How Do Land Takings Affect Political Trust in Rural China?

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Abstract:

While China's ruling Communist Party has benefited from a reservoir of political trust engendered by more than three decades of rapid economic growth, it is confronted with rising social tensions and the prospect of instability. The number of mass incidents, a key measure of instability, has risen enormously, and a major source of such incidents stems from local governments taking land from farmers, often at below-market prices. In this article, we draw on data from two surveys to assess the political trust implications of land takings. We find that, as expected, land takings are associated with a decline in political trust. However, the decline affects trust in local authorities only and leaves the central government largely unscathed. Nonetheless, the gap between villagers' trust in central and local authorities is not unalloyed good news for the regime and has major implications for policy implementation and governance.

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A country's land ownership is generally the outcome of centuries of political battles and negotiations and often has far-reaching political consequences. Moore famously argued that England's 'peaceful' transition to democracy during the 19th century was made possible by preceding centuries of violent, Parliament-supported land enclosures, which empowered the bourgeoisie at the expense of both the royalty and the peasantry (Moore 1966, pp. 3-39). Tocqueville famously claimed that 'democracy in America' was built on a foundation of relative land equality among freeholders. In recent years, scholars have applied Tocqueville's insight more broadly, showing that countries with low levels of land inequality are more likely to make the transition away from authoritarianism (Boix, 2003; Ziblatt, 2008; Ansell and Samuels, 2010). Continuing disputes over eminent domain in the United States remind us that state-society negotiations over rights to land persist in democratic regimes (Somin, 2014).

Perhaps nowhere in today's world is the political salience of land more evident than in contemporary China. While playing a central role in China's economic transformation (Hsing, 2010), land requisition has become one of the country's most contentious issues. Of the 187,000 'mass incidents' that occurred in China in 2010, more than 65 per cent were due to farmers' anger at losing their land on what they perceived to be unfair terms (Landesa, 2012). The frequency of land-related protests led one veteran observer to claim that 'the Beijing leadership is in danger of losing control of vast tracts of the countryside' (Lam, 2005).

Will land-related unrest loosen the regime's grip on the countryside? In this article, we illuminate the implications of prevailing land policy by examining the effect of land requisition on villagers' trust in political authorities. High levels of political trust

have been shown to bolster regime legitimacy in both democratic and non-democratic contexts (Miller and Listhaug, 1990; Johnson, 2005; Jamal, 2007). Survey research indicates that, since at least the early 1990s, the ruling Chinese Communist Party has benefited from a deep reservoir of popular support. Might villagers' trust in their leaders be shaken by the jarring experience of losing their land? We find that the answer to this question depends on which level of government one is talking about. In our analysis of data from two distinct surveys, we observe that land requisition is associated with a decline in villagers' trust in local authorities only; trust in the central government appears unaffected. This finding is not unexpected, given existing research, but its political consequences may nonetheless be significant. Insofar as unfair land takings widen the gap between central and local government trust, their persistence will further complicate rural governance in China.

LAND TAKINGS AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN RURAL CHINA

The use and distribution of agricultural land have inflamed rural passions since the dawn of the People's Republic of China. The dust of the Chinese Civil War had barely settled when the victorious Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on land reform nationwide, confiscating the property of landlords and well-to-do peasants and redistributing it to the rural poor. Despite the bloodshed that accompanied the land reform program, most villagers were grateful to receive their own farmland. They were less enthusiastic about the process of collectivization, which began in 1953; numerous sources report villagers killing their own livestock rather than relinquishing them to agricultural collectives. Post-Mao decollectivization, in turn, led to a rapid increase in villagers'

incomes, but also eroded the authority of grassroots leaders in many parts of the country and contributed to a serious governance malaise in agricultural areas (Yang, 1996; Bernstein and Lü 2003).

Unlike in other East Asian economies (Japan, Korea, Taiwan) with private land ownership where the landowners shared in the fruits of rising land values that resulted from rapid development, the Chinese state has used its monopoly over land to acquire rural land cheaply for rapid development. As Chinese economic growth accelerated in the 2000s, land requisitioning has expanded in scale and land-related conflict has intensified.

Local officials are eager to requisition land from rural communities. First, land is needed for new factory sites, commercial developments, infrastructure (such as roads), and residential buildings. The steady and rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization have thus required growing amount of land. Second and equally importantly, local officials have prized land development as a crucial source of revenue in itself. The roots of today's land conflicts lie in a package of tax and fiscal reforms enacted in 1994, which strengthened the fiscal capacity of the central government at the expense of local governments (World Bank, 2002). Subsequent reforms to alleviate 'peasant burdens,' culminating in the elimination of the centuries-old agricultural tax, further weakened the fiscal position of county and township authorities.

Struggling to fill their coffers like never before, local officials have increasingly relied on revenue generated from requisitioning rural land for commercial and industrial development (Tao et al., 2010). The Land Administration Law empowers local authorities to compensate farmers for only the agricultural value of their land, rather than the often much higher market value. A 2011 survey of nearly 1,800 villages found that

villagers who had lost land reported receiving an average of 18,739 *yuan* per *mu*—a paltry 2.4 per cent of the 778,000 *yuan* per *mu* received by local governments. (Landesa, 2012). By undercompensating dispossessed villagers and auctioning off land acquired to real estate developers, local authorities have found land requisitioning a major source of revenue. By the late 2000s, the amount of land lease fees, which was then not included in government budgets, was well known to have reached as much as 50 per cent of local government revenue (Amnesty International, 2012).

