Domestic Politics, China's Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order

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Abstract With the future of liberal internationalism in question, how will China's growing power and influence reshape world politics? We argue that views of the Liberal International Order (LIO) as integrative and resilient have been too optimistic for two reasons. First, China's ability to profit from within the system has shaken the domestic consensus in the United States on preserving the existing LIO. Second, features of Chinese Communist Party rule chafe against many of the fundamental principles of the LIO, but could coexist with a return to Westphalian principles and markets that are embedded in domestic systems of control. How, then, do authoritarian states like China pick and choose how to engage with key institutions and norms within the LIO? We propose a framework that highlights two domestic variables—centrality and heterogeneity—and their implications for China's international behavior. We illustrate the framework with examples from China's approach to climate change, trade and exchange rates, Internet governance, territorial sovereignty, arms control, and humanitarian intervention. Finally, we conclude by considering what alternative versions of international order might emerge as China's influence grows.

With the future of liberal internationalism in question, how will China's growing power and influence reshape world politics? The question of whether a rising China can be peacefully integrated into existing international institutions and norms is not new. Yet many studies have taken for granted the presence of a stable or liberalizing international order, one that the United States as the leading power would seek to preserve or deepen, rather than relinquish or dismantle.

New uncertainties about the willingness of the United States to support the Liberal International Order (LIO) have amplified anxieties over China's rise.[1] Some say that the system is resilient and will outlast a decline in US power because rising powers such as China have derived significant benefits from the LIO and can prosper within it,[2] as long as their economic aspirations are not stymied.[3] To the extent that participation in international organizations has socialized and habituated their participants,[4] rising powers such as China may strive for greater authority and rights within the LIO rather than overturning its core principles.[5]

1. For a definition of the LIO and its contested components, see Lake, Martin, and Risse, 2021.
2. Ikenberry 2008, 2011.
3. See Monteiro 2014; Deudney and Ikenberry 2018 also argue that the institutions of the liberal order will strengthen as long as economic interdependence grows.
4. Johnston 2008.
5. Schweller and Pu 2011 note that China seeks to grow and contest the existing international order from within.

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We argue that views of the LIO as integrative and resilient have been too optimistic, for two reasons. First, China's ability to profit from within the system has shaken the domestic consensus in the United States on preserving the existing LIO. As the LIO expanded after the Cold War, it grew to include many illiberal states.[6] But only China's rise has fused economic and security concerns about the consequences of letting an illiberal state prosper within the system. China's persistent illiberalism and growing military and economic power have helped call into question the adequacy of existing institutions, from the World Health Organization to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Second, the literature has not adequately addressed how the rise of a nationalist, authoritarian power such as China will reshape the LIO, given the very different "social purpose," identity, and institutions that characterize state–society relations in the People's Republic of China (PRC).[7] Both illiberal and liberal states, including the United States, have selectively chosen which international institutions to join and be bound to.[8] That variation, along with variation in the willingness of the United States and other core democratic members to champion the more liberal components of the international order, makes it difficult to summarize China's approach to international order as either "revisionist" or "status quo."[9]

In this article, we propose a research agenda for understanding how China's domestic characteristics infuse its international efforts vis-à-vis the rules, norms, and institutions of the existing order. Major features of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule include a prioritization of the state over the individual, rule by law rather than rule of law, and a renewed emphasis on ethnic rather than civic nationalism. These features chafe against many of the fundamental principles of the LIO, but could coexist with a return to Westphalian principles and markets that are "embedded" in domestic systems of control.

The LIO has always been less liberal in practice than in theory,[10] reflecting persistent tensions between liberal norms and the Westphalian emphasis on noninterference into the domestic affairs of sovereign states.[11] Rather than being a frontal challenge to the existing international order, greater Chinese influence will likely shift the

6. Standards for certifying liberal practices have also become more stringent. See Towns 2010; Lake, Martin, and Risse, 2021.

7. Ruggie 1982; Simmons and Goemans (2021) also urge greater attention to "spatialized" identities and preferences for understanding domestic "social purposes."

8. Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021.

9. Johnston 2019a argues that international order is better conceptualized not as a coherent system but rather as the emergent properties of state-level interactions in different domains.

10. See Graham Allison, "The Myth of the Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs*, 14 June 2018, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/myth-liberal-order>; Barma, Ratner, and Weber 2013; Colgan and Keohane. 2017; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "The Liberal Order Is More Than a Myth." *Foreign Affairs*, 31 July 2018, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-07-31/liberal-order-more-myth>.

