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Abstract

This study examines the role of the media in sustaining regime stability in an authoritarian context. The article engages the recent work on authoritarian resilience in comparative politics but goes beyond the standard focus on elections to other important institutions, such as the media and courts, that are used by authoritarian leaders to bolster legitimacy. The authors find that the Chinese media contribute to regime legitimacy and effective rule by propagandizing citizens' experiences in the legal system. However, unlike the "mouthpieces" of earlier communist regimes, the marketized Chinese media provide more convincing and sophisticated messages that continue to accord with state censorship demands while satisfying readers' interest in real-life stories and problems. The "positive propaganda" and the relative uniformity of information sources because of state censorship lead aggrieved citizens to the law as a realm for dispute resolution and rights protection. Statistical analysis of a randomly sampled survey conducted in four Chinese cities in 2005 demonstrates that exposure to media reporting about labor-law-related issues successfully promotes the image of a proworker bias in the law among citizens, thus encouraging them to participate in the legal system. The state is able to achieve its political goal because of the lack of

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conflicting sources of information and the lack of previous experience with the reformed legal system among citizens.

Keywords

democratization, media, law, labor, China, authoritarianism

One of the central questions in comparative politics is why certain regimes change and others persist. Since the 1960s political scientists have expressed the view that the media play a facilitating role in destabilizing authoritarian regimes and contribute to a sociocultural framework conducive to liberal democracy. Lerner (1964) argued that access to the mass media would encourage citizens to become politically active, thus eventually leading to democratization. With the decline of modernization theory in the late 1960s skepticism grew that greater access to the media alone would have such an effect (Mowlana & UNESCO, 1985). Yet when the opening of media markets provided citizens in authoritarian regimes with more choices of information sources, the media reemerged as a factor in works on regime transition in the 1990s. Television reporting was said to have a signaling and accelerating effect on public protests in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s (Huntington, 1996). Similarly, the Internet has been described as an “alternative news agency” that is able to subvert state control over the flow of information (Ferdinand, 2000). Numerous studies of the role of the media during democratization argued that criticism voiced in independent news media eroded the regime’s legitimacy (see, e.g., Lawson, 2002; Olukotun, 2002; Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 1998). Greater diversity of information is also said to affect political culture and the emergence of a public sphere (see, e.g., Bennett, 1998; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). The link between the media and political liberalization is also evident in works that use freedom of press as one indicator for the extent to which a political system is liberalized (Diamond, 2002).

These existing studies on the role of the media in political change have concentrated on the potential liberalizing role of the media in nondemocracies. Only recently have some scholars devoted attention to the possibility that the media might function as a reactionary force to stabilize authoritarian regimes. Increased interest in recent years in sustained authoritarianism or “authoritarian resilience” has led to new research on variations within the authoritarian context and to the recognition that transition-theory-driven analysis of authoritarian regimes may be misplaced (see, e.g., Carothers, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Nathan, 2003). It is not the case that

all authoritarian regimes are in a (gradual or rapid) transition toward democracy. Many authoritarian regimes, including China and Russia, are ambitiously pursuing institutional and political changes that cement leaders' political power rather than dilute it. In both countries, the media have played a critical role in this process of power consolidation. In this literature we see a return to past theories on authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The highly influential "four theories of the press" claimed that authoritarian states would use the media to stabilize the regime, whereas totalitarian regimes would also rely on the media to transform society (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956/1973). Recent works that deal with the media in sustained authoritarianism often tie the increasing corporate and global nature of the media to political and economic elites (White, 2005; Y. Zhao, 1998). This is a backlash against the assumption that globalized and diverse media would have a liberalizing effect on political systems as states are no longer able to tightly control the information flows originating abroad.

This article adds to this more recent scholarly discussion as we examine the effects of the mass media on citizens' attitudes and behavior toward the legal system. First, we are expanding the discussion of durable authoritarianism beyond the focus in current research on seemingly democratic institutions, such as elections, dominant parties, and legislatures (see, e.g., Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Schedler, 2002). Although manipulation of democratic institutions is one of the key ways in which dominant parties co-opt potential opposition, we believe that stable one-party systems also achieve their dominance through the manipulation and control over many other institutions that do not necessarily appear democratic, including the media. Recent studies on media under authoritarianism confirm that there is significant variation in the ability of authoritarian states to restrict press freedom and access to information, and this variation can be partially explained by natural resource endowment (Egorov, Guriev, & Sonin, 2009; Norris & Inglehart, 2009). In addition, we believe that single-party states, such as China, may be more likely to build institutions in charge of monitoring media content, such as the Propaganda Department under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and thus be better able to restrict information flows (see also Stockmann, IN PRESS).

Second, we go beyond the current emphasis on media independence and press freedom by focusing on media influence on the views of citizens living under authoritarian rule. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in understanding the effects of media on public opinion under authoritarianism (Kern & Hainmueller, 2009; Norris & Inglehart, 2009), which we see as a great advancement over the assumption that people's

opinions reflect the nature of media content in nondemocracies. In part because of the difficulties in obtaining suitable survey data, these studies measure media influence by means of media consumption. Our data allow us to take into account that people not only need to be exposed to political messages but also need to encode and retain the information they receive from the mass media. Our findings indicate that entertainment programs that emphasize sensationalism, such as legal shows, may make people particularly susceptible to political messages.

Finally, we are adding a dynamic element to the discussion: Although the debate focuses on only two possible outcomes—regime stability or liberalization—we are examining a case in which the media are considered an important tool to bring about political reform for the broader goal of keeping in power. In the case of China, the regime has adopted “rule of law” reforms to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy of their rule. The media are important in shaping citizens’ views and behavior toward the legal system. Positive views and increasing usage of the legal system may be indications of regime stability through institutional reform and change. Below we investigate this research question based on a study of legal mobilization of workers through the mass media in China.

To learn about how the Chinese media report about labor-related issues we examined one nationwide China Central Television (CCTV) show that specialized in labor issues and two weekly sections of Shanghai newspapers. We chose Shanghai newspapers because qualitative interviews with disputants from Shanghai allow us to directly compare what is written in the news to workers’ experiences. We selected those two newspapers in particular because they were the papers most likely to be named by respondents in Shanghai as the source of their news and information on labor disputes and employment law issues. The content analysis was complemented with qualitative interviews with media practitioners from Chongqing and Beijing. For the statistical analysis we relied on the Survey of Labor Law Mobilization (LLM), a randomly sampled survey conducted in four Chinese cities in 2005. Chongqing, Shenyang, Foshan, and Wuxi were selected as research sites to account for differences in labor environments and to include regional variation. Because of the global positioning system sampling technique the LLM is one of the first surveys conducted in China that included migrant workers, a large social group normally excluded when sampling is done based on lists of registered households. More detailed information about our research methods can be found in the appendix and the online appendix available at www.daniestockmann.net.

