

*Consent to Contend: The Power of the Masses in China's Local Elite Bargain**

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Abstract

This study explores how local officials tolerate and use mass mobilization to extract policy concessions from above. Local officials strategically tolerate mass mobilization when the demands of the masses are congruent with elements of their own agenda that they are otherwise unable to pursue. Protestors in the streets turn out to be a powerful bargaining chip for local officials: they illustrate *ex ante* that higher level leaders risk causing social instability if they reject the masses' demands. The article lays out the institutional environment that gives rise to such a strategy, presents a detailed case study focusing on the

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