. This point remains controversial. On the one hand, Ramsay (2004) argues that opposition babbling is reduced by assuming two-dimensional preferences, incorporating policy goals as well as office-seeking goals to discipline the opposition. On the other hand, Slantchev (2006) contends that office-seeking incentives bias the signal that the opposition sends to citizens, preventing them from learning anything about the competence of the incumbent leadership.

Despite this unresolved debate, audience costs have been marshaled to explain international cooperation (Leeds 1999), crisis behavior and outcomes (Partell and Palmer 1999; Eyerman and Hart 1996), compliance with trade agreements (Mansfield et al. 2002), monetary policy credibility (Lohmann 2003), and even democratic consolidation (Pevehouse 2002). The use of audience costs to address such a range of issues underscores the need to substantiate their theoretical underpinnings. In doing so, I depart from the traditional focus on electoral institutions and turn instead to the strategic interaction of citizens and leaders in authoritarian states.

In the logic presented here, the negotiation begins with some international provocation or challenge. The first stage describes the domestic interaction between an authoritarian government and its citizenry. The second stage describes the international negotiation between the authoritarian government and the foreign government. In the first stage, the government has the opportunity to allow or repress anti-foreign protests. If the government allows anti-foreign protests, the public can then choose to protest or not protest. If the public decides to protest, there is a risk that anti-foreign demonstrations will turn against the government with some exogenous probability, which is common knowledge. In the second stage, the foreign government has a chance to withdraw or press its challenge. If the foreign government presses its challenge, the home government then decides whether to stand firm or back down. Standing firm increases the probability that negotiations will break down, but backing down requires the government to concede the issue and suppress protests if they have occurred.

In deciding whether to allow anti-foreign protests, the government thus faces a risk-return tradeoff. Although anti-foreign protests have the potential to get out of hand, the government's decision to allow them also makes the foreign government more likely to concede the dispute. That is, the decision to take a domestic risk makes international victory more likely. I hypothesize that allowing anti-foreign protests increases the probability that authoritarian leaders will achieve diplomatic victory in two ways: by raising the cost of concession, and by signaling resolve. I present each of these arguments in turn.

Anti-Foreign Protest as a Commitment Tactic

Although autocratic leaders are not constrained by the same electoral institutions as democratic leaders, anti-foreign protests represent an alternative mechanism by which domestic interests can be leveraged in international negotiations. By raising the cost of diplomatic

concession, anti-foreign protests serve as a commitment tactic in international negotiations, enabling authoritarian leaders to claim credibly that they cannot maintain the status quo or meet foreign demands. Analogous to audience costs, anti-foreign protests represent one method by which leaders can “tie” their hands, generating expectations of retrospective sanctions if they fail to follow through with their commitments or threats.

Anti-foreign protests raise the cost of diplomatic concession by generating a credible threat of domestic punishment. In order to back down and meet foreign demands in the presence of anti-foreign protests, the government would have to suppress the anti-foreign protests or suffer an anti-government backlash. As the costs of suppression escalate, the government has less and less incentive to make diplomatic concessions. Rather than concede and face the wrath of protesters, the government can minimize the costs of dispersing protest by taking a firm foreign policy stance. If nationalist protesters see progress toward their objectives, they will be more easily persuaded to disperse without blaming the government. In sum, when nationalist protests occur, authoritarian leaders face incentives to placate protesters with a hawkish foreign policy stance and evidence of diplomatic triumph.

To illustrate, consider the nature of foreign relations with and without nationalist anti-foreign protests. Without protests, autocracies have a relatively free hand to set foreign policy. If the authoritarian government pursues a conciliatory foreign policy that is perceived by the public as betraying the nation’s interest, domestic resentment may build against the government. If protests do not occur, foreign observers cannot readily observe the extent of this discontent. Though netizens and independent newspapers may publish dissenting views, foreign observers may conclude that domestic opposition is limited to a vocal minority and is unlikely to influence foreign policy. Even if official pronouncements declare that the “feelings of the people” have

been hurt by foreign transgressions, as Chinese diplomats often claim, it is difficult for outsiders to determine whether this is “cheap talk” or grounds for a stiffer foreign policy.