The compensation discrepancy has not gone unnoticed by rural residents. Land takings replaced 'peasant burdens' as the leading cause of instability in the early 2000s (Bernstein, 2006). By most accounts, the number of 'mass incidents' has continued to increase, from 87,000 in 2005, to somewhere between 180,000 and 210,000 in 2010; a majority of these incidents have been attributable to villagers' frustration over losing their land (Göbel and Ong, 2012). Clearly, the prevailing system of land takings has angered rural residents—but has it affected their trust in their political leaders? This question is particularly salient in rural China, where the problem of land takings has attracted international attention. However, as a recent series of articles elucidates, government-sponsored land requisition is an issue throughout the developing world, from Ethiopia to Indonesia.[1] As in China, 'land grabbing' in these countries is the source of considerable state-society tensions (Ito, Rachman and Savitri, 2014). That the regimes in question often hold a tenuous grip on political authority underlines the need to better understand the social implications of large-scale land requisition.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL TRUST

A rich literature attests to the importance of political trust, or 'the ratio of people's evaluation of government performance relative to their normative expectations of how government ought to perform' (Hetherington and Husser, 2012). Scholars have devised a variety of measures for political trust. Survey respondents, for example, can express different levels of confidence in their incumbent leaders, political institutions, and political regimes (Easton, 1975; Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990). Citizens who trust their leaders' commitment to govern in their interest may not trust their competence for doing so, and these attitudes may further diverge depending on the policy domains at stake (Levi and Stoker, 2000).

Regardless of how they measure the concept, most scholars agree that high levels of political trust redound to the benefit of incumbent authorities. First, considerable evidence demonstrates that political trust promotes compliance and eases policy implementation. Trusting citizens display a greater willingness to consent to government rules and regulations, and are more likely to pay taxes (Tyler 1990; Levi 1997; Scholz and Lubell, 1998). In contrast, declining trust in government appears to erode support for a wide variety of government actions, especially redistributive policies requiring personal sacrifice (Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn, 2000; Hetherington and Globetti, 2002; Hetherington, 2005).

Second, deteriorating political trust is associated with the likelihood of aggressive forms of political participation. Following the protest wave of the 1960s, Gamson and others found that declining political trust and rising political efficacy created the ideal conditions for participation in demonstrations, riots and other forms of non-traditional political participation.[2] Recent studies have tended to confirm the link between low

political trust and anti-regime behavior, albeit with more nuances (Kaase, 1999; Hooghe and Marien, 2013).

Third, low levels of political trust do not appear to undermine the legitimacy of robust democracies, such as the United States (Lipset and Schneider, 1983; Citrin and Green, 1986), but in non-democratic contexts, declining trust, often associated with the rise of critical citizens, has been shown to increase support for democratization (Johnson, 2005; Jamal, 2007). In China, Li has found that less-trusting rural residents are more likely to support direct elections for central leaders—in effect, the overturning of the existing political regime (Li, 2004; Li, 2010). Declining political trust may also have broader social implications. Steinhardt (2012) and Tao et al. (2013) observe that, in China, political trust undergirds generalized social trust. Given the myriad benefits that have been ascribed to social trust (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1993; Putnam, 2000), deteriorating political trust might have negative implications beyond the political sphere.

POLITICAL TRUST IN CHINA

Chinese survey respondents tend to express a high degree of confidence in their political leaders, particularly those at the center. Tianjian Shi's 1993 survey, conducted not long after the Tiananmen Crisis of 1989, surprised many with the finding that 74 percent of respondents agreed that they could 'generally trust decisions made by the central government' (Shi 2001, p. 406). Public confidence in the national leadership has only grown in subsequent years. The China Survey of 2008, conducted when much of the rest of the world was mired in the Great Recession, revealed that 86 per cent of respondents in China trusted their central leaders (Li 2013, p. 4). While there have been

concerns about the reliability of attitude surveys in China (Newton 2008, p. 208), there is little evidence that Chinese respondents systematically distort their survey responses out of political fear (Shi, 2001).

Scholars attribute the high levels of political trust in China to a variety of factors, including 'performance legitimacy' arising from China's phenomenal economic growth (Chen, Zhong and Hillard, 1997; Wang, 2005; Yang and Tang, 2010), an emphasis in traditional Chinese culture on deference to authority and avoidance of confrontation (Shi, 2001), and the effect of the state-controlled media (Kennedy, 2009). Yet there exist potential cracks in the regime's foundation of political trust. Relying on data from the mid-1990s, Chen and Shi (2001) found that increasing media exposure had a negative effect on trust in central authorities, in contrast to Kennedy's recent study. Research also link increasing inequality and perceptions of corruption to declining political trust in other countries.[3] Both issues are highly salient in China. Whereas China has developed rapidly and lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty, it has also become one of the most unequal societies in the world (Zheng, 2012). Even though China's corruption perceptions index according to Transparency International has improved in absolute terms since the mid-1990s, it remains in the ranks of underachievers; half of Chinese respondents in a recent survey identified corruption as a 'very big problem' (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 2012).