The Chinese Media Under Reform

Just as China's economy, politics, and society transformed after the introduction of economic reforms in the late 1970s, the structure of the Chinese mass media underwent tremendous change during the reform period. Before the reforms all media were state owned and financed by the state. During the reform era the Chinese government deregulated, commercialized, and partially privatized the news media. As part of media reform the government provided lower levels in the broadcast and print administrative hierarchy with greater authority over programming, personnel, and business decisions (Lynch, 1999; Y. Zhao, 1998). The Chinese media were also encouraged to obtain outside funding through advertising and increased sales. Today most media institutions finance themselves with advertising revenues, though some continue to receive indirect or small state subsidies (Stockmann, IN PRESS). Investment further promoted the profit orientation of media outlets. Beginning in the late 1990s broadcasting followed by print media could be publicly traded on the stock market, and beginning in 2002 nonmedia state companies were allowed to invest in media groups (Y. Zhao, 2005). Although there remain restrictions about the share of nonstate investment into media outlets not to exceed 49%, the state has nevertheless partially transferred property from public toward private ownership (Hu, 2003). Media reform has thus been characterized by changes in management, financing, and ownership. The combination of these changes resulted in marketization (or commercial liberalization) of the media.

In addition to marketization, China's media environment has become more diverse and internationalized, in terms of both the kind of media sources available to audiences and news content. In the early 1980s the government relaxed its licensing policy, thus allowing an increasing number of media outlets to emerge. For example, in the 1980s "evening" or "semiofficial papers" rose and started to challenge previously existing official papers. In the 1990s "metro" or "commercialized papers" started to compete with the official and evening papers (Wu, 2000; Y. Zhao, 2005). Along with the government's decision to open up China to the world, the Internet and international media sources, for example the BBC and *Newsweek* magazine, became available to the Chinese population. These information sources placed competitive pressure on television, radio broadcasting, and print media to be bold in reporting. Editors and reporters invented new media products to attract audiences, which in turn increased advertising income. In television broadcasting, new program formats emerged, ranging from call-in

shows to docudrama to live broadcasting. Some of these formats have been modeled after foreign examples or bought from abroad. For example, some shows resemble *Cops* or *48 Hours*, and Japanese cartoons are regularly shown on television.

Citizens make sense of this complicated environment by distinguishing among different types of information sources, characterized by variation among media types (television, radio broadcasting, newspapers, magazines, the Internet) and within media types (such as, e.g., official papers and commercialized papers). Individual media sources may not always fit neatly into these categories, but these distinctions refer to general tendencies associated with variation in the degree of marketization and greater autonomy from the state. As a rule of thumb, newspapers are subject to greater investment than broadcasting and “commercialized papers” more than “official papers,” which media practitioners associate with more space for news reporting. The Internet is often compared to the most commercialized papers in terms its degree of marketization and the reduced ability of the state to control its content (Stockmann, 2010, 2011).

Yet despite this variation in terms of media types, the state is still able to exert a great deal of control over the mass media. All major newspapers and radio and television stations continue to be registered under state or party organizations, they are owned at least 51% by the party (Hu, 2003), and they remain subject to institutions, most importantly a Propaganda Department, that have the authority to give editorial guidelines and to dismiss personnel. State institutions have also helped to implement conglomeration as a means to overcome increased fragmentation of diverse media outlets and to prevent internationalization of the newspaper industry through enforcement of restrictions on foreign direct investment (Li, He, & Yu, 2006). The structure of press groups is usually hierarchically organized, which reinforces the authority of the state (Zheng, 2003). Similarly, the Internet is not completely outside of state control, although controlling the web remains a challenge. The government relies on a combination of policy measures and technical solutions to control domestic sites as well as access to foreign websites (Taubman, 1998; J. Zhao, 2008).

The institutional structure into which media outlets are embedded effectively establishes boundaries for news reporting that are, on the whole, respected by reporters. Though there is some variation in media content, the ability of the regime to constrain news reporting is still sufficient to ensure that newspapers generally do not divert much from the position of the government. The result is a peculiar information environment in which media

messages vary in terms of style but generally stick to an “official line.” Of course, the uniform state message is sometimes challenged by conflicting information, but these messages usually do not gain enough importance to seriously challenge the main information flow disseminated through the mass media. Next we explain how this plays out with respect to labor problems and labor rights.

The Role of the Media in Legal Reform

As a vehicle of state propaganda and a main channel for Chinese citizens to receive news and official information, the Chinese media play a major role in the dissemination of legal news, new laws and regulations, and updates on the ever-changing legal system. This is part of a more widespread “legal dissemination” campaign that aspires to inculcate Chinese citizens with respect and knowledge of the law (Exner, 1995). Thus, the Chinese media serve as a bridge connecting Chinese citizens to the state, a bridge that is even more important as other key institutions of social control and influence have weakened or shifted goals, such as the work unit, the neighborhood committee, and mass organizations. Marketization and diversification of the Chinese media system have not changed this fundamental political role of the media. Despite its more sophisticated, specialized, and globalized nature, there are still profound differences between Chinese media and media outlets in liberal democracies.

Chinese media outlets must manage a difficult and sensitive position as the media continues its political role as the mouthpiece of the CCP with increasing hard budget constraints, market pressure, and competition. At the same time, media reform has created incentives to cater news content more toward the demand of Chinese media audiences. In this section we argue that these dual goals of political correctness and commercial success lead to a certain representation of labor and labor problems reflected in media content, imagery, and rhetoric. This representation satisfies the government’s policy goals while its delivery, especially in the more reformed media outlets, satisfies popular tastes and market demand. The media’s ability to do both has raised their effectiveness, shaped readers’ opinions on legal topics, and so far at least further enhanced the Chinese state’s “authoritarian resilience.” By focusing on the changing imagery and nature of state propaganda *that is delivered through* marketized media, we are able to pinpoint more clearly the building blocks of this resilience. Our conclusions may indicate that marketization of the media can coexist with authoritarian political control over media content.