With protests, the domestic costs of pursuing a conciliatory foreign policy become visible. The government faces two options for restoring order once protests begin: appeasing demonstrators by adopting a more hawkish foreign policy stance, or using coercion to disperse the demonstrators. As protests escalate, so do the physical, psychological, and reputation costs of using coercion to restore order. Moreover, by raising the salience of the international dispute among the public, protests increase the size of the audience costs incurred if the government backs down (see Baum 2004; Miller and Krosnick 2000). The escalating costs of concession and suppression thus reduce the government’s negotiating flexibility by making a tough stance on foreign policy increasingly attractive to the government. If the costs of concession and suppression grow large enough, the government will stand firm with certainty. Unfortunately, like other bargaining tactics that “lock” in a tough bargaining stance, anti-foreign protests can cause negotiations to collapse despite the government’s intentions to the contrary, leading to escalation or simply the failure to achieve cooperation.

Anti-Foreign Protest as a Signaling Tactic

Second, the decision to allow anti-foreign protests demonstrates a willingness to bear risk, namely, that protests may turn against the government. Although the government can take security measures to mitigate this risk—e.g. sending police to accompany the protest march or prohibiting protest on sensitive domestic anniversaries or in focal locations—there remains some probability that the protests will spiral beyond their intended scope and target the government. The government’s willingness to run this risk sets the government apart from governments that would not run this risk, signaling a relatively high value for the dispute relative to concession.

The magnitude of this risk is independent of the government's actions on foreign policy, that is, it is exogenous to the international negotiations, determined entirely by the "fragility" of the authoritarian system or the latent instability of the regime. This element of risk renders anti-foreign protests analogous to the "threat that leaves something to chance" (Schelling 1960, 1966). The innovation here is that the potential for disaster is not mutually assured destruction, but domestically assured destruction. The act of allowing protests thus shows that the government is willing to approach the "brink." Whereas traditional models require actions that increase the risk of war to signal resolve (Schelling 1960; Powell 1990; Fearon 1992, 1994), I suggest that actions that increase the risk of regime instability can also serve this purpose.

To illustrate, consider again the nature of diplomatic negotiations with and without protests. Without protests, the government's resolve over the issue is mainly conveyed via public rhetoric and private comments by government officials.¹² While official spokesmen may calibrate their rhetoric to convey a consistent hierarchy of national priorities, outside observers have little hard evidence to evaluate the weight of official remarks. By consenting to anti-foreign protests, however, the government demonstrates that it is willing to run a risk of domestic instability for the sake of the dispute. As the cliché goes, actions speak louder than words. By allowing protests that appear potentially destabilizing in the eyes of foreign observers, authoritarian leaders communicate the gravity of their concern.

Predictions

Three primary implications follow from the theory:

¹² On the efficiency of private and public rhetoric as credible signals, see Sartori (2002), Leventoglu and Tarar (2005), and Kurizaki (2007). At a higher level of escalation, economic sanctions and military mobilization are alternative methods of signaling resolve (e.g. Slantchev (2005)).

H1 (Bargaining Advantage): If a settlement is reached, the international outcome should be more favorable to the government given the occurrence of anti-foreign protests.

Once the government has tied its hands and demonstrated resolve by allowing anti-foreign protests, the burden of conciliation falls to the foreign government. On average, therefore, anti-foreign protests should lead to a more advantageous bargain for the authoritarian government. However, the nature of strategic interaction means that although anti-foreign protests give authoritarian leaders bargaining leverage, the ultimate outcome depends on the resolve and actions of the other parties. Negotiations may also collapse, leading to escalation or simply a lack of cooperation.

H2 (Tying Hands): In the absence of a settlement, the government is more likely to take a hawkish stance given the occurrence of anti-foreign protests. Unless foreign negotiators back down or threaten to impose sanctions that will be more costly to the government than suppressing protests, the government should take a tougher foreign policy stance in order to placate and disperse protesters.

H3 (International Timing): Anti-foreign protests are more likely to be allowed by authoritarian governments before or during negotiations, not after a settlement has been reached. As signals of resolve, nationalist protests are useful during the stage of negotiations when parties are trying to reveal preferences, establish reservation levels, and locate a bargain. Once a deal has been struck and the negotiations have moved into the implementation phase, anti-foreign protests no longer increase bargaining leverage. When reassurance and compliance are the objective, anti-foreign protests cease to be useful tactics. Thus, we should not observe anti-foreign protest after a settlement has been reached.