Why has confidence in the central government remained high despite mounting social tensions? One reason is that local officials appear to have absorbed the brunt of Chinese citizens' political frustration. Existing studies reveal that most Chinese citizens, including rural residents, trust central leaders more than the local authorities. Insofar as

villagers observe and experience local cadre predation, they tend to blame local cadres, thinking that higher levels are either unaware of or unable to do much about their subordinates' disloyalty (O'Brien, 2002; Li, 2004). Scholars have offered various explanations for the existence of this 'trust gap'. Li contends that rural residents' 'trust in higher level authorities, particularly the Center, seems to derive in part from the Confucian tradition of ascribing moral virtue to the emperor and blaming wicked and shrewd court officials for things that go wrong' (Li 2004, p. 234). The Chinese media can report fairly freely on the misdeeds of local officials but must avoid criticizing sitting national leaders, thereby contributing to the trust gap (Li, 2004; Brady, 2007; Kennedy, 2009). Moreover, a recent study by Lü (2014) finds that awareness of positive government policies increases popular trust in central officials, but not in their local subordinates. In general, therefore, and in contrast with American and Japanese citizens, Chinese tend to view central leaders as more trustworthy than the local elites who act as the Center's agents.[4]

The central question motivating this paper is whether this pattern holds after the jarring experience of losing one's land. Do dispossessed villagers lose trust in the central government that enabled the prevailing system of land takings? Or do they merely blame their local officials? On one hand, comparative evidence from Latin America suggests that negative experiences with local officials have the potential to erode citizens' trust in the central government (Seligson, 2002). On the other hand, anecdotal evidence from the widely publicized case of Wukan indicates that the 'trust gap' persists following land requisition; central leaders appear to escape blame for the predatory land takings of their subordinates.

Over an eighteen-year period starting in 1993, the Guangdong village of Wukan (population: 13,000) lost more than 60 per cent of its cultivatable land to waves of land sales engineered by local leaders (Wines, 2011). The community's simmering frustration boiled over in late 2011, but protesting villagers were careful to emphasize that their complaint was directed at their local leaders, not the Center, as they notified visiting journalists: 'We are not a revolt. We support the Communist Party. We love our country' (Wong, 2011). Granted, in a country where outright criticism of the Communist Party authority is anathema, protest leaders may make such tactical declarations to protect themselves from the wrath of the Party-state. But declarations of this nature also allow protestors to speak the language of 'rightful resistance' (O'Brien and Li, 2006). Given the survey results cited above, it seems reasonable to take these claims of central government fealty at face value. We predict that dispossessed villagers tend to maintain their trust in the central government, while losing faith in their local leaders. Two hypotheses follow:

Hypothesis 1: All else being equal, rural residents who have experienced land requisition should report lower levels of trust in local officials.

Hypothesis 2: Land requisitioning should have little or no significant effect on rural residents' trust in the central government.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To test these hypotheses, we analyze data from two surveys conducted in 2008 and 2009. The first survey sample includes 1,195 villagers living in the suburban

peripheries of twelve Chinese cities (Figure 1). As we explain in more detail below, we enhance the robustness of our findings by testing the same hypotheses with data from a representative survey of 2,210 villagers carried out in 2008.

[Figure 1 about here.]

The core of our analysis is the 2009 twelve-city suburban survey, as it is in these areas where land-related tensions are often most acute. The sample respondents were selected via stratified sampling within China's four major urbanizing areas: the Yangtze River Delta (Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang); the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province; the Chengdu-Chongqing region (Sichuan and Chongqing); and the Bohai Bay area (Hebei, Shandong and Tianjin). In each area one 'megalopolis,' one 'large city,' and one 'small- or medium-sized city' were randomly selected, except for Chengdu-Chongqing, where two megalopolises were chosen.[5] For each megalopolis, a single suburban district was selected for the survey. The five megalopolis districts include Jiangbei district in Ningbo, Zhejiang; Licheng district in Jinan, Shandong; Baiyun district in Guangzhou, Guangdong; Wenjiang district in Chengdu, Sichuan; and Shapingba district in Chongqing. The remaining cities are Yueqing, Zhejiang; Jiangyin, Jiangsu; Yanjiao, Hebei; Weifang, Shandong; Zhongshan and Dongguan (Chashan town) in Guangdong; and Nanchong, Sichuan. Within each city or district, 5 villages or communities were randomly selected, for a total of 60 villages. In each village or community, we sought to interview 20 randomly selected households. The research team conducted face-to-face interviews with at least one adult member in each household. Our data include a total of 1,195 observations.