Legal Mobilization of Workers and Regime Stability

The CCP's rhetoric on the role of law and the development of a modern legal system have evolved since law was revived as an important political institution following the end of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1970s. Deng Xiaoping and his political protégés linked law to many of the important modernization goals first laid out by Deng in the early reform era. They include economic development, integration with the international economic system, political and social stability, and a determined shift away from the revolutionary and unpredictable politics of the Mao Zedong era (Lubman, 1999). As the Chinese economy has grown rapidly over the past 30 years, many new social problems and challenges have emerged, including large-scale rural to urban migration, environmental degradation, urban unemployment, and rising inequality. With these problems the role of law has shifted somewhat to emphasize social justice, social protection, and the rights of the downtrodden. Emphasis on law as the protector from the vagaries of *politics* has shifted to emphasis on law as the protector from the vagaries of the *market* (Keith & Lin, 2001). Moreover, given the large decentralization of political and economic decision making that was one of the hallmarks of Deng's reforms, proponents of rule of law development in China emphasize the importance of legal authority to ensure that central policy goals are implemented by provincial and local leaders (Peerenboom, 2002).¹

In the specific issue area of labor and employment law, the Chinese party-state has particular concerns and goals when it comes to the media and dissemination of legal education and information. First, the state wants to increase its legitimacy among a subset of the population that is often labeled the "sacrificial lambs" of the current Chinese development model. Since 1995 the central government has passed several important laws enhancing workers' rights and social welfare protections. Second, central leaders want to strengthen implementation of these key laws and regulations to improve the working conditions and safety of Chinese workers and limit outbreaks of mass demonstrations and strikes because of unsafe and unfair workplace conditions. It is well known that Chinese laws are often not implemented or enforced by local government officials who are more concerned about boosting local economic growth. The dissemination of legal education to workers is part of a strategy to increase pressure on localities to implement the central government's laws. Finally, since 1995, labor disputes have increased 25% per year on average (Gallagher and Dong, IN PRESS). Many of these disputes include extralegal action such as workplace strife, strikes, and large demonstrations. The government wants to

channel labor unrest to state-sanctioned administrative or legal institutions to reduce the social impact of workplace conflict.

Although we deal only with the issue of labor rights in this article, we believe that the relationship between media mobilization and regime stability is generalizable to other issues where citizens do not hold strong opinions because of lack of information. Labor and employment rights protection is a new issue area for most Chinese citizens. Until 1995 Chinese citizens were employed predominantly in state or collective enterprise with lifetime employment and cradle-to-grave benefits. The state's newfound interest in protecting workers rights comes with the rise of private employment and market regulation of China's labor markets. Therefore, for most citizens, this is a new and unfamiliar issue. Our argument may not apply to long-standing grievances between the state and its citizens. For example, most Chinese have strong ideas about the level of corruption in society, and it is unclear if state propaganda regarding corruption or anticorruption measures taken by the state is persuasive.

The use of the media to propagandize state policies is, of course, a central tenet of any communist state. In a period of rapid economic growth and social change, the CCP has adopted a more distinctly populist direction in the hope that attention to those at the bottom of society will reduce social unrest and instability, further solidifying the CCP's monopoly on political power. This "authoritarian populism" has also been seen in other authoritarian settings, most recently in Latin America (Dix, 1985; Eke & Kuzio, 2000).

Media Representations of Labor Problems and Labor Rights

Media representation of labor problems must serve the state's goals of legitimacy, enhanced policy implementation, and channeling of disputes, but it also must accord with the commercial and market-based goals of the media outlet. Negative news or problems attract readers, but the government demands a "positive" spin that enhances its legitimacy and focuses on what is being done to solve problems. Without exception, editors and journalists who specialized in reports about legal issues believed that the state wants the news media to frame legal issues from the perspective of the "weak parts of society." As one newspaper editor explained,

The central government is very clear: Wen Jiabao said that migrant workers should get their salary on time. Those kinds of problems are labor disputes. If the employer is from a private corporation, they

should give salary on time; if the employer is from a state owned enterprise, then he should even more do so. (Stockmann, Interview 7)

Often, journalists and editors did not receive specific directives about the nature of the propaganda message. Instead, they learned from making mistakes, previous news articles on similar issues, and speeches by political leaders about what issues are allowed or not as well as about how to report about certain issues.

The result of this combination of state and market pressure is a specific media representation of labor, which we label “bad apples but happy endings.” This representation of labor emerges through content analysis of two Shanghai newspapers, *New People Evening News (NPEN)* and *Labor Daily (LDB)*, and the television show *Legal Report (LR)* in the period leading up to the survey. *NPEN* is a popular, marketized evening paper, part of a large media conglomerate that is under the direction of the Propaganda Department of the Shanghai municipal government. *Labor Daily* is the official paper of the Shanghai Municipal Trade Union. Although not as popular as *NPEN*, *Labor Daily* is often available at workplaces and, therefore, widely available to those with employment problems. Both newspapers run weekly sections on labor and employment news, often focusing on a single case and merging reporting with advocacy articles, detailed information of relevant laws and regulations, and contact information for civil society organizations such as legal aid centers and for state bureaus that also provide information and advice. *Legal Report* is a popular legal show broadcasted every day nationwide by CCTV and is a model to an increasing number of legal TV shows. Since our findings from CCTV confirm those based on Shanghai newspapers, we are confident that our results capture a general trend in legal news reporting in the Chinese media.

Shanghai newspapers and *Legal Report* tend to portray the worker as the weaker side of the conflict, in need of protection from exploitative companies. Problems encountered by the worker during the dispute and subsequent resolution are related to “bad apples” rather than systematic flaws in the resolution process. Finally, these sections focus on cases that have been resolved positively, with good outcomes for the worker. In some cases, where the outcome is not yet clear, the worker is exhorted to continue to fight to protect his or her legal rights. This representation of labor satisfies two important, but different, goals. The emotive representation of an aggrieved, mistreated worker helps to sell papers. The successful use of the legal system by a normal citizen promotes the state’s goals of enhanced legitimacy through rule of law.

Unlike prereform propaganda, however, these stories are not ideological, boring, or unrealistic. If compared to the labor representations of the past, stories on designated “model workers,” which extolled the virtues and self-sacrifice of proletariats in purple prose and socialist platitudes, these stories are gritty exposés on the hardships of working life in China today. Although clearly not diverting from the government’s main message on rule of law, legal development, and labor politics (e.g., journalists do not touch highly sensitive topics, including freedom of association or strikes),² these stories are not empty rhetoric, and their delivery is more satisfying and attractive to an average reader. In particular, we focus here on how these messages are conveyed.

