Supplementary Material

**Appendix A: The Steps of Case Collection and The Criteria for Including a Case**

I searched for cases with the keyword of “petitioning” (*shangfang* 上访 or *xinfang* 信访) and most common accusations from 2014 to 2019 at the China Judgement Online, http://wenshu.court.gov.cn. The most common accusations include: “picking quarrels and provoking troubles” (*xunxin zishi* 寻衅滋事), “blackmail” (*qiaozha lesuo* 敲诈勒索), “disrupting the working order of state agencies” (*raoluan guojia jiguan gongzuo zhixu* 扰乱国家机关工作秩序), “gathering the masses to attack state agencies” (juzhong chongji guojia jiguan 聚众冲击国家机关), “gathering the masses to disrupt social order” (juzhong raoluan shehui zhixu 聚众扰乱社会秩序), and “gathering the masses to disrupt traffic and public order” (juzhong raoluan jiaotong he gonggong changsuo zhixu 聚众扰乱交通和公共场所秩序). To avoid duplication of cases, I only focus on the first trial at the grassroots courts. Those cases with other criminal activities (e.g. gambling or affray) and other accusations were excluded. In the cases of “blackmail”, only those cases in which petitioners seek compensation from the government, officials, and village cadres were included. I also deleted the cases from Beijing, because these cases are legally suppressed by the authorities in Beijing rather than the local governments, and they do not meet the definition of legal repression.

A search of China Judge Online found 5474 cases in which petitioners were prosecuted and incriminated from 2014 to 2019. 3102 cases can be used to conduct sequential analysis, and 2372 cases were excluded due to incomplete information and some special reasons. Five types of cases were excluded in the sequential analysis. 1392 cases lack enough information about contentious activities and bureaucratic processing to generate sequential paths. And 506 cases belong to those cases related to laws and litigation (shefa shesu 涉法涉诉). In the cases, protesters did not stage petition with the court’s petition office and administrative agencies refused to deal with the complaint in the name of “separation of petition and litigation” (sufang fenli 诉访分离), and there were no further judicial procedures and administrative procedures. Additionally, there are 265 cases in which aggrieved citizens lodged complaints with state authorities many times, and no bureaucratic procedures were recorded. Although these cases did not document any bureaucratic processing, they do not meet the definition of “direct legal repression”. Moreover, the time interval between the last petitioning activities and the criminal detention exceeds one year in 123 cases. These cases face the potential risk of incomplete information, so I excluded these cases. Finally, some special cases (86 cases) were also deleted, such as protesters having political claims and the government repressing different petition cases at the same time.

**Appendix B: The Selection and The Criteria for Including a Case in The Regression Analysis**

I selected some cases of staging troublemaking petitions in Beijing as examples to conduct statistical analysis. The reasons for this selection are as follows. First, given that the mode of progressive legal repression is a better fit when dealing with boundary-pushing contentions, the analysis of this part focuses on cases without collective and violent activities. Second, the staging of petitioning in Beijing, especially for non-normal petitioning, is one of the most effective forms of boundary-pushing resistance that imposes considerable pressure on local governments. Third, the court decisions tend to document the number of staging petitions in Beijing and demonstrate evidence that certifies protesters’ activities, rendering the information more accessible and reliable.

However, conducting such an analysis entails strict criteria for including a case. The first criterion is that the cases need to document complete information of protesters' petitioning in Beijing and bureaucratic processing, allowing for variable coding. Second, these cases should be suitable for comparison. For example, if the complainant did not stage any petition activities in Beijing before the last bureaucratic procedure but started to lodge petitions in Beijing after bureaucratic processing and suffered from legal repression, such case should be excluded. Third, to accurately capture the effect of bureaucratic processing, cases in which protesters made new claims and local authorities initiated separate procedures to handle their newly raised demands should be excluded. Finally, to distinguish the effect of bureaucratic practices and the impact of the legal government campaign and to focus more on the contention governance under Xi administration, I also deleted cases in which the last bureaucratic procedures were performed before 2014. After these selections, 351 cases were used to conduct the analysis.

**Appendix C: Measurement and Coding of Dependent Variable, Independent Variable, and Control Variables**

In the regression analysis, the dependent variable is a dummy indicating whether local governments deploy immediate legal repression after bureaucratic procedures, and the independent variable is the level of bureaucratic processing. The control variables include the type of demand, time period, government concession, circumstances of crimes, protest intensity, and the region. The following sections provide more details on how I measure and code the dependent variable, independent variable, and control variable in the adjudication documents.