Three secondary hypotheses follow from the assumption that protests pose a risk to authoritarian regimes:

H4 (Regime Type): Anti-foreign protests are less frequent in autocracies than democracies. Although authoritarian leaders may allow nationalist protests when it suits their bargaining interests, on the whole, such protests should still be less frequent than under democratic rule. Nationalist protest is both riskier for regime survival and less costly to repress under autocracy than democracy. In democratic systems, nationalist protest is less likely to become a movement for revolution. As Tarrow (1998:84) puts it, “The ease of organizing opinion in representative systems and finding legitimate channels for its expression induces many movements to turn to elections.” In addition, the cost of squelching protests is higher in democracies, where constitutional protections for freedom of assembly are stronger. In sum, authoritarian leaders have greater motivation and capacity to repress nationalist protest.

H5 (No dovish protests): Authoritarian governments tend not to allow dovish protests. We should not observe permission granted to protests that are more dovish or conciliatory than the government’s position on foreign policy (if bargaining is underway) or the status quo (if negotiations have not yet begun). That is, protesters need not be more hawkish than the government, just more hawkish than the status quo. Dovish protests are domestically disruptive but provide the government with no extra leverage in diplomatic negotiations. In fact, pro-foreign protests may actually reduce bargaining leverage, giving foreign negotiators an incentive to stand firm and hope that regime instability will bring a friendlier, more dovish government to power. If, on the other hand, nationalist protests are perceived to be more hawkish than the government itself, foreign governments will face incentives to strengthen the authoritarian regime by making concessions that will appease protesters.

H6 (Domestic Risk): The larger the risk that an anti-foreign protest will turn against the government, the less likely the government is to tolerate or encourage such protest. By implication, the riskier the protest, the greater the signaled level of resolve. The magnitude of this domestic risk is in turn a function of a variety of factors, including state strength, the level of domestic discontent, and the extent of anti-foreign sentiment among the public. Proxies for the level of domestic discontent may include indicators such as inflation, unemployment, corruption, and anti-government incidents. It is worth noting here that this hypothesis contravenes the predictions of diversionary or “gambling for resurrection” theories, which posit that leaders are more likely to saber-rattle when their domestic future is shaky (Downs and Rocke 1994; Smith 1996a; Dassel and Reinhardt 1999; Coser 1956; Mueller 1973).

State strength is more problematic. On the one hand, the weaker the state, the less likely the government is to undertake the risk of allowing anti-foreign protest. On the other hand, state weakness makes it more likely that a protest will happen without the government’s knowledge or ability to prevent it. This observational equivalence means that when outsiders observe anti-foreign protest, they do not know whether to infer that the government valued the international outcome highly enough to allow protest despite the risk to regime stability, or whether the government was simply too weak to prevent protest. Nevertheless, the implications for the government’s foreign policy are the same. ***Whether the government allowed the protest or was caught by surprise, the government still has incentive to take a more hawkish position in international negotiations.*** The weaker the government, the less it can afford the costs of suppression, and the greater the incentive to choose escalation over capitulation. The only requirement here is that the costs of suppressing protest are visible to outsiders, i.e. the protests cannot be perceived to be the carefully stage-managed, “rent a crowd” variety. In sum, state

weakness makes the signal of resolve noisier, but the hands-tying advantage still operates, provided that suppression costs are apparent to foreign observers.

A slew of recent work has suggested that attempts to systematically test models of strategic interaction will inevitably run into problems of selection effects (Smith 1996b; Fearon 1994, 2002; Morrow 1989b; Achen & Snidal 1989; Signorino 1999; Lewis & Schultz 2003). Selection effects arise when the process of selection into the sample is nonrandom. Schultz (1999) demonstrates that if a leader is able to generate very high audience costs, then the other side is likely to back down and the leader will not be punished. Alternatively, if the other side does *not* back down (perhaps having generated its own audience costs), then escalation is more likely and we will still not observe the audience costs.

Similarly, selection effects make it difficult to observe the true risk and suppression cost associated with nationalist protests. The larger the risk to the government, the less likely the government is to allow protests; the greater the cost of suppression, the more likely the government is to choose placation (via a tough foreign policy stance) over suppression. In both cases, high observed values of risk and suppression costs are likely to be censored because they are “off the equilibrium path.”