First, journalists offer real examples of local workers invoking legal rights at the workplace. For example, *NPEN*’s employment section used a letter by Mr. Zhou of the 5th Village of Luoshan, Pudong District, to explain the potential complications and problems related to labor contracts that might arise during the restructuring of formerly state-run firms (*NPEN* 1). Similarly, *Legal Report* starts with a specific case of injustice, followed by interviews with both disputants by an investigative reporter. After the presentation of the court verdict and comments by a legal expert, the audience is given a chance to respond by phone, letters, and email. The use of specific cases and opportunities for readers and audiences to participate serve to make the media message on law more meaningful and dramatic. For example, in an article summarizing a collective dispute involving dozens of migrant construction workers, the journalist opened his story with a courtroom drama:

When Ah-Zhang and his two dozen fellow workers left the Hongkou District Court for the second time, they could barely conceal their smiles. After losing half a year’s hard-earned sweat when their labor contractor took off without notice, their once in a lifetime court case had just been decided. The law had given these migrant workers from afar justice—they had just signed their names to a mediation agreement in the court and would receive the half-year salaries that had been withheld. [Ah-Zhang said,] “We are migrant workers, in Shanghai we are strangers in a strange land, but when we met this injustice, we still received sincere care and help, Shanghai didn’t take us for outsiders.” (LDB 19)

Stories of migrant workers receiving back wages accord with Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s focus on this issue beginning in 2003 when he personally intervened in a case involving a worker from Gansu. The emotive language,

in-depth details of their exploitation at the hands of labor contractors, and descriptions of satisfaction and gratitude satisfy both readers' desire for real-life problems and the state's desire to publicize official policies that pay attention to weak members of society.

In addition to reliance on case-based analysis, the emotive content, body language of victims, and common use of phrases like "protecting your own rights" (LR 1), "seeking justice through the law" (LDB 19), and "taking up legal weapons" (*NPEN* 1) encourage citizens to not only read and watch these stories for their human interest but also identify with the protagonists as common people like them. Write-in columns, advertisements of hotline numbers, online discussions, and legal aid contact information all emphasize the participation opportunities for citizens as potential plaintiffs themselves. The bad apples—vanished labor contractors, sneaky bosses, cowardly labor arbitrators—are simply bumps on this "road to justice," not indications of systemic problems or deep-seated corruption. The cases selected for analysis present hard-won battles by workers, but they are all, in the end, won.

Either because of unintentional inattention to crucial problems or intentional self-censorship, this media representation of labor conflict does not accord with reality and ill prepares potential plaintiffs for the true vagaries of the legal system and legal procedure. To illustrate the unrealistic portrayal of labor disputes in the Chinese media we examine a labor dispute case litigated by the legal aid center that frequently ran columns in the *NPEN* and *Labor Daily*. By juxtaposing the case itself, its media reporting, and the subsequent in-depth interviews with the plaintiffs, we begin to construct a mechanism for how media representation can both encourage people to use the law but also lead them to leave the legal process with a heavy sense of frustration and disenchantment. We also use these findings to interpret the survey data discussed below.

One of the labor cases covered most widely by the Shanghai media in 2003 and 2004 was the case of Du Linxiang, an old worker who was fired from his company when it was acquired by a Taiwanese investor. The company refused to compensate Old Du for his 35 years of tenure at the original company. Old Du was a product of the Cultural Revolution. His reemployment chances were next to none, and he realized that his severance pay was the only chance to get a large sum of money to support himself into retirement. So he fought back; he began to read the newspaper and visit legal aid offices at the trade union. Because his case was representative of labor problems during privatization and restructuring, it attracted much attention from the print and TV media. *Labor Daily* first featured his case in a column in January 2003: "Once again he sets out on the road to rights protection," which was published while he waited for his final appeal to the Shanghai

Intermediate Court. (Old Du had lost in arbitration while the district court awarded him only 8 years of severance.) Shanghai TV featured him in a broadcast that was aired right after the Intermediate Court issued a decision in Old Du's favor, awarding him severance for 35 years of tenure, nearly RMB 80,000 (about \$10,000). *Labor Daily* then published a second column with an update of the case, reporting the Intermediate Court's verdict and that "after more than a year-long rights-protection course, Du Linxiang has at last recovered justice" (LDB 12).

In an interview nearly one year after this decision, Du Linxiang reports that he has yet to receive any compensation or payment from his company. He continues to pursue implementation of the decision through the Shanghai High Court but worries about the effects on his family and his health. Old Du is angry and also amused that all of his media coverage has encouraged people like him to seek him out for help, while he himself has lost everything. Despite his victory at the Intermediate Court, Old Du has nearly lost hope. "Filing a lawsuit is too exhausting, I no longer believe in legal channels. Chinese people do not have human rights. Zhu Rongji has really sacrificed our generation, especially since the beginning of the reform period. Justice in China is not real" (Gallagher, Interview 9).³

As Old Du himself noted, the media coverage of his case had made him famous; people sought him out for help and advice on their own legal problems encountered when firms restructured or privatized. His victory at the Intermediate Court was empty for him personally but mobilized others to seek out a "path to justice." The media's tendency to focus on only the positive aspects of the case accords with the state's desire to accentuate the positive and to limit coverage that would highlight key structural limitations of the Chinese justice system. None of the media stories examined, for example, the problem of implementation, which is in part a function of the weakness of courts and in part a symptom of systemic corruption and close relationships between local companies and local governments.

Old Du's experience is a microcosm of the larger pattern. We see first high expectations for the law and the legal system that are fueled by the media's overly positive portrayal of one's real chances of having a fair day in court. Postdispute attitudes are much less sanguine for those directly involved, but media packaging of the results can give new hope to the uninitiated.

The Mass Media as Information Source

As an important source of legal news and information, the media are the main conduit through which Chinese readers can learn about relevant laws

and regulations and the problems confronting employees at the workplace. When asked about their use of the news media to learn about social issues, 97.4% indicated watching television, 90.7% reading newspapers, 62.6% reading magazines, 42.2% listening to radio broadcasts, and 39.5% surfing the Internet in the four cities we surveyed. When asked about their use of legal programs, 90.9% reported watching legal shows on television and 32.1% listening to legal programs on the radio. Among the working population in the four cities only 0.9% reported never using any media source at all.⁴ The most important alternative information source to the media is propaganda through work units. Of respondents, 44% reported that they had heard about labor law at their work unit. Thus, the mass media represent the most important information source on labor law.⁵

The growing demand for information about the law is caused by a combination of three factors. First, as pointed out previously the state has reduced its involvement in dispute resolution. As more people are channeled into the legal system, they seek information about how to use the law effectively. Lee (2007) cites a migrant construction worker involved in a collective labor dispute in Shenzhen:

Since we started this struggle with the company, many workers have begun to read newspapers. Some even cut out labor dispute stories for circulation in the dormitory. The more we read these legal reports, the more we understand the legal issues involved in our own case. (p. 172)

Similarly, 82% of 46 randomly selected plaintiffs who received help by the legal aid center in Shanghai had heard about the labor law from the mass media (Gallagher, 2006). Many plaintiffs reporting hearing about legal protections through the columns in *NPEN* and *Labor Daily* as they searched out information and education that would help with their cases. Two older workers, Cao and Wang, reported,