Dependent Variable: Measuring Political Trust

We operationalize the measurement of political trust as citizens' belief that officials are committed to ruling or governing in their interests. Specifically, survey respondents were asked whether local leaders and central authorities represent and protect the rightful interests of farmers. *1. Do local (county/township) Party/government leaders truly represent and protect the lawful rights and interests of farmers? 2. Do the Party Central Committee and the State Council truly represent and protect the lawful rights and interests of farmers?* We coded responses on a five-level scale: strongly agree (2), slightly agree (1), neutral (0), slightly disagree (-1), and strongly disagree (-2).[6]

Admittedly, this operationalization does not cover the full range of political trust's 'objects, dimensions, and domains' (Li 2013, p. 26). It is a measurement more of villagers' trust in government leaders than of their trust in governing institutions.[7] Our survey questions may also measure leaders' commitment to acting in the interests of villagers more than their competence to do so (Levi and Stoker 2000, p. 476). In the Chinese case, though, the commitment dimension of trust may have the most profound implications for regime legitimacy. High levels of central government trust in China generally reflect survey respondents' confidence in the Center's intentions; interviewees tend to report less confidence in their central leaders' ability to put these intentions into practice (O'Brien, 2002; Li, 2004; Li, 2013). Thus, political trust in China is founded on faith in the Center's commitment to the common good. It is this bedrock of political trust that we evaluate in our empirical analysis. Our doing so, moreover, aligns with recent studies by Li and Kennedy, who both measure political trust as survey respondents' belief that officials govern with their interests in mind.[8]

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 1 presents the average level of local and central government trust for each city, as well as the difference between the two. Residents in each sample city report higher levels of trust in the central government than in local officials. This finding is consistent with other surveys conducted in China (Shi, 2001; Li, 2004; Michelson, 2012). Inter-city variation, though, is considerable. On average, villagers in Zhejiang, one of China's most prosperous coastal provinces, report negative trust in their local officials. For example, in Wenzhou, the city with the lowest trust score in the sample, the mean response to the trust-in-local-government question is -0.73, or somewhere between 'neutral' and 'slightly disagree.' Wenzhou residents are thus skeptical that local leaders are committed to ruling in their interests. Their average level of trust in the central government (1.00) is considerably higher—if lower than in other cities. Those living in the three Guangdong municipalities also report low levels of trust, but the difference between central and local trust is less significant. Chengdu (Sichuan) and Weifang (Shandong) rank particularly high in terms of both central and local political trust.

Independent Variable: Land Requisition

Every village in our suburban sample had experienced some land requisition during the years 2000-2008, but not every household lost land. We hypothesize that this inter-household variation in land takings explains some of the variation in trust in local authorities. Table 2 displays the percentage of dispossessed villagers in each sample city. Overall, 63 per cent of survey respondents report having lost land to requisition. Land requisition rates range from a low of 24 per cent in Zhongshan, Guangdong to a high of

96 per cent in the sample unit in Chengdu, Sichuan. Dispossessed villagers lost not only farmland, but also orchards, forest and residential land.[9]

[Table 2 about here.]

Control Variables

In studies of Western democracies, various demographic characteristics have been found to influence levels of political trust. Better-educated, higher-income individuals tend to report greater trust in their leaders (Agger, Goldstein and Pearl, 1961; Lineberry and Sharkansky, 1971). The elderly, on average, appear less trusting than the young (Agger, Goldstein and Pearl, 1961). We control for age, gender (1=male, 0=female), education (in years), marital status (1=married, 0=unmarried), per capita income (logged), and household per capita land area before requisition (in *mu*).

Personal experiences with government officials and policies have the potential to significantly affect an individual's trust in political leaders. We control for ties to the regime that might be expected to increase political trust: Communist Party membership, People's Liberation Army service, and experience as a village leader. We also control for various family connections to either the regime or local government leaders. We ask whether respondents have family members who have: served as cadres at the township or county level; been honored by the government; or participated in various wars including 'the War to Resist Japanese Aggression,' the Chinese Revolution and the Korean War.

Other experiences are likely to reduce trust in political authorities. Millions of Chinese families suffered persecution during various Mao-era political campaigns. Today's migrant workers must contend with institutionalized forms of discrimination and

often face harassment from government or quasi-government employees (Solinger, 1999). To control for these factors, we include variables indicating experiences with political persecution and whether respondents have family members who have worked as migrant laborers. Finally, we include village and province dummy variables to remove local fixed effects. Descriptive statistics for our variables are listed in Table 4.

A Complementary Rural Dataset: The Six-Province Rural Survey

The aforementioned survey draws observations from suburban villages to highlight the effect of land takings on political trust. We focus on suburban communities because it is here, in the path of China's inexorable urbanization, where contention over land requisition has been most intense. In villages where requisition has occurred, we predict that those villagers who have lost land to requisition will tend to be less trusting than their neighbors who have avoided dispossession. Land finance has not been limited to the urban periphery, however, so to mitigate the problem of generalizability, we run an additional test of our hypotheses by analyzing data from a survey of rural residents conducted in summer 2008 (hereafter the six-province rural survey). The survey sample, based on stratified sampling, includes 117 sample villages in six provinces (Jilin, Hebei, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Jiangsu, and Fujian).[10] In each village, interviews were conducted with a random sample of twenty households. The final sample yielded 2,210 individual respondents.

We use the same variables in analyzing both datasets—with one exception. As mentioned earlier, other scholars have observed differing impacts of media exposure on trust in central authorities (Chen and Shi, 2001; Kennedy, 2009). In the six-province

rural survey, respondents were asked to name their favorite television program. One of the options was central television (CCTV) primetime news. We include a dummy variable based on this survey item (1=preference for CCTV news; 0=preference for other television programs) to control for the effect of Party-state propaganda on the trust levels of rural residents.