However, selection effects are weaker when state capacity is low. Where state capacity is high, the government can nip protests in the bud. Therefore, selection effects imply that a strong government will either prevent protests in the first place or take a hawkish foreign policy stance. Where state capacity is low, the government may be unable to prevent protests from occurring. Therefore, we are more likely to observe the full range of outcomes – suppression as well as foreign policy placation – when state capacity is weak.

3. Research Design and Data

To illustrate the first three hypotheses, I briefly describe the 2005 anti-Japanese protests in China and the negotiations over the expansion of the United Nations Security Council. This case study is presented in full in the next chapter. Then, to test the regime type hypothesis, I compare the occurrence of anti-Japanese protest in Hong Kong and China over the period 1978-2005.

Case Study: Anti-Japanese Protests and the Negotiations over UNSC Expansion

In the spring of 2005, hundreds of thousands of anti-Japanese protesters took to the streets of at least 38 cities in mainland China. I seek to show that the Chinese government strategically utilized these anti-Japanese protests as a bargaining tactic during negotiations over Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. In particular, I demonstrate that the protests prompted the Chinese government to take a tougher public stance against Japan's bid and led the United States to move its position closer to the Chinese position. The final result of the negotiations was closer to China's preferred outcome than the counterfactual, i.e. the probable outcome of negotiations if anti-Japanese protests had not been allowed.

The anti-Japanese protests were timed to coincide with a critical period of negotiations over the expansion of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC). When Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced in March 2005 that he would like a decision by September and endorsed Japan's candidacy, there was uncertainty over what positions the permanent UNSC members would take on the G4 proposal, particularly that of China and the United States. Although *realpolitik* would suggest that neither government desired the addition of veto-wielding permanent members to the UNSC, both governments sought to avoid the international reputation costs of blatantly

disregarding the majority opinion of the General Assembly.¹³ The evidence presented here suggests that the anti-Japanese petitions and protests were part of a campaign by the Chinese government to undermine global support for Japan's candidacy in the lead up the General Assembly debate on April 6-7 and the Uniting for Consensus meeting on April 11, as well as to mitigate the costs to the Chinese government of making an eventual veto threat, if necessary.

The anti-Japanese protests in China were influential in altering the course of the negotiations, reducing uncertainty about China's stance on the G4 proposal, prompting the United States to take an active role in blocking the G4 proposal, and eliciting symbolic concessions from Japan. Although Japan and the G4 continued to seek a two-thirds majority for their proposal, Japan declined to press China for an apology over the anti-Japanese protests, instead offering an apology of its own for Japan's historic misdeeds. Moreover, the anti-Japanese activities were instrumental in convincing the United States to switch its stance from "unambiguously" supporting Japan to publicly opposing the G4 proposal. Following the second week of protests, John Bolton, the newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, explicitly referred to the protests in stating his doubts about Japan's chances for success in the negotiations. In the end, on the eve of a potential vote in the General Assembly, the United States and China struck a deal to join efforts and block the G4 proposal.

The events of spring 2005 suggest that the anti-Japanese protests posed a risk to the Chinese government and that this risk was evident to foreign observers. Japan's largest daily, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, reported: "What the Chinese government fears most now is that anti-Japanese protests could turn to criticism that its diplomacy is weak-kneed and develop into antigovernment demonstrations. Add into the mix pent-up frustration among labor groups and

¹³ China, in particular, has scrupulously avoided using its veto power in the UNSC, typically preferring to abstain.

farmers, and the Chinese government could be facing a shakeup.”¹⁴ Perhaps fearing that the protests might lead to a more hawkish Chinese foreign policy, both Japan and the United States ultimately made concessions that enabled China to claim diplomatic victory and restore public order without paying large suppression costs. Koizumi made a rare apology instead of pressing China’s leaders to apologize for the anti-Japanese protests, and the United States changed its position on UNSC reform to one that was more aligned with China’s interests.