Generally, I treated each court decision as a protest case suffering from legal repression. To avoid duplication, different trial decisions involving the same location, claims, and descriptions of protest activities were coded as one case. If protester(s) were criminally punished several times, I coded only the first trial as a case.

Tilly defines a protest event as “an occasion on which a number of people outside of the government gathered in a publicly accessible place and made claims on at least one person outside their own number, claims which if realized would affect the interests of their object”. In this study, I adopt a broader concept to define protest events. I define a protest event as a protest incident in which aggrieved citizens (individuals or a number of people) undertake contentious activities and make claims to state authorities through institutional channels or disruptive methods. In order to prove that petitioners and protests staged illegal activities and violated law and order, a detailed court decision regularly documented a series of protest incidents over time in a protest case. It recorded each influential protest event's time, place, and behaviours that imposed considerable threats to local governments. These records allowed me to assess some protest attributes and code some variables to conduct analysis.

***Dependent Variable***

The dependent variable is a dummy indicating whether local governments deploy immediate legal repression after bureaucratic procedures. In model 1, a protest case was coded “1” if it met two criteria: (1) protesters staged *non-normal* petitions in Beijing several times ﻿before the last bureaucratic procedure, and (2) protesters only staged *non-normal* or *normal* petitioning in Beijing 0-1 time after the last bureaucratic procedure and suffered from immediate legal repression. Other cases were coded as “0”. Finally, 129 cases (36.8 percentage) were recorded as “1”. 81 cases belong to the cases in which protesters staged a *non-normal* petitioning in Beijing (1 time) after the last bureaucratic procedure and suffered from immediate legal repression. When local governments used the “non-normal petitioning in Beijing” to label petitioners, it can reflect that petitioners had conducted some illegal activities in sensitive areas in Beijing. Moreover, 12 cases belong to the cases in which protesters staged a *normal* petitioning in Beijing or at the provincial government (1 time) after the last bureaucratic procedure and suffered from immediate legal repression. In these 12 cases, the court decisions only mentioned that petitioners staged petitions or registered in Beijing and do not record any illegal activities after the last bureaucratic procedure, but these petitioners still suffered from immediate legal repression. Additionally, 36 cases belong to the pattern of “staging non-normal petitioning in Beijing-- bureaucratic processing -- legal repression”. In these cases, petitioners did not stage further petition activities after the last bureaucratic procedure, but they suffered from legal repression after the bureaucratic processing.

Also, an alternative measurement of the dependent variable is used in model 2. In model 1, the measurement of the dependent variable might run the risk of overlooking the effect of the protester’s oral threat of staging petitions in Beijing and their unsuccessful petitioning (e.g., being intercepted by the local authorities). In order to reduce the impact of this problem, an alternative measurement of the dependent variable is used in model 2. In addition to meeting the two criteria mentioned above, only those cases in which local governments deployed legal repression within 95 days after the last bureaucratic procedures were coded as “1” (the mean time interval of all immediate legal repression cases in model 1 is 190 days).

***Independent Variable***

To define and examine the bureaucratic process, I used these local governments’ paperwork about legal-bureaucratic procedures listed in the court decision to evaluate the level of bureaucratic processing. Given that there are a wide variety of petitions and protests, and specific practices might vary, different petition and protest cases may experience different legal-bureaucratic procedures. In the Xinfang system, the governments have some available official procedures to deal with citizen complaints, such as investigation, solution, mediation, public hearings, re-examination and review, and termination. If complainants’ cases are related to law and litigation, they might go through legal procedures in judicial agencies, such as adjudication, retrial, dismissal of the appeal, and judicial termination. I consider these legal-bureaucratic procedures as parts of bureaucratic processing. In trials against petitioners and protesters, the local authorities regularly present some official documents to the court to certify that petitioners’ claims had been well addressed through legal-bureaucratic procedures, and these local governments’ paperwork is regularly listed in the court decision, recording the date and the content of each legal-bureaucratic procedure. As a result, this information enabled me to examine the level of bureaucratic processing. Since different petition and protest cases may have been addressed by different legal-bureaucratic procedures and no single set of procedures can fit all the cases, I estimated the level of bureaucratic processing based on the rounds of legal-bureaucratic procedures. The level of bureaucratic processing was coded into three categories: limited processing, sufficient processing, and terminated processing. Whereas limited processing means that the local government managed the petition case in one or two rounds, sufficient processing indicates that the case was handled many times (three or more). Terminated processing means that the petition case was terminated (zhongjie 终结) or identified as unreasonable (rending wuli 认定无理) through some bureaucratic procedures. Only cases terminated by the county or higher-level governments were coded as cases with terminated processing.