As shown in Table 3, the percentage of respondents who reported having experienced land requisition in the six-province rural survey is significantly lower, at 12 per cent, compared with 63.7 per cent in the twelve-city suburban survey. Descriptive statistics for the six-province survey can also be found in Table 4.

[Table 3 about here.]

[Table 4 about here.]

RESULTS

Because the dependent variable, political trust, is an ordered, categorical variable, we estimate two ordered logit regressions for trust in local and central authorities. Table 5 presents the regression results for both datasets—the twelve-city suburban dataset and the six-province rural dataset.

[Table 5 about here.]

Our results provide strong evidence in support of our main hypotheses. First, data from both surveys show a statistically significant and negative relationship between land requisition and trust in local officials. Villagers who reported having had their land taken through requisition show reduced trust in township and county authorities. Second, in neither dataset do we observe a statistically significant relationship between land

requisition and trust in central authorities. Despite the protests they have caused, the disputes surrounding land takings are local affairs. They cause dispossessed villagers to lose trust in local officials but have little influence on trust in central authorities.

Among the demographic characteristics, gender and age affect trust in authorities at both local and central levels. Males in both sets of regressions are less trusting of local officials than females. Yet in the suburban survey they exhibit higher levels of trust in central authorities than females. This finding corroborates other studies showing that men appear to be more distrustful than women of township and country governments (Li, 2004). It likely reflects the household division of labor in which men play a greater role in interacting with local authorities, thus becoming more discontented (Lai, 2012). Older villagers report higher levels of trust in both local and central authorities than their younger counterparts (except in the rural survey where age has no effect on local trust). This may be due to a variety of factors. Younger Chinese tend have access to a wider variety of information, and may thus be less susceptible to government propaganda. Meanwhile, older rural residents may compare present conditions to the past, especially the dismal everyday life of the Mao era, and may be more satisfied with recent policies designed to improve their welfare.[11]

Ties to the regime matter. Village leaders in the suburban survey express greater trust in central authorities. The suburban survey data also suggest that village cadres are more trusting of local authorities. This finding lends support to the argument that village leaders often ally with external interests, including local government leaders, to profit from land requisition and subsequent development (Warner and Yang, 2012). Veterans report higher trust in central authorities while Party members seemed inclined to trust

local authorities. But this inference is valid for the twelve-city survey only and is not robust for the six-province rural survey. Having a family member honored by the government boosts trust in local authorities, according to the six-province survey. Villagers with war veteran relatives are less likely to trust local officials, but are *more* likely to trust central authorities.

Education has an inconsistent effect on political trust. More educated residents show higher levels of trust in central authorities in the suburban survey but lower trust in local authoritiesin the rural survey. Marital status, household income per capita, and household land per capita have no significant effect on trust in either of the datasets.

Finally, in the six-province rural survey, we find that exposure to Party-state propaganda has a positive effect on trust in both central and local authorities. Respondents who preferred Central Television (CCTV) news reported significantly higher levels of trust in central and local authorities. The positive effect of propaganda on central trust is in line with previous findings by Kennedy (2009). More surprising is our finding that media exposure appears to improve evaluations of local officials as well, despite the fact that the Focus Point Program immediately following CCTV Prime News often criticizes local government malfeasance.[12]

THE IMPLICATIONS OF DECLINING LOCAL GOVERNMENT TRUST

The rising number of protests has worried China's leaders, concerned as they are about stability and regime legitimacy, and contributed to the building of a costly stability maintenance regime (Chen 2013). Our finding that the experience of land requisition erodes trust in local, but not central, authorities may therefore appear to be good news for

the central government. Continuing land requisition does not presage an immediate decline in villagers' trust in the Center. National leaders have 'room to maneuver' in addressing the discontent arising from China's ceaseless development drive (Li 2004, 230).

Yet our findings also indicate that land takings have the potential to further erode local government trust. As we noted earlier, higher levels of political trust make it easier for officials to do their jobs; the evaporation of this trust complicates policy implementation. Since the implementation of key policy tasks often falls to local officials, reform attempts might stall in the face of declining local government support. More ominously, comparative research shows that distrustful citizens are more likely to engage in aggressive forms of political participation, such as riots and protests.

Paradoxically, confidence in central authorities may help propel the kind of instability the Center is eager to avoid. Villagers who trust central authorities more than local officials appear more inclined to engage in acts of 'rightful resistance' against local authorities. Li finds that village survey respondents who report a larger difference between their trust in central and local leaders are more likely to have participated in 'contentious acts,' particularly filing collective complaints (Li, 2004). Our results imply that the experience of land requisition widens the already-considerable gap between local and central government trust. Land requisition may therefore not only anger villagers directly, but also incline them towards more "rightful resistance" indirectly.

Descriptive analysis of our survey data lends support to the idea that a widening trust gap might engender more contentious activities. Our twelve-city suburban survey reveals that villages in which respondents reported higher average differences between

local and central government trust were more likely to have experienced instances of instability related to local land takings. The survey asked respondents whether, in the past ten years, villagers had participated in 1) collective petitions, and/or 2) other "collective incidents," e.g., obstructing traffic, blocking construction, arguing with local government representatives, etc. The survey also asked how many villagers had participated in these instances of unrest. For both collective petitions and collective incidents, we coded as 1 those villages where at least one resident had reported an incident over five participants related to land takings. Table 6 reveals that instances of land-related unrest in these villages (all of which had experienced land requisition) were quite common. Sixty-one per cent (38 villages) had experienced collective petitions in the years 2000 to 2009, while 37 per cent (23 villages) had experienced collective incidents.