The case also supports the argument that the escalating costs of suppression were instrumental in leading the Chinese government to choose a tougher foreign policy placement. A Chinese Foreign Ministry official described the change in China’s stance on the UNSC issue in this way:

China had to make its stance clear because other countries were no longer being so active. The uncertainty over the outcome of the G4 proposal was too great. Domestically, the atmosphere was intense. There were signature campaigns and online petitions. The government had to respond, or it would be seen as too soft and weak (*ruanruo*). The people want the government to uphold certain principles. If the government didn’t take a stand on the UNSC issue, it would lose public confidence. (Interview 100, June 2007)

The Chinese government was aware of the international costs of threatening to veto the G4 proposal, but the domestic costs of *not* vetoing the bid would have been even greater. As Shi Yinhong, an international relations scholar at People’s University, commented:

As for the masses, the resolute opposition to Japan's bid for a UNSC permanent seat has already become a form of fixed mentality. In fact, China's attitude toward Japan's bid for a UNSC permanent seat already has not much leeway for concession....China has no alternative but to cast a veto under the grim situation. Faced with strategic interests and sentimental factors, China has weighed the pros

¹⁴ Satoshi Saeki and Masahiko Takekoshi, April 12, 2005.

and cons and must pay the price for exerting diplomatic pressure on Japan....This may have a negative impact on the prospect of Sino-Japanese ties and the security and stability of the Asia Pacific region. At the same time, China will also offend Germany, India, Brazil, and other countries bidding for a UNSC permanent seat. However, under the present circumstances and after weighing the pros and cons, China must use this way to block Japan.¹⁵

Interviews with protest participants and anti-Japanese activists also suggest that the government's stance on the UNSC issue was effective at easing pressure for further protest. One nationalist intellectual commented: "The protests certainly brought pressure to bear on the government....On the issue of Japan's entry into the UNSC, the government's position changed dramatically. Before the protests, the government was very vague (*mohu*). Afterward, they clearly opposed Japan's entry" (Interview 42, July 2006). Anti-Japanese activists, perhaps as part of their tacit understanding with the government, know that once the government has taken a clear stance, it is time for the activists to back off and allow the government to take the upper hand. Remarked one activist in Shanghai: "We can only push the government to take action in areas where the government has not taken a clear position. Afterwards, we must withdraw (*tuibu*)" (Interview 81, April 2007). Although this activist felt that the anti-Japanese activities forced the government to take a stance against its will, my interviews suggest that the government *desired* this public pressure; the government chose to allow the internet and street petitions and then opted not to intervene when protests erupted nationwide.

A Quasi-Experiment: Comparing Anti-Japanese Protest in China and Hong Kong

The comparison of "democratic" Hong Kong and "autocratic" China allows us to examine the effect of autocracy on the incidence of anti-foreign protest while controlling for

¹⁵ *Ta Kung Pao*, FBIS, CPP20050603000054, June 3, 2005.

other factors. The results of this comparison provide support for the hypothesis that autocracy is associated with a decrease in the incidence of anti-foreign protest. Here, I have chosen to examine anti-Japanese protest as a subset of the universe of anti-foreign protests. The rationale for examining anti-Japanese protest is that it is one of the most prevalent types of anti-foreign protest in Asia, owing to Japan's invasion and occupation of many Asian nations in the first half of the 20th Century.

At first glance, China and Hong Kong may not seem like a good comparison, primarily because China is the world's most populous nation and Hong Kong is a city-state. I argue below that this difference in size, along with other potential confounding variables, do not present important threats to the validity of the analysis. In fact, adjusting for these variables may actually strengthen the observed relationship between regime type and anti-Japanese protest.

Unlike laboratory or field experiments, a quasi-experiment involves the comparison of groups where the "treatment" is not randomly assigned. For an evaluation of this sort to be valid, the researcher must demonstrate that the groups are similar on the relevant covariates. To establish that China and Hong Kong are a good match, it is necessary to show that the two are similar along relevant dimensions other than regime type. "Relevant" dimensions are those which affect both the treatment and outcome variables. This process seeks to eliminate potential sources of confounding and determine that there are no omitted variables driving the observed relationship. Below, I argue that there are no variables which make Hong Kong distinct from China in ways that also influence the incidence of anti-Japanese protest in the direction predicted by the hypothesis. I do, however, find variables which influence the relationship in the opposite direction, meaning that the relationship is likely to be even stronger than what we observe.

Before addressing these issues, I first describe the “control variables”—the similarities which make China and Hong Kong an apt comparison.

The China-Hong Kong comparison allows us to control for two factors which influence anti-Japanese protest activity. The first is the character of Japanese occupation in World War II, which should affect the level of anti-Japanese grievances and the propensity of the citizenry to stage anti-Japanese protests. Although Hong Kong was occupied for a shorter period than mainland China, the experiences of Japanese rule in Hong Kong and China were more similar than, say, those of Taiwan and South Korea. The Japanese occupation of Korea was more brutal and exploitative than the occupation of China and Hong Kong, whereas Taiwan’s experience was benign by comparison with Hong Kong and mainland China. Hong Kong is thus a better “control group” than Taiwan or South Korea, each of which has also had dozens of anti-Japanese protests.