It used to be that labor regulations were all internal. We didn't know and we couldn't know. It's not like now with so much media dissemination, newspapers, and the Internet. Now everyone can find out. . . . We started to look for legal books and to read *Labor Daily*. (Gallagher, Interview 47)

Second, getting informed about the law and the legal system is a way to keep up with China's rapid socioeconomic transformation. The logic of the law, which is based on contract and exchange, is regarded to suit the logic of the

market. As Wang Jun, a professor at the Communication University of China, put it, “Along with the development of a market economy people increasingly realize: ‘market economy means an economy with a legal system’” (Wang, 2005, p.1). Studies on media dependency suggest that uncertainty in the political environment generates heightened anxiety among citizens. Therefore, citizens are more likely to turn to mass media as a source of information and in doing so are more easily influenced by the mass media (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Loveless, 2008). Finally, Chinese media audiences seek legal news because these kinds of news stories are often “negative news”—a term describing watchdog journalism. Such reporting exposed, for example, forced labor in the brick-making industry in Shanxi province in the spring of 2007. The combination of these factors—reduced state involvement in dispute resolution, rapid socioeconomic transformation, and attraction to investigative news reporting—has increased demands for more and better legal information among Chinese urban publics.

These reasons behind the increasing interest in legal issues among the Chinese public suggest that citizens do not selectively expose themselves to information that is consistent with their preheld beliefs—the classic question of media selection versus media effects in communication research. The labor law is new to most Chinese. It was passed only in 1995 and has been subject to changes since then. Also, few people relative to the large population have experienced the labor dispute resolution system and have had a chance to form their opinions based on firsthand experience. Only 51 out of 4,112 citizens in the four cities had completed a labor dispute. Our qualitative research with disputants indicates that citizens seek information primarily out of curiosity on issues related to labor law, to learn about what the law says and how to make it work in their favor, in other words to form an opinion rather than to confirm previously held beliefs. An experiment conducted with 138 ordinary citizens in Beijing further demonstrated that readers were influenced by newspaper stories that portrayed labor law as effective to protect worker rights when originating from a more marketized media outlet (Stockmann, IN PRESS). Therefore, we interpret the findings of the statistical analysis in the next section as media effects.

Media Influence on Beliefs About the Legal System

Mere exposure to the media alone does not change people’s attitudes. Instead, the extent to which a person is influenced by the mass media depends on the level of awareness of a particular issue. Counterintuitively, moderately informed citizens tend to be most easily persuaded by new information conveyed, for

example, through the news media (Converse, 1962; McGuire, 1968; Zaller, 1992). Starting with Zaller, scholars of political communication have commonly used a person's level of political knowledge as a proxy for political awareness, defined as the extent to which a person pays attention to politics and understands political information. According to Zaller's exposure-acceptance model, a person's likelihood to be persuaded by a piece of information depends on two factors: first, his or her likelihood to be exposed and comprehend the message (reception) and, second, his or her likelihood to accept the message (acceptance). Zaller argued that poorly informed citizens are less likely to receive news media messages because they are little aware of politics. Highly informed citizens are more attentive and are thus very likely to receive and store political information conveyed through the mass media. At the same time, however, they also scrutinize the information in light of their predispositions and therefore tend to be more resistant to changing their political views. For example, if a person holds conservative beliefs and receives a liberal message, that message is more likely to make a difference if he or she is not already familiar with it. The more familiar he or she already is with similar liberal messages, the lower the likelihood that the message is going to change his or her conservative beliefs. Therefore, a person's level of awareness and attitude change are related to each other in a nonlinear way.

To investigate the extent to which Chinese workers were influenced by the mass media we examined the relationship between levels of awareness and attitudes toward the labor law among media users.⁶ To simplify interpretation, we use the terms *awareness* and *attention* interchangeably, though measured consistent with the exposure-acceptance model based on six items that tapped into respondents' level of knowledge about the labor law and labor dispute resolution.⁷ Attitudes toward the labor law were captured by a question that asked respondents whether they thought the labor law was very effective, somewhat effective, not so effective, or not at all effective in protecting workers' rights. Since the dependent variable was a categorical variable we employed ordered probit regression analysis.⁸

In our probit model, we estimated the probability and the uncertainty surrounding it for workers who had about 10 years of education (mean), were first employed before the introduction of the labor contract system (mode), had not experienced a labor dispute themselves (mode), and had not received information about the labor law at the work unit (mode). The results are displayed in Figure 1 and demonstrate that the relationship between attention and perceived effectiveness of the labor law for the average worker in the four cities was nonlinear, as expected. At the same time, we did not find

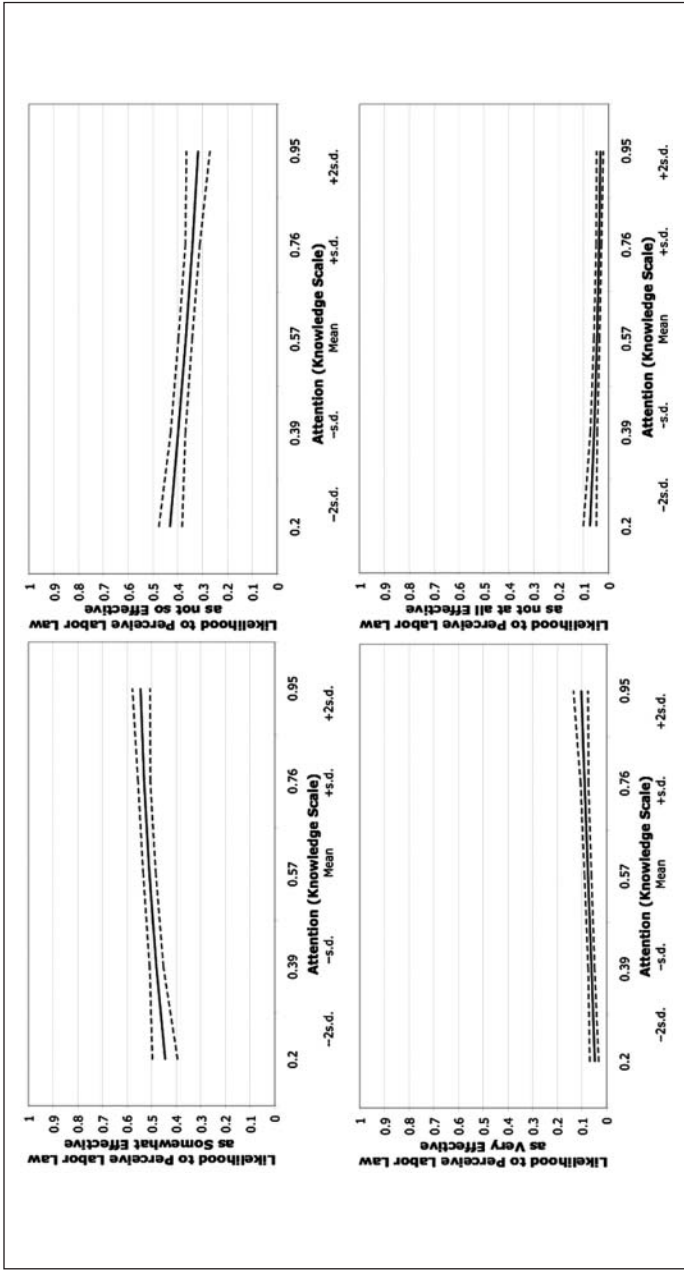


Figure 1. Relationship Between Attention and Views of the Labor Law Among Media Users