[Table 6 about here.]

Table 6 also shows that villages that experienced land-related disturbances are characterized by wider average distances between central and local government trust. In villages where residents participated in collective petitioning, central government trust was higher, and local government trust was lower, than in villages that did not see collective petitioning. The average distance between central and local government trust was 1.004 for petitioning villages, compared to 0.797 for non-petitioning villages. The difference in trust gaps was even starker in regards to the presence or absence of collective incidents. Places where villagers engaged in more transgressive acts of resistance were characterized by an average trust gap of 1.122; villages without collective incidents reported a significantly lower trust gap of 0.807.[13]

We recognize that these results do not firmly establish a causal relationship

between differences in political trust and 'rightful resistance'.[14] Nonetheless, combined with earlier findings, we believe these results are highly suggestive. Villagers with larger trust gaps are more likely to engage in collective incidents, underlining another challenge to governance in villages experiencing land requisition. The connections we highlight between political trust and instability thus point to the complexities of governance in China.

CONCLUSION

As it has in other countries, land development has undoubtedly contributed to China's economic transformation. The rural enterprises that set China on the path to becoming 'factory of the world', the rows of luxury apartments that ring its burgeoning metropolises, the glittering skylines of Pudong and Shenzhen—all were made possible, in part, by the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural purposes. China's transformation has been far from painless, though, even as it has lifted millions out of poverty. In their pursuit of economic development and scarce revenue, local governments have dispossessed millions of rural residents, often at lowball prices. The rising wave of unrest over the past two decades attests to the wrenching nature of China's developmental experience. So does the increasing number of citizens willing to commit suicide in protest; at least 39 farmers over the past five years have chosen 'death over eviction' (Johnson, 2013).

As noted by Moore (1966) and others, land-related conflict can have profound political consequences. Our article illuminates the political implications of China's vast and conflict-ridden land requisition. We find that while the experience of dispossession

erodes villagers' trust in township and county authorities, it does not negatively affect their trust in the central authorities, as embodied in the State Council and the Party Central Committee.

Previous studies have pointed to the existence of a 'trust gap' between local and central authorities (O'Brien, 2002; Li, 2004; Li, 2013). Yet our findings based on data from two surveys are still noteworthy. Land takings have been the leading source of 'mass incidents' in China and thus the most prominent cause of social instability as well as inequality. Our finding that land requisitioning does not diminish popular trust in the central authorities in China thus sheds important light on the relationship between economic development and political legitimacy in authoritarian China, and on the nature of China's governance.

Our analysis also suggests that persistent central government trust is not an unalloyed blessing for the regime. Inasmuch as land requisition widens the gap between villagers trust in local and central authorities, it has the potential to further complicate the contentious process of rural governance, especially accompanied by rising expectations among the Chinese public (Chen and Yang, 2012). In recognition of this, China's national leadership in 2013 began to consider amending the Land Administration Law (LAL) and associated regulations on compensation for land requisition to make the amount of compensation for land being requisitioned fairer. If enacted, the amended LAL will likely stand both as landmark in the evolution of China's developmental experience and a symbol of change in China's mode of governance.

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Figure 1: Study Sites for 12-City Suburban Survey

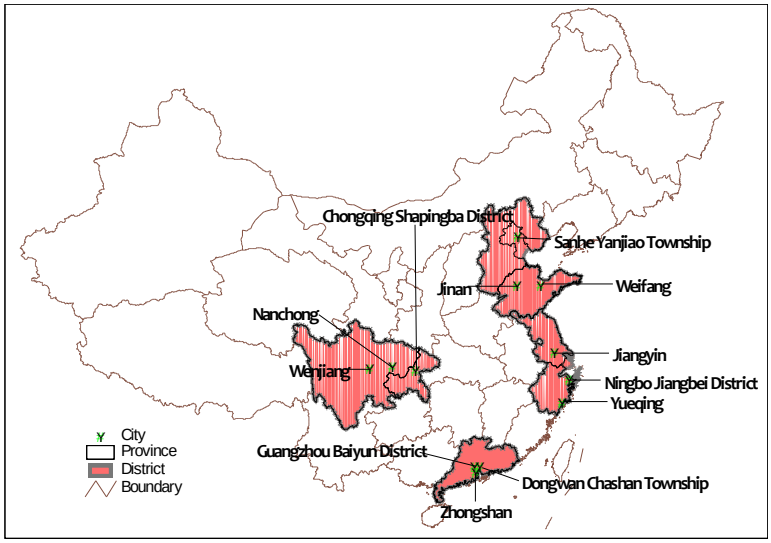

Table 1: Measurements of Political Trust in 12-City Suburban Survey

Province	City	Local trust	Central trust	Distance
Chongqing	Chongqing	0.28	1.48	1.19
Guangdong	Dongguan	0.42	1.07	0.64
Guangdong	Guangzhou	0.42	1.10	0.67
Guangdong	Zhongshan	0.55	1.28	0.72
Hebei	Langfang	0.32	1.31	0.98
Jiangsu	Wuxi	0.70	1.34	0.63
Shandong	Jinan	0.45	1.53	1.08
Shandong	Weifang	1.15	1.70	0.55
Sichuan	Chengdu	1.01	1.78	0.77
Sichuan	Nanchong	0.81	1.61	0.80
Zhejiang	Ningbo	-0.09	1.29	1.38
Zhejiang	Wenzhou	-0.73	1.00	1.73
Average		0.44	1.37	0.93

Data source: authors' 2009 survey. Trust in this table is calculated as the average level within city.