Some experienced protesters might change the demands in their old cases to create a new case, which leads to difficulties in empirically defining “protest case” and “the level of bureaucratic processing”. In the regression analysis, to minimize the effects of this problem, I excluded cases in which local authorities mentioned that protesters made new claims and initiated separate processing rounds to handle these newly raised demands.

***Control Variables***

The control variables included the type of demand, time period, government concession, circumstances of crimes, protest intensity, and region. According to who and what caused the grievance, this study divides protest demands into five categories: civil conflict, land requisition, and demolition, villager-village cadre conflict, social welfare and policy benefit, and citizen-government conflict.

This study also divides protest cases into seven periods based on the time at which the last bureaucratic procedure was performed: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Examining the effect of the period on local governments’ immediate deployment of legal repression can trace the development of the legal governance campaign.

The government concession variable indicates whether local authorities met protesters' demands during bureaucratic processing, at least to some extent, mentioning that governments solved protesters' grievances, reached agreements with protesters, and disciplined local officials and village cadres. The local governments’ previous concession might affect their latter calculations in deploying legal repression.

One concern is that the local government resorting to legal repression after bureaucratic processing might result from petitioners’ illegal activities. According to the definitions of three accusations, namely “picking quarrels and provoking troubles” (xunxin zishi 寻衅滋事), “blackmail” (qiaozha lesuo 敲诈勒索), “disrupting the working order of state agencies” (raoluan guojia jiguan gongzuo zhixu 扰乱国家机关工作秩序), in the Crime Law, I set five dummy variables to measure circumstance of crime before the last bureaucratic procedure. The first variable is “non-normal petitioning in Beijing”, and if the court document mentioned the petitioner had conducted non-normal petitioning in Beijing before the last bureaucratic procedure, the case was coded as “1”. The second variable is beating, indicating whether petitioners had beaten (ouda殴打、lanjie拦截) other people. Although 12 cases were recorded as “1” due to the court decisions mentioned that petitioners have beaten other people, these cases did not report any property damage and injury and were identified as troublemaking cases rather than violent cases. The third variable is insulting, indicating whether petitioners have insulting (ruma 辱骂、konghe恐吓) other people. The fourth variable is blackmailing; if the court document mentioned the petitioner had extorted local officials (qiangna yingyao强拿硬要、suoyao caiwu索要财物) before the last bureaucratic procedure, the case was coded as “1”. Finally, the fifth variable is causing chaos; those cases in which court documents mentioned that petitioners had caused the chaos of public order and state agencies’ working order were coded as “1”.

Furthermore, some people might say that the local government resorting to legal repression might result from the cumulative effect—the protesters staging too many petitioning activities and posing considerable threats to local governments—so I also considered the protest intensity, which is measured by the number of petitioning instances in Beijing before the last bureaucratic procedure. I mainly focus on the number of non-normal petitioning in Beijing. Nevertheless, 33 cases only mention that petitioners staged petitions in Beijing or registered in Beijing; the number of such activities was recorded in these cases. Also, 18 cases merely document that protesters lodged petitions in Beijing many times, and “many times” was coded as “three times”. Moreover, seven cases just give a total amount of petitioning Beijing over a time period, and I averaged the numbers according to the time scale.

I also considered the regional effects by two regional variables. First, I divided the regional variable into two categories: provinces with a large number of petitioning instances in Beijing (Shangfang dasheng上访大省) and other provinces. In regions witnessing a large number of petitions in Beijing, local governments might suffer from significant pressure and respond differently. In 2009, the central government dispatched reception teams to five provinces with relatively large numbers of petitioning instances in Beijing, namely Henan, Hebei, Shanxi, Neimenggu, and Liaoning.[[1]](#footnote-1) Thus, the cases in these provinces were coded as “1”. Those in other provinces were coded as “0”. Second, the level of economic development and the level of legal development might affect the local governments’ employment of legal repression, so I distinguished eastern coastal areas from other areas. The eastern coastal provinces are considered more economically and legally developed. The cases in eastern coastal provinces, including Liaoning, Hebei, Tianjin, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, and Hanan, were coded as “1”. Those in other provinces were coded as “0”.