Second, Hong Kong’s strategic interests are much closer to those of China than either Taiwan or South Korea, and the return of Hong Kong to mainland China in 1997 furthered this alignment. Taiwan and South Korea both have bilateral territorial disputes with Japan and security agreements with the United States. By contrast, virtually all anti-Japanese protests in Hong Kong have championed the interests of greater China. Indeed, Hong Kong activists often explicitly urge the Chinese government to take a stronger stance in bilateral negotiations with Japan. For example, Hong Kong activists have expressed consternation at Taiwanese activists for advancing Taiwan’s and not China’s claim to the hotly contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. According to Lew Mon-hung, spokesman for the Hong Kong Action Committee for the Protection of the Diaoyu Islands, there had been “confusion” during previous collaborative attempts by Hong Kong and Taiwanese activists to land on the islands. In future

seaborne protests, he said, the Hong Kong vessel would sail directly for the islands without stopping at Taiwan.¹⁶

Turning now to potential confounding factors, the most obvious and perhaps relevant difference between China and Hong Kong is size. All else equal, one would expect that the larger the population, the more numerous the protests. Hong Kong today has a population of roughly seven million; China has a population of over 1.3 billion. If one restricts the relevant population to the number of citizens living in urban areas, China has roughly 560 million urban residents,¹⁷ whereas Hong Kong has approximately seven million. If the relevant comparison is not urban residents but the number of cities with a critical mass of people living in close proximity to one another (implying that further increasing the size of a city does not affect the likelihood of protest), the number in mainland China is still much greater. Take, for example, the number of cities with a population of over 4 million. Hong Kong has one such city; China has thirteen. If the relevant metric is cities of population over 1 million, Hong Kong has 1; China has 113.¹⁸ One would expect this difference in population size to increase the relative incidence of protest in mainland China.

Another factor to consider is the patriotic education campaign in mainland China, launched by the government in 1994 to bolster its nationalist credentials (see Zhao 1998, 2004; Shirk 2007). For more than a decade, mainland citizens have been inundated with propaganda celebrating the role of the Chinese Communist Party in World War II, known in China as the War of Resistance against Japan. This campaign has been widely blamed for the oft-noted fact that mainland Chinese citizens under age 30 tend to be more hostile toward Japan than their elders,

¹⁶ *Agence France Presse*, January 8, 1997.

¹⁷ All population data as of 2005. *2006 China Statistical Yearbook*, National Bureau of Statistics, available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2006/html/D0401e.htm>.

¹⁸ Also as of 2005. *2006 China Statistical Yearbook*, National Bureau of Statistics, available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2006/html/K1101e.htm>.

whose actual memories of the war are stronger. The effect of nationalist propaganda in mainland China should be to increase the incidence of anti-Japanese protest in mainland China relative to Hong Kong. In sum, both population size and nationalist propaganda should increase the incidence of anti-Japanese protest in “authoritarian” China relative to “democratic” Hong Kong. These two factors thus influence the relationship in the *opposite* direction of the hypothesis, tending to mask the effect of autocracy. If we still find evidence to support the hypothesis that anti-foreign protests are rarer in autocracies, the actual effect is likely to be much stronger than the observed effect.

Many other factors set Hong Kong and mainland China apart, but it is not clear that these factors necessarily influence anti-Japanese protest activity. One such variable is the relative wealth of Hong Kong. As of 2006, per capita GDP in Hong Kong was roughly \$27,000, whereas per capita GDP in mainland China was only \$2,000.¹⁹ But it is unclear whether wealth affects the incidence of anti-Japanese protest. On the one hand, one could argue that citizens with larger incomes pay a greater opportunity cost for protesting; wealth may thus be associated with a decrease in the incidence of protest. On the other hand, one could argue that higher wage earners have greater resources to mobilize protest, including the education and access to information needed to recognize and react to foreign provocations. Which effect dominates is unclear. Moreover, even if wealth and education do have a (positive or negative) effect upon anti-Japanese protest, the apparent discrepancy between mainland China and Hong Kong is considerably reduced when one considers the relevant population of potential protestors. In both Hong Kong and mainland China, anti-Japanese activists tend to be college educated, white-collar

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/18902.htm> (mainland China) and <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2747.htm> (Hong Kong).

urban residents. Although educated urbanites are a larger percentage of the population in Hong Kong, in terms of absolute numbers, China dominates even in this regard.