Table 2: Proportion of Dispossessed Farmers in Each City

Province	City	Total Sample	Dispossessed Farmers	
			Number	Percent
Chongqing	Chongqing	103	56	54.4%
Guangdong	Dongguan	90	32	35.6%
Guangdong	Guangzhou	104	29	27.9%
Guangdong	Zhongshan	83	20	24.1%
Hebei	Langfang	108	53	49.1%
Jiangsu	Wuxi	101	79	78.2%
Shandong	Jinan	102	88	86.3%
Shandong	Weifang	109	59	54.1%
Sichuan	Chengdu	109	105	96.3%
Sichuan	Nanchong	105	92	87.6%
Zhejiang	Ningbo	102	90	88.2%
Zhejiang	Wenzhou	79	58	73.4%
Overall		1195	761	63.7%

Data source: authors' 2009 survey.

Table 3: Proportion of Dispossessed Farmers in 6-Province Rural Survey

Province	Sample Size	# of Dispossessed Farmers	Percent
Fujian	378	56	14.8%
Hebei	372	11	3.0%
Jiangsu	355	29	8.2%
Jilin	373	42	11.3%
Shaanxi	382	73	19.1%
Sichuan	350	56	16.0%
Overall	2210	267	12.1%

Data source: authors' 2008 survey.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

	12-city Suburban Survey					6-province Rural Survey				
	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Obs.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
Land requisition (1=yes)	1195	0.637	0.481	0	1	2210	0.121	0.326	0	1
Gender (1=male)	1195	0.700	0.460	0	1	2210	0.608	0.488	0	1
Age	1195	49.032	11.603	17	86	2210	49.69	11.412	19	87
Education (years)	1195	7.743	3.270	0	19	2210	6.137	3.326	0	16
Marital Status (1=married)	1195	0.941	0.236	0	1	2210	0.935	0.246	0	1
Village Cadre (1=yes)	1195	0.059	0.236	0	1	2210	0.029	0.166	0	1
CCP Member (1=yes)	1195	0.230	0.421	0	1	2210	0.076	0.264	0	1
Veteran (1=yes)	1195	0.094	0.292	0	1	2210	0.045	0.207	0	1
Household income per capita (logged)	1195	9.216	1.259	0	12.4	2210	8.334	0.993	2.6	11.9
Household land area per capita (unit: mu)	1195	0.531	0.882	0	15.6	2210	1.541	1.921	0	33.3
Relatives as local officials (1=yes)	1195	0.125	0.331	0	1	2210	0.162	0.369	0	1
Family member with migration experience (1=yes)	1195	0.433	0.496	0	1	2210	0.612	0.487	0	1
Family members politically persecuted (1=yes)	1195	0.125	0.331	0	1	2210	0.106	0.308	0	1
Family members honored by government (1=yes)	1195	0.294	0.456	0	1	2210	0.208	0.406	0	1
Family member war experience (1=yes)	1195	0.191	0.393	0	1	2210	0.259	0.438	0	1

Data sources: authors' 2008 and 2009 surveys.

Table 5: Determinants of Political Trust: Ordered Logit Results

Data sources	12-city Suburban Survey		6-province Rural Survey	
VARIABLES	Local	Central	Local	Central
Land requisition	-0.476***	-0.080	-0.595***	0.214
(1=yes; 0=no)	(-3.729)	(-0.573)	(-4.108)	(-1.296)
Preference for CCTV news	-	-	0.301***	0.352***
(1=yes; 0=no)			(-3.231)	(-3.501)
Gender	-0.210*	0.360***	-0.298***	0.142
(1=male; 0=female)	(-1.714)	(2.665)	(-3.173)	(-1.281)
Age	0.012**	0.043***	0.004	0.017***
(year)	(2.063)	(6.445)	(-1.053)	(-3.342)
Education	0.017	0.047**	-0.025*	0.018
(years)	(0.848)	(2.096)	(-1.679)	(-1.024)
Marital Status	0.080	-0.139	-0.186	-0.478**
(1=married; 0=unmarried)	(0.385)	(-0.544)	(-1.042)	(-2.034)
Village Cadre Status	0.433*	0.804***	0.212	0.541
(1=yes; 0=no)	(1.711)	(2.869)	(-0.711)	(-1.644)
CCP Member Status	0.236*	-0.103	0.277	-0.287
(1=yes; 0=no)	(1.810)	(-0.688)	(-1.491)	(-1.507)
Veteran Status	-0.078	0.704***	-0.059	0.19
(1=yes; 0=no)	(-0.338)	(2.913)	(-0.258)	(-0.838)
Household income per capita	0.034	0.011	0.072	-0.009
(Logged)	(0.792)	(0.215)	(-1.543)	(-0.157)
Household land per capita	0.143**	-0.006	-0.012	-0.017
(before expropriation)	(2.053)	(-0.106)	(-0.622)	(-0.618)
Relatives as local officials	0.017	-0.113	0.329***	0.052
(1=yes; 0=no)	(0.103)	(-0.642)	(-2.693)	(-0.390)
Family member with migration experiences	0.077	0.302*	-0.015	-0.259**
(1=yes; 0=no)	(0.472)	(1.653)	(-0.169)	(-2.507)
Family members politically persecuted	-0.038	-0.007	-0.251*	-0.032
(1=yes; 0=no)	(-0.231)	(-0.033)	(-1.828)	(-0.202)
Family members honored by government	0.092	-0.049	0.197*	0.198
(1=yes; 0=no)	(0.755)	(-0.365)	(-1.815)	(-1.506)
Family members participated in the wars	-0.445***	-0.013	-0.057	0.261**
(1=yes; 0=no)	(-3.113)	(-0.087)	(-0.579)	(-2.240)
Province Dummy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,195	1,195	2,210	2,210