11. Lake, Martin, and Risse, 2021. Others have criticized the hypocrisy of a liberal order that emphasizes sovereign equality while failing to acknowledge or level historical hierarchies. See Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2020.

international order in a more Westphalian direction, as Beijing continues to support the principles enshrined in the UN Charter of state sovereignty, equality, and noninterference, while circumscribing the liberal emphasis on individual political freedoms and movement toward more intrusive international institutions.[12]

To illuminate the domestic parameters of China's interests and efforts across the variety of issues, norms, and institutions that make up the international order, we suggest and illustrate a framework that highlights two domestic variables: centrality and heterogeneity. In so doing, we sketch an agenda for researchers to examine where China's rise entails more incremental or more fundamental challenges to the existing international order.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the twin challenges that China's rise has posed for the LIO. Second, we present the implications of centrality and heterogeneity for China's international efforts across different issue areas, illustrated with examples of China's approach to climate change, trade and exchange rates, Internet governance, territorial sovereignty, arms control, and humanitarian intervention. Finally, we conclude by considering how the international order might evolve in the shadow of China's influence.

China's Rise and the LIO

Canonical accounts of the LIO were optimistic that rising powers such as China could be peacefully integrated into the system and discouraged from overturning it. As Ikenberry notes, the LIO was designed to allow "rising countries on the periphery of this order—to advance their economic and political goals inside it."[13] As China joined dozens of international organizations and multilateral agreements, its behavior was also shaped by social pressures, helping explain Chinese cooperation even in the absence of obvious material benefits.[14] China's stature within these institutions was also expected to constrain and shape China's choices, encouraging Beijing to channel its grievances into "rules-based revolution" rather than a violent bid for hegemony.[15] Many officials who supported China's accession to the WTO argued that greater trade and economic interdependence would have politically liberalizing effects.[16]

In our view, these accounts have given insufficient attention to the role of domestic politics, both in the rising state (China) and in the globally preponderant power (the United States). Centering the role of domestic politics leads to a more varied, and relatively less optimistic, set of expectations about China's rise and the future of the LIO.

12. On the growing intrusiveness of international institutions after the end of the Cold War, see Börzel and Zürn, this issue. Foot 2020 argues that China promotes a triadic model of a strong state, social stability, and economic development, in contrast to the prevailing UN emphases on international peace and security, human rights, and development.
13. Ikenberry 2011, 135.
14. Johnston 2008.
15. Goddard 2018.
16. But see Johnston 2019a.

A Shaken Consensus

Growing concerns about China's domestic and international trajectory have undermined support for continued engagement with China and institutional agreements that facilitated China's rapid economic growth. A surge in Chinese exports after its accession to the WTO helped fuel a backlash against globalization in developed democracies across the West, although scholars have debated whether economic hardship or perceptions of status threat was the dominant driver of electoral support for isolationist politicians.[17] In the United States, both Republican and Democratic officials charged China with unfair trade practices, poor compliance with WTO rulings, and exploiting open markets and scientific exchange to gain an advantage in next-generation technologies with national security implications.[18] China's persistent and increasingly personalistic form of authoritarianism led some in the US policy community to concede that China's increased integration had not produced greater political or economic liberalization.[19]

The political cohort that took office under the Trump administration linked this disenchantment to broader attacks on the premise of the LIO.[20] Playing to widespread social, economic, and racial anxiety, Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election on a nativist, America-first platform.[21] In office, not only did the Trump administration seek to alter the bilateral trading relationship by levying successive rounds of tariffs on virtually all Chinese-made goods, it also moved to expand the set of commercial activities deemed a risk to national security, accused the WTO of showing favoritism toward China, and began "decoupling" the supply chains of the two countries. By invoking national security to restrict trade, blocking WTO appellate appointments, and withdrawing from a range of multilateral agreements on climate, arms control, health, and trade, the Trump administration mounted a frontal assault on the once-US-led international order.

Without reference to US domestic politics, theorists of liberal internationalism have difficulty explaining why the United States chose to undermine the best way to protect its values and interests even as China closed the relative power gap with the United States. Although recognizing that the leading state may not want to bind itself to rules that others do not follow, Ikenberry predicted that the United States as global hegemon would continue to invest in the LIO in order to create "a favorable institutional environment for the lead state as its relative power

17. On the "China shock," see Colantone and Stanig 2018a, 2018b; Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2013. On the 2016 US election and perceptions of China as a threat to US global dominance, see Mutz 2018. On the mobilization of mass discontent against international cooperation, see De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021.

18. A chief concern for many US policymakers and scholars had been China's tendency to free ride or cheat on the rules. Christensen 2015.

19. Campbell and Ratner 2018.

20. For a different argument about China's rise and the unraveling of the LIO, see Mearsheimer 2019, who argues that the liberal order facilitated China's rise and hence a return to multipolarity, which in his view cannot sustain the liberal order.