Source: Survey of Labor Law Mobilization 2005.

a. For detailed results of the ordinal probit regression, see Table A1 in the appendix. For robustness test results, including dummy variables for different cities, (Table A10) as well as the equation of the statistical model (Equation 1) see the online appendix.

evidence for strong resistance among the highly informed. Even when paying much attention to the issue, the average workers in the four cities remained fairly susceptible to positive messages about the labor law.

Which media sources were particularly influential in boosting people's positive perceptions of workers' rights? To answer this question we added an interaction term between attention and a dummy variable on frequent consumption of different media types to the previous statistical model. To decrease multicollinearity between interaction terms, we decided to model the relationship between attention and attitudes linearly, which is consistent with our finding that there was not much resistance among the highly informed. As displayed in Table 1, coefficients of interaction terms, especially for legal TV and radio shows, were substantially and statistically highly significant. Interaction terms for newspapers, magazines, and reading societal news online were comparatively smaller than those for broadcasting media and statistically insignificant. Radio and television broadcasting were particularly effective in creating the impression that the labor law protects workers effectively.

One reason for the high effectiveness of legal shows might be the style in which television and radio deliver positive messages about labor law. Media practitioners and social scientists point to the special power inherent in presenting news in a way that illustrates and personalizes national problems (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Though studies in communication have not always found evidence for the effect of vividness (see, e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), sensationalism on television has been found to increase emotional arousal and liking of the story as long as it is not emotionally overwhelming (Vettehen, Nuijten, & Peeters, 2008). Similarly, we believe that the "docudrama"-like presentation of Chinese legal shows, such as *Legal Report*, is likely to explain why legal shows on television and radio broadcasting have a particularly strong impact on Chinese media audiences. In Landry's (2008) study of Chinese courts, he finds a similarly strong effect for television in bringing people to the courts.

Although the evidence for actual influence is often thin, several features of the medium do lend it the potential for considerable power. TV does not require its audience to be literate nor even to expend the effort of reading (Brader, 2006; Graber, 1990). Whether because of its authenticity (Barry, 1997), intimacy (Hart, 1999), or the combination of two sensory channels (image and sound; Crigler, 1994), many suggest that television has greater emotional power than other media sources (Graber, 1990; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Although these studies explain why television constitutes a more effective news medium compared to print and radio, these factors cannot explain why legal shows were even more effective than news programs. We

Table 1. Relationship Between Use of Media Types and Views of the Labor Law as Attention Changes Among Frequent Media Users (Multiple Probit Regression Model; Equation 2)

	Perceived effectiveness of the labor law						
	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	
Attention	0.136 (0.207)	0.242 (0.261)	-0.175 (0.431)	0.441 ^{***} (0.169)	0.456 ^{***} (0.161)	0.479 ^{***} (0.172)	0.460 ^{***} (0.175)
Frequently watching legal TV Shows	-0.335* (0.2)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Frequently Watching Legal TV Shows × Attention	0.867 ^{***} (0.321)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Frequently reading newspapers	—	-0.229 (0.205)	—	—	—	—	—
Frequently Reading Newspapers × Attention	—	0.420 (0.327)	—	—	—	—	—
Frequently watching TV	—	—	-0.441 (0.293)	—	—	—	—
Frequently Watching TV × Attention	—	—	0.788* (0.463)	—	—	—	—
Frequently listening to radio*	—	—	—	-0.415 (0.297)	—	—	—
Frequently Listening to Radio × Attention	—	—	—	0.554 (0.472)	—	—	—
Frequently listening to legal radio show	—	—	—	—	-0.809 (0.517)	—	—

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

	Perceived effectiveness of the labor law										
	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)	
Frequently Listening to Legal Radio Show × Attention	—	—	—	—	1.575* (0.884)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Frequently reading magazines*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.005 (0.279)	—	—
Frequently Reading Magazines × Attention	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.188 (0.441)	—	—
Frequently surfing news websites*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.064 (0.264)	—
Frequently Surfing News Websites × Attention	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.258 (0.411)	—
Constant	0.835** (0.327)	0.874*** (0.339)	1.100*** (0.412)	0.767** (0.32)	0.752** (0.319)	0.756** (0.32)	0.804** (0.324)	2.309	2.309	2.309	2.309
N	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309	2,309
Pseudo-R ²	.04	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03

Source: Survey of Labor Law Mobilization 2005.

Standard errors are in parentheses. The table displays probit coefficients before transformation into the cumulative normal distribution. Since the parallel regression assumption for ordinal probit regression was violated for these models, we are using multiple probit analysis (the dependent variable was transformed into a dummy variable). We also limit the analysis to frequent media users to improve our ability to capture effects of specific media types. For economy of presentation control variables (see Note 8) are not displayed in this table. For information about the statistical model and complete probit regression results (Tables A12 and A13) see the online appendix.

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

believe that this can be explained by the higher sensationalism contained in legal shows.

Despite the fact that Chinese workers, on average, tend to be highly susceptible to media reports about the labor law there are still a variety of factors that make especially those at high levels of attention more resistant. One factor we consider here is personal experience. Somewhat surprisingly, we do not find a negative relationship between a disputant's attention and his or her views about the effectiveness of the labor law. Although disputants consistently perceived the labor law as less effective, they nevertheless were still positively influenced by media messages (see Table A1 in the appendix).

How can we explain the high susceptibility of those who have experienced the system? Qualitative interviewing with labor disputants in Shanghai shows that there are two aspects of legal consciousness that are affected by actual engagement with the legal system. One aspect of legal consciousness is an individual's evaluation of the legal system (How well does the law work?); the other aspect is an individual's evaluation of his or her own efficacy and competency to use the law (How well can I work the law?). Although many of the respondents in Shanghai reported frustration and disappointment while waging their legal battles, they also overwhelmingly professed an inclination to use the law again for a similar problem. Over three quarters also reported that they now helped friends, relatives, or colleagues with their own workplace problems (Gallagher, 2006). We believe that the process of legal mobilization leads to more knowledge and awareness of the legal system, warts and all, which leads to an increase in personal efficacy and competency. If the Shanghai findings are applicable to other labor disputants, such as those in the survey, these respondents may see the legal system as effective because they have a greater capacity to understand it. This ability to understand and make sense of the legal system also extends to digestion of legal news and information as presented by the media. In other words, for people who have actually experienced a labor dispute, it may be difficult to separate out their evaluations of the legal system's effectiveness from changes in how they perceive their own abilities to make use of and make sense of law.