Data source: authors' 2008 and 2009 surveys. Robust z-statistics in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6: Village-Level Instability and Trust

	Observations	Local Trust	Central Trust	Distance
Petition	38 (61%)	0.395	1.397	1.004
No petition	24 (39%)	0.515	1.312	0.797
Col. incident	23 (37%)	0.320	1.442	1.122
No col. incident	39 (63%)	0.513	1.320	0.807

Data source: authors' 2009 survey

Notes:

[1] The *Journal of Peasant Studies* has devoted several issues to the 'global land grab'—an ongoing transfer of agricultural land from subsistence farmers to corporations in the developing world, usually with the assistance of local governments. See, for example: Ito, Rachman and Savitri, 2014; Lavers, 2012; White et al., 2012.

[2] Abravanel and Busch, 1975; Gamson, 1968; Muller, Jukam and Seligson, 1982; Seligson, 1980.

[3] On inequality and political trust, see: Anderson and Singer, 2008; Uslaner and Brown, 2005. On corruption and political trust, see: Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Chang and Chu, 2006; Morris and Klesner, 2010.

[4] Pharr (1997) and Jennings (1998) observe the opposite trend in Japan and the United States, respectively; that is, citizens' trust in the central government appears to be declining more rapidly than that in local government.

[5] Following China's city-classification system, these are, respectively, cities with populations over 1 million, between 500,000 and 1 million, and fewer than 500,000.

[6] We focus on local government officials, rather than village cadres, because the latter's 'land management' responsibilities *do not* include village-initiated land requisition. Village cadres may assist local governments in land requisition efforts, but are forbidden by law from directly leasing land to urban users. Only local government officials are authorized to initiate the transfer of village collective land. All land takings, moreover, must be approved at the county level or higher (Hsing, 2010; Lin, 2007; Zhu and Prosterman, 2007).

[7] To use Easton's (1975) influential distinction, we gauge 'specific support' for government instead of assessing 'diffuse support' for the regime.

[8] Kennedy 2009, 523; Li 2010, 295-6. Kennedy's survey asks respondents: 'Do you believe the national leadership is acting in your interest?' Li asks if respondents think that government leaders '(1) put their own interests before those of farmers; (2) do not care whether farmers will agree when they make policies; and (3) care primarily about the powerful and rich and neglect the interests of ordinary people.'

[9] Due to the political sensitivity of requisition efforts in some villages, we were unable to interview more than ninety villagers in three cities (Wenzhou, Dongguan, and Zhongshan). Had we been able to carry out all these interviews, the revealed average political trust in these areas might have been even lower; thus our sample may have captured less of the variation in political trust than would have been case had all the interviews been conducted.

[10] We chose these provinces by dividing the country into six geographical regions and randomly selecting one province from each. We then divided the counties in each province into five strata based on their per capita industrial output; we randomly selected one county from each stratum. Townships in each of these thirty counties were stratified according to per capita income. We selected two townships in each, and then repeated the process at the village level to result in 120 villages. Forces beyond survey teams' control—including flooding in the wake of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake—prevented them from reaching all selected villages, resulting in 117 villages in the final sample.

[11] See Michelson (2012) for a discussion of recent policies aimed at improving the welfare of elderly rural residents.

[12] In separate regressions (the results of which we do not report here) we also tested for the possibility of an interactive effect between dispossession and media exposure. The interaction terms were insignificant for both central and local government trust. Exposure to Party-state propaganda does not appear to condition rural residents' response to losing their land.

[13] A two-tailed t-test rejects the null hypothesis that villages with and without collective incidents report the same average trust gap ($p<0.01$). We can also reject the hypothesis that petitioning and non-petitioning villages are characterized by the same trust gap, albeit at a lower level of confidence ($p<0.10$).

[14] Due to the availability of only a very limited number of village-level variables, we are unable to run regressions controlling for various related factors. The possibility of endogeneity also exists (Li, 2008; Li, 2013).