Table 1: A Summary of All Variables

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Obs | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max | |
| Immediate legal repression after bureaucratic practices (Model 1) | 351 | 0.368 | 0.483 | 0 | 1 |
| Immediate legal repression after bureaucratic practices (Model 2) | 351 | 0.197 | 0.398 | 0 | 1 |
| Level of bureaucratic processing | 351 | 1.997 | 0.739 | 1 | 3 |
| Demand | 351 | 2.547 | 1.49 | 1 | 5 |
| Year | 351 | 2.937 | 1.451 | 1 | 6 |
| Government concession | 351 | 0.479 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| Non-normal petitioning in Beijing | 351 | 0.932 | 0.253 | 0 | 1 |
| Beating | 351 | 0.0342 | 0.182 | 0 | 1 |
| Insulting | 351 | 0.0541 | 0.227 | 0 | 1 |
| Blackmailing | 351 | 0.456 | 0.499 | 0 | 1 |
| Causing chaos | 351 | 0.940 | 0.238 | 0 | 1 |
| Protest intensity: number of previous petitions in Beijing | 351 | 6.826 | 10.873 | 1 | 120 |
| Provinces with numerous petitions in Beijing  Eastern coastal provinces | 351  351 | 0.356  0.268 | 0.48  0.443 | 0  0 | 1  1 |
|  | | | | | |

**Appendix D: The Validity and Reliability of the data in the Court Decision**

Like other protest event analyses based on newspaper and social media contexts, this research also faces possible biases. Since court decisions are documented by the local authorities, I realize the possibility that some information might be selectively recorded or not included in the court document. In this situation, using content documented in the adjudication decision to define and examine protest incidents and bureaucratic processing might not reflect the realities of the case. However, some aspects might indicate the ﻿validity and reliability of the data in the court decision. First, the data were presented as evidence in the court, and they are mainly in the form of official documents. Second, demonstrating how severely protesters violated law and order and how well local authorities addressed complainants’ demand is an important step to delegitimize protesters in the courts; thus, it is reasonable to assume that local authorities tend to detail protesters’ disruptive behaviours and bureaucratic processing as much as possible. Finally, the number of cases in the regression analysis was not small, and the collection spans 24 provinces.

**Appendix E: The Problem of Sampling in the Sequential and Statistical analyses and Robustness Tests**

In the sequential and statistical analyses, a considerable number of cases were deleted due to several reasons. In order to discuss the impact of sampling on the analysis and estimation, I examine whether there is a difference in the sentence of imprisonment between the two groups of cases (deleted cases and included cases). The sentence represents the severity of punishment imposed by the local government on unruly petitioners, and it is an indicator that directly reflects the local government’s attitude and reaction to petitioners. If those missing cases are caused by some potential reasons or structural selections, the average sentence for the two groups of cases should be different. There are five types of adjudication outcomes: fixed-term imprisonment (有期徒刑), fixed-term imprisonment with probation (有期徒刑,缓刑),impunity to punishment (免于刑事处罚), community correction (管制), and criminal detention (拘役). The sentence of imprisonment is coded as “0” in those case with fixed-term imprisonment with probation (有期徒刑,缓刑),impunity to punishment (免于刑事处罚), community correction (管制) since the petitioners did not suffer from actual imprisonment. In those cases with fixed-term imprisonment and criminal detention, the sentence is coded as the substantial period of imprisonment. If a case involves several defendant petitioners, the average sentence is recorded.

For the sequential analysis, 3102 cases were included, and 2372 cases were deleted due to several reasons. The average sentence of included cases is 17.9 months, while the average sentence of deleted cases is 17.1 months. The T-test confirms that the average sentence for the two groups of cases is not statistically different. It indicates that those missing cases might not be caused by some potential reasons or structural selections, and the sampling may not cause bias to the sequential analysis.

Table 2: T-Test of Difference in Sentence in Two groups of cases in Sequential Analysis

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Group | Number of Cases | Mean of Sentence | Is the sentence statistically different from another group? |
| Included cases | 3102 | 17.9 months | No  p value: 0.1122 |
| Deleted cases | 2372 | 17.1 months |

Similarly, in the statistical analysis, limited cases were used to conduct the logistic regression because of the strict standards for including a case. 351 cases were included, and 1850 cases involving staging petition activities in Beijing were deleted. However, the T-test suggests that the average sentence for the two groups of cases is not statistically different. The sampling may not lead to bias in the statistical analysis.