Overall, these findings are consistent with Geddes and Zaller's (1989) study of a public opinion formation under the military regime in Brazil in the early 1970s and a recent follow-up study on China (Kennedy, 2009). They found evidence for a nonlinear relationship, but no strong resistance among the highly informed or highly educated.⁹ Geddes and Zaller argued that two factors explained these results: first, how much of an effort the government made to indoctrinate citizens and, second, how much access to alternative values citizens possessed. In the case of Chinese legal mobilization, the government clearly makes a strong effort to educate citizens about the law and to

convince them that the law is an effective weapon of the weak. Since legal reform has effectively been implemented only recently and alternative accounts are not widely available because of the small number of disputants relative to the population, most citizens do not have access to firsthand accounts of the legal process that would conflict with the overly positive messages transmitted to citizens through the media (also see Michelson & Read, 2011). Similarly to Brazilians, Chinese therefore lack access to alternative values that would make them more resistant.¹⁰

In contrast to these existing studies, however, we believe that our results are partially dependent on the issue at hand. Up until the 1990s China did not have a labor law. In fact as the state started to implement legal reform only in the 1980s, most rights and responsibilities of citizens have only recently been framed in a legal or contractual sense. Thus, labor law and labor dispute resolution are not issues that the Chinese public held predispositions of. With respect to other issues Chinese citizens show more resistance to media influence, especially when the official line and citizens' preheld opinions conflict. For example, there is discrepancy between the Chinese public's sentiments toward the United States and the way in which the central government wishes the media to portray the country. The Propaganda Department aims to "massage" public views of the United States and to pull public opinion into a more positive direction (Stockmann, IN PRESS). Although we believe that our results are similar for other issues that are new to citizens, such as, for example, the establishment of a pension system, further research should be done across other issues areas to examine the effects of China's increasingly sophisticated propaganda on public opinion and regime legitimacy. With the huge media and social attention to the newest Chinese labor laws, including the Labor Contract Law and the Labor Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law of 2008 and a tremendous increase in the number of labor disputes since 2008 (Gallagher & Dong, IN PRESS), even Chinese public opinion toward labor issues may become less malleable over time as more people experience disputes firsthand.

Conclusion

In the literature on regime change and political liberalization, there has been a tendency to conflate commercial liberalization of the media with political liberalization. Indeed, for China in particular, with its increased global integration and visibility, there has been much hope that changes in management, financing, and ownership of the media combined with new technology would thwart the CCP's authoritarian ambitions. In this article we critically examined the role of the media in creating a legal consciousness among citizens and in

encouraging citizens to participate in the reformed legal system. We found that media content hews closely to the party line, despite the fact that marketization has changed the way news is delivered. Media coverage of labor disputes identifies with the aggrieved worker, champions the underdog, and celebrates his or her victories over abusive employers. Media coverage omits problems associated with implementation of the law and provides legitimating examples to other potential plaintiffs, thus encouraging others to pick up legal weapons. Increased litigious behavior and a new emphasis on “rights protection” are indications of changing state–society relations in China, but they are not necessarily indications of antiregime sentiment or instability. In fact, they may be a sign that the state’s attempts to achieve a more sustainable and stable authoritarianism are working.

Despite the fact that Chinese are aware of tight state control over the mass media, the overwhelming majority of urban citizens use the mass media to learn about social problems and legal rights. Those who use the mass media are susceptible to these messages, especially when they are moderately informed. The highly informed are somewhat more resistant to media messages but also not strongly resistant. The combination of a uniform flow of information, the novelty of the issue, and a lack of experience with the legal system creates this pattern of low resistance and high susceptibility. This pattern is consistent with previous work on media influence in other authoritarian regimes.

The labor law and the Chinese state’s emphasis on workplace rights, however, will stay new issues for only a short period of time, particularly given the new visibility of labor issues in China in the aftermath of the financial crisis and high-profile strikes in foreign-owned factories. Severe problems in the Chinese state’s ability to regulate the workplace and to enforce judicial decisions are likely to reduce confidence that rights on paper have significance to people’s lives.¹¹ As a result, people might become more resistant over time to media messages that do not accord with what they hear firsthand by friends, colleagues, and neighbors. The mass media clearly raise people’s expectations for a more effectively functioning legal system and thus create pressure on legal administrators to improve implementation. Yet if these demands are not met by changes in legal institutions, mass media mobilization is likely to become a less effective means to induce change over the long run.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the role of the media in political change is not necessarily one that fosters political liberalization. We show that the media, even a diversifying and dynamic press, can play a role in regime stabilization by portraying the legal system as overly positive. In fact, CCP resilience may be the result of the increased sensationalism and sophistication

of press coverage in China not in spite of it. Official state messages and policy goals are more effectively conveyed and absorbed when presented as news, “publicity,” and documentary rather than as the old style propaganda of a Leninist state. Commercial liberalization of the media not only may be compatible with authoritarian resilience but also may be a factor in that resilience.

Appendix

Survey of Labor Law Mobilization, 2005

The survey was conducted in four cities by Mary E. Gallagher at the University of Michigan in collaboration with the Chinese Institute for Labor Research and the Research Center on Contemporary China at Peking University between March 19 and May 25, 2005. The response rate was 73% in Chongqing ($N = 1,019$), 72% in Foshan ($N = 1,029$), 73% in Wuxi ($N = 1,029$), and 72% in Shenyang ($N = 1,035$). Sampling was done based on the global positioning system sampling technique, resulting in the inclusion of 15.1% of respondents with an agricultural residency permit. The polling involved lengthy face-to-face interviews with respondents between 18 and 65 who had working experience conducted by trained interviewers. The survey data were double-checked several times before release.

Question Wording and Coding of Variables. Survey nonresponses (“don’t know” and “no answer”) were deleted from the analysis. All independent variables were recoded running from 0 to 1 to allow for interpretation of the intercept. Concept validity and reliability of all variables were tested (see Stockmann, IN PRESS).

Perceived effectiveness of the labor law: “Have you heard about the labor law?” If yes: “In your opinion, is the implementation of the labor law very effective, somewhat effective, not so effective, or not at all effective in protecting workers’ rights?” Variable was coded from 1 to 4, whereby higher values indicate perceiving labor law as more effective. If not having heard about Labor Law, respondents were excluded from the analysis.