In addition to confounding issues, there are two more potential threats to consider: diffusion and movement between groups. First, there may be a diffusion or imitation effect by which news of a protest or perceived Japanese transgression spreads from Hong Kong to mainland China, increasing the likelihood of copycat protests. If dynamic is present, it should minimize the observed difference between Hong Kong and China. In particular, diffusion from Hong Kong to the mainland will blur the effect of “autocracy” in China, making it more difficult to conclude the impact of regime type. Second, citizens from mainland China may travel to Hong Kong to stage a protest and vice versa. In 2005, for example, activists from Hong Kong crossed into Guangdong to attend an anti-Japanese protest. Similarly, there could also be movement in the opposite direction, as mainland Chinese activists travel to Hong Kong because it is easier to protest there. If movement from mainland China to Hong Kong were common, it would suggest that the number of protests in Hong Kong is inflated. However, the logic is consistent with the theory. Regardless, movement between groups by anti-Japanese protestors does not seem to be very frequent. In creating the dataset, I excluded the few cases in which Hong Kong activists staged protests in mainland China and vice versa.

The “treatment” variable in this analysis is regime type. Hong Kong is not an electoral democracy, but it has a much higher degree of political freedom than the rest of the People’s Republic. Although Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule in 1997, individual liberties and the freedom to protest in the former British colony have remained robust. Demonstrations for greater democracy are not suppressed in post-handover Hong Kong as they are in mainland China.

The outcome variable is the incidence of anti-Japanese protest. I coded the occurrence of anti-Japanese protests using Lexis-Nexis and FBIS databases, as well as several anti-Japanese activist websites operating out of mainland China and Hong Kong.²⁰ For protests that occurred within the last five to seven years, interviews with anti-Japanese activists, protestors, and domestic observers allowed me to corroborate the reports of secondary sources. In accordance with the definition presented above, I coded an anti-Japanese protest as having occurred if it met the following criteria: 1) two or more people were involved; 2) Japan was the primary target of the demands or objections expressed; and 3) the activity was held in a public location and sought to attract the attention and/or participation of bystanders. Thus, I excluded the following types of events from the dataset: 1) seminars and meetings to commemorate or evaluate the history of Japanese wartime atrocities; 2) protests that made demands of the Chinese, British, or American governments to pressure Japan to change policy; and 3) excursions by sea to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. In addition, I excluded several Hong Kong protests where the issues were specific to Hong Kong and not mainland China, such as the visit of a Japanese official to Hong Kong and Japan's refusal to honor the military *scrip* used in Hong Kong during its occupation in World War II. I also excluded one case in which Hong Kong activists attempted to stage a protest in mainland China, and another case in which two mainland activists staged a protest in Hong Kong.

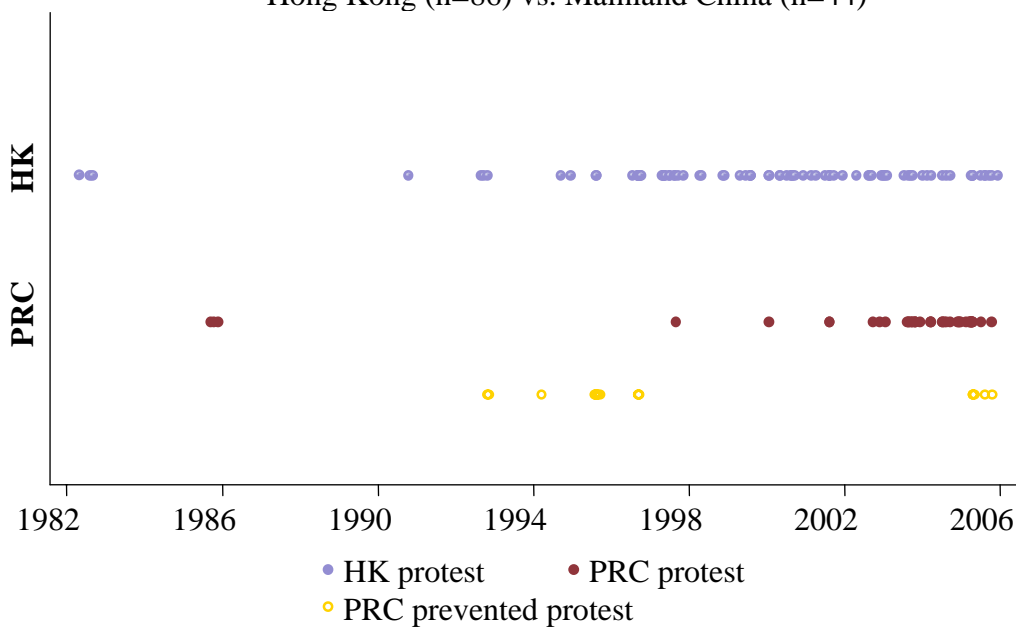
Spanning the period 1978 to the present, anti-Japanese protests occurred on 44 days in mainland China and 86 days in Hong Kong, with protests occurring in both China and Hong Kong on 11 days (see Figure 1 below). Including anti-Japanese street petitions²¹ increases the number of days in which mainland China experienced protest to 55, still considerably fewer than