Table 3: T-Test of Difference in Sentence in Two groups of cases in Statistical Analysis

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Group | Number of Cases | Mean of Sentence | Is the sentence statistically different from another group? |
| Included cases | 351 | 19.5 months | No  p value: 0.2405 |
| Deleted cases | 1850 | 20.6 months |

**Appendix F: The Robustness Test for The Effect of Time Period**

One may argue that the findings of increasing deployment of immediate legal repression over time may be due to flawed case filtration. The cases in which the last bureaucratic procedures were performed before 2014 were deleted, which shrinks cases adjudicated in 2014 in the sample. I chose the cases in which the last bureaucratic procedure was performed in 2015 as the reference group to conduct a robustness test. The result shows that the odds of immediately using legal repression after bureaucratic processing in cases in which the last bureaucratic procedure was performed in 2017, 2018, and 2019 are still higher than for cases in which the last bureaucratic procedure was performed in 2015. What's more, when I chose those cases in which the last bureaucratic procedure was performed in 2016 as the reference group, the positive effect of the time period is still statistically significant. Additionally, the distribution of “time period” variable is: 2014 (76 cases), 2015 (72 cases), 2016 (67 cases), 2017 (84 cases), 2018 (38 cases), and 2019 (14 cases); it is less likely that the positive effect of time period on immediate legal repression is due to fewer cases in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Table 4: The Robustness Test for The Effect of Time Period on Immediate Legal Repression

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Immediate Legal Repression after Bureaucratic Practices |
| Level of Bureaucratic Processing  (ref. limited processing) |  |
| sufficient processing | 1.358\*\*\* |
| terminated processing | 1.454\*\*\* |
| *Controls*  Demand (ref. civil dispute) |  |
| land requisition and demolition | 0.0250 |
| villager-village cadre conflict | 0.217 |
| social welfare and policy benefit | 0.0138 |
| citizen-government conflict | 1.007\*\* |
| Concession | 0.131 |
| Year (ref. 2015) |  |
| 2014 | -1.241\* |
| 2016 | 0.143 |
| 2017 | 0.962\*\* |
| 2018 | 1.691\*\*\* |
| 2019 | 2.575\*\* |
| Circumstances of Crimes |  |
| non-normal petitioning in Beijing | 15.57 |
| beating | 1.594 |
| insulting | -0.411 |
| blackmailing | 0.263 |
| causing chaos | -14.65 |
| Number of Previous Petitions in Beijing | -0.0173 |
| Provinces with Numerous Petitions in Beijing  Eastern Coastal Provinces | 0.187  -0.177 |
| Constant | -4.447\*\*\* |
| Observations | 351 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Immediate Legal Repression after Bureaucratic Practices |
| Level of Bureaucratic Processing  (ref. limited processing) |  |
| sufficient processing | 1.358\*\*\* |
| terminated processing | 1.454\*\*\* |
| *Controls*  Demand (ref. civil dispute) |  |
| land requisition and demolition | 0.0250 |
| villager-village cadre conflict | 0.217 |
| social welfare and policy benefit | 0.0138 |
| citizen-government conflict | 1.007\*\* |
| Concession | 0.131 |
| Year (ref. 2016) |  |
| 2014 | -1.384\*\* |
| 2015 | -0.143 |
| 2017 | 0.819\* |
| 2018 | 1.547\*\* |
| 2019 | 2.431\*\* |
| Circumstances of Crimes |  |
| non-normal petitioning in Beijing | 15.57 |
| beating | 1.594 |
| insulting | -0.411 |
| blackmailing | 0.263 |
| causing chaos | -14.65 |
| Number of Previous Petitions in Beijing | -0.0173 |
| Provinces with Numerous Petitions in Beijing  Eastern Coastal Provinces | 0.187  -0.177 |
| Constant | -4.447\*\*\* |
| Observations | 351 |

1. news.sina.com.cn. 2009. “The central government will dispatch reception teams to those provinces that have a relatively large number of petitioning Beijing”, 19 August, http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2009-08-19/034518462702.shtml, and news.qq.com. 2010. “The reception teams from the central government have addressed a large number of difficult petition cases”, 20 January, https://news.qq.com/a/20100120/000935.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)