Media use: “How frequently do you read/watch/listen newspapers/magazines/television/radio broadcasting/internet to understand the news about society and life—Often, sometimes, or ever?”; “Do you frequently, sometimes, or never watch legal programs on TV/Radio?” Based on these questions a series of dummy variables were created for frequent media use of each of the seven media sources.

For Table A11 in the online appendix we created a variable that counted the number of media types a person reported to frequently use.

Attention/awareness/knowledge scale: “Old Chen works at a company, his labor contract ends in 5 years. After 3 and a half years the company is not performing very well and dismissed Old Chen without a severance pay. Do you think the company’s action was legal?” If respondent answered “illegal”: “Why was it not legal?”—“I have a feeling that it’s illegal, but cannot tell the specific reason,” “It’s illegal, because the company cannot determine the contract ahead of time,” “It’s illegal, because the company can determine the contract ahead of time, but has to pay severance pay (true).” “Imagine a work unit which often asks workers to work on holidays. The payment is the same as normal wages. What do you think about this remuneration?—The work unit’s behavior is legal, there is nobody to blame; the work unit’s behavior is legal, but unfair; the work unit’s behavior is illegal, but having some remuneration is better than having none; the work unit’s behavior is illegal, it should pay 150% of regular wages as overtime bonus (true).” “Based on your knowledge, how many hours per day are the maximum hours of an employee’s work as stipulated by the Labor Law?” (8 hours) “What is the standard for this city’s minimum wage?” (coded as correct if respondent’s answer ranged within 1.5 standard deviations below and 0.5 standard deviations above the actual minimum wage). “According to your understanding how long is the period in which a labor dispute can be brought forward?” (60 days). “During arbitration, if one side is dissatisfied with the results of the arbitration, can he go to court?” (yes).

Disputant: “Within the past 10 years have you ever encountered a labor-related problem about the following issues? A labor-relations problem is a problem whereby the employer and employee disagree about a labor contract, working hours, income, work-related injury, wages, social security, and traineeship.”

Propaganda at work unit: “Have you now or some time ago heard about the labor law through propaganda at the work unit?”

Worker: Dummy variable coded one based on answers to two questions “Which type of work have you done or are you currently doing at the work unit?” “Which type of work unit are you currently working at/ have you been working in the past?”

Education levels: Education levels were tapped by years of education and logged.

Age 39+: “Which year were you born?” Dummy variable coded as 1 if age was equal or above 39.

Table A1. Ordinal Probit Regression Results of Attention on Views of the Labor Law Among Media Users

	Perceived Effectiveness of the labor law	
	Coeff. (SE)	Coeff. (SE)
<i>Independent variables</i>		
Attention	0.523*** (0.121)	0.788 (0.617)
Attention squared	—	-0.228 (0.521)
<i>Control variables</i>		
Labor disputant	-0.348** (0.137)	-0.347** (0.137)
Propaganda at work unit	0.214*** (0.043)	0.214*** (0.043)
Worker	-0.068 (0.047)	-0.068 (0.047)
Age 39+	-0.025 (0.045)	-0.025 (0.045)
Education (logged)	-0.341 (0.249)	-0.352 (0.25)
Cut 1	-1.722*** (0.216)	-1.660*** (0.258)
Cut 2	-0.255 (0.214)	-0.194 (0.256)
Cut 3	1.397*** (0.215)	1.458*** (0.257)
N	2,800	2,800
Pseudo-R ²	.01	.01

Source: Survey of Labor Law Mobilization 2005.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

z < .05; *z < .01.

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Notes

1. In addition, the Chinese Communist Party continues to use other types of authority, including ideological and military, to enforce its position and policy goals.
2. Since the State Council passed the Regulations for the Opening of Government News (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Zhengfu Xinxi Gongkai Tiaoli*) in 2007 some labor strikes have moved from a highly sensitive topic that cannot be reported about toward a sensitive topic that can be reported about with restrictions, as evident in media reporting on the Chongqing taxi strike in 2008 (Stockmann, IN PRESS).
3. Zhu Rongji was the premier during the high tide of layoffs and restructuring of state-owned enterprises in the late 1990s.
4. For detailed results see Tables A1 to A7 in the online appendix. Since we are employing a self-reported measure for media exposure, these percentages are likely inflated. However, similar patterns of media use can be found when employing different measures (Stockmann, IN PRESS). Thus, the true percentages of media exposure may be lower, but the relationship between consumption of different sources is likely to remain consistent.
5. It is possible that workplaces disseminate the law in a way that accords with their own interests. As a consequence, employees may be looking for other sources of information that might convey a more proworker interpretation of the law. When controlling for hearing about labor law at the work unit, however, we found a positive relationship between propaganda at the work unit and perceptions of the labor law (see Table A1 in the appendix and Tables A10, A11, A12, and A13 in the online appendix). Thus, propaganda at the work unit does not seem to transmit information that conflicts with media content.
6. Labor rights represents an issue that people care about. Most urban citizens in Wuxi, Foshan, Chongqing, and Shenyang paid about medium levels of attention to those issues. For details see Table A8 in the online appendix.
7. Price and Zaller (1993) provided evidence that political knowledge constitutes a valid indicator for news reception. For concept validity tests of the knowledge scale see Note 11 in Stockmann (2009, p. 154).
8. We chose the control variables in the analysis on the basis of the literature on legal mobilization in China and public opinion, more generally (see, e.g., Gallagher, 2006; Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Sides & Karch, 2008). These variables include

personal experience with labor disputes; access to alternative channels of information, such as in school or at the work unit; being a member of a social group targeted by legal mobilization, such as being a worker, unemployed, or retired or not having an urban residence permit; socialization through employment before the labor contract system (age older than 39); and other social characteristics such as income, gender, and city of residence. For detailed statistical results with control variables, further information about statistical models, and robustness tests see the online appendix.

9. Geddes and Zaller (1986) measure media influence by means of levels of knowledge, but Kennedy (2009) measures it by means of education levels, which may be a valid indicator for a person's ability to store information but not necessarily to encode information. Among Chinese respondents, education is uncorrelated with valid measures for attentiveness (Stockmann, 2009) and knowledge. According to Survey of Labor Law Mobilization data, the correlation between years of education and knowledge levels was .17. These results are consistent with those of studies in American politics (see, e.g., Converse, 1964).
10. Table A11 in the online appendix illustrates that attention is more strongly related to positive views of the labor law as a person consumes additional media types (television, radio, newspapers, magazine, online news websites). Homogeneity in the news facilitates media influence on attitudes.
11. Table A9 in the online appendix shows that disputants' satisfaction with the outcome of the labor dispute is dependent on the implementation of the verdict.

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