²⁰ Search strings included "protest," "demonstrat*," etc.

²¹ Street petitions are typically public gatherings in which a small group of activists seeks to elicit signatures from passers-by.

in Hong Kong. As is always the case with historical research, missing data are a problem, particularly in an authoritarian country where transparency is low. The number of protest-days in mainland China is thus likely to understate the true figure. I also coded 16 cases in which protests in mainland China were prevented by the government, whether by arresting participants at the outset of a protest or by taking special measures to curtail the movement of key organizers.

Figure 1. Incidence of Anti-Japanese Protest
 Hong Kong (n=86) vs. Mainland China (n=44)



The roughly two-fold difference in the incidence of protest between Hong Kong and mainland China is striking, lending support to the hypothesis that autocracies allow fewer anti-foreign protests than democracies. The relative scarcity of anti-Japanese protest in mainland China is even more impressive when one considers the vastly larger population of mainland China, as well as the impact of more than a decade of nationalist propaganda in the People's Republic. It is thus all the more remarkable that we still observe fewer protests in China than in Hong Kong.

The comparison with Hong Kong is important for establishing the universe of potential protests in mainland China. When the government prevents protest, it is often not reported in the press. Because detecting non-events is difficult, having Hong Kong as a comparison group helps identify the “zeros” in mainland China. This simple comparison with Hong Kong suggests that if China were to become democratic, we would see an increase in nationalist protest. However, nationalist protest under a democratic rule may not have the same effect on foreign policy.

4. Conclusion

This paper has presented the outlines of an answer to a puzzling phenomenon in the study of authoritarian regimes and international conflict: why do authoritarian leaders sometimes allow and sometimes repress destabilizing nationalist protests? If anti-foreign protests are costly signals of resolve in international bargaining, then it is not necessarily the case that democracies have the advantage in creating credible commitments vis-à-vis audience costs. In the literature that links democratic politics and international relations, conventional wisdom holds that democracies have the advantage over autocracies in crisis bargaining. For democracies, the need to retain electoral support makes it difficult for democratic leaders to back down from positions taken publicly. The logic of audience costs holds that it is precisely this domestic vulnerability that enables democratic leaders to send credible signals about their intentions and resolve to foreign decision makers.

It is generally assumed that democratic leaders are more easily held accountable than autocratic leaders. Whereas regular elections enable democratic publics to remove leaders at relatively little cost, in autocracies, citizens are assumed to be nearly powerless to punish leaders

that act against the national interest.²² Although Fearon (1994), Schultz (2001), and Goemans (2000) note that autocratic leaders may face harsher punishments in the event of a coup or other irregular change of leadership, this probability is assumed to be either very small or not visible *ex ante* to foreign decision makers. This, then, is the signature role of anti-foreign protests: enabling authoritarian leaders to send a visible and costly signal of their domestic vulnerability, and generating incentives to stand firm in international negotiations.

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²² Typical models such as Schultz (1998) and Slantchev (2005) assume that the electorate has homogenous preferences and that the issue in dispute has the non-rivalrous, non-excludable properties of a public good. This raises the question of how the electorate is able to overcome the collective action problem inherent in punishing a leader (Olson 1965). This is typical in problems of diffuse costs vs. concentrated benefits.

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