21. See also Broz, Frieden, and Weymouth 2021 and Flaherty and Rogowski 2021.

declines."[22] Despite a wave of new research into the domestic sources of unraveling US support for liberal internationalism, these studies have not focused on concerns about China's rise.[23]

Yet it is important to note that the US-led attack on the LIO was not an inevitable outcome but a choice by the Trump administration. A counterfactual US administration led by Hillary Clinton would have been more likely to use multilateral pressure and institutional levers to confront and constrain China, as the United States had under President Obama.[24] Indeed, bipartisan concerns over China's ability to flout the rules while maintaining other privileges within the international system suggest that different political coalitions could succeed in making the case for renewed US investment in multilateral leadership, with more stringent requirements on China should it wish to enjoy the benefits of access.[25] Alternatively, US policies to encourage firms and laboratories to decouple their supply chains and research efforts could herald a return to more closed or preferential economic blocs reminiscent of the Cold War.[26] In short, domestic coalitions, identities, and ideological beliefs matter in shaping the choices of the leading state.[27]

China's Persistent Illiberalism and Tensions with the LIO

How do the domestic politics of an authoritarian state such as the PRC affect whether it seeks to engage or reshape the international order as it grows in power and influence? Do the CCP's ambitions extend beyond changing "the distribution of authority and rights" to challenging the "underlying principles of liberal order," as Ikenberry asks?[28] At a basic level, the PRC is likely to follow the United States in privileging its own domestic interests and relative power within the global hierarchy.[29] Yet the PRC is undeniably different from the United States in a number of ways that put it at odds with core principles of the LIO.[30] On the one hand, the PRC has been a staunch defender of Westphalian principles of respect for territorial sovereignty as

22. Ikenberry 2011, 153, 155–56, 316.

23. See, for example, Musgrave 2019; in this issue, Rogowski and Flaherty show that the "China shock" is associated with increased support for populist parties only in countries with high levels of income inequality.

24. As Obama said of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, "we can't let countries like China write the rules of the global economy." White House, "Statement by the President on the Trans-Pacific Partnership." 5 October 2015. Available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/05/statement-president-trans-pacific-partnership>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

25. See, for example, Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, "Competition Without Catastrophe," *Foreign Affairs*, 21 September 2019. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/competition-with-china-without-catastrophe>.

26. Lake 2018.

27. See Kaufmann and Pape 1999; Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon 2009.

28. Ikenberry 2011, 27, 282.

29. Kupchan 2012.

30. Still, these differences in identity, particularly nationalism, are what Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018 argue will prevent China from forging an effective counter-hegemonic bloc.

well as the UN charter, the principle of non-intervention, and the present configuration of the UN Security Council (UNSC). The PRC also helped shape, and ultimately signed on to, a more narrow conception of the "Responsibility To Protect" (R2P) principle authorizing international intervention to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity.[31] On the other hand, four characteristics of contemporary CCP rule are at odds with the LIO as a rules-based order that privileges democracy, free enterprise, and individual political freedoms.

First, the CCP has emphasized the role of the state over private enterprise, even though it was the introduction of markets and economic liberalization after Mao's death that unleashed China's economic miracle. China's brand of state capitalism —including subsidies, nonmarket barriers, and other preferential policies that have curtailed reciprocal market access—has been responsible for much of the international backlash against China's trade practices and participation in the WTO. China has also made financial, technical, and infrastructural assistance available to governments that do not meet the liberal political and economic conditions set by traditional lenders.[32]

Second, the CCP has opposed the elevation of individual political rights and has regarded civil society organizations and transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activists with suspicion, fearing that they might challenge the CCP's domestic rule. In opposing the 1997 Ottawa Treaty banning land mines, for example, the Chinese government viewed the involvement of NGOs in the negotiation of a key document with distrust.[33] In the development arena, Chinese loans and grants have also sought to enhance state capacity. As one study of China's information and communications technology (ICT) investments in Africa noted, other donors typically select the most appropriate actors to advance a particular development objective, "be it a local NGO, a private company, or a specific ministry," whereas China "has preferred an actor-based approach, seeking to increase the capacity of the state"—including the installation of AI-powered surveillance systems.[34]

Third, the CCP has demonstrated a clear preference for "rule by law" over "rule of law." Laws in China have proliferated, but the CCP has redoubled its commitment to using the law to carry out its objectives rather than allowing the law to constrain its discretion.[35] On 30 June 2020, following a months-long standoff with a broadly popular movement for the defense of Hong Kong's freedoms, the PRC National People's Congress passed a national security law penalizing secession, subversion, organization and perpetration of terrorist activities, and collusion with foreign actors, including acts committed by anyone, anywhere in the world. By operating

31. On humanitarianism and liberal intrusiveness, see Börzel and Zürn 2021. Foot 2020 notes that Beijing supports a state-centric version of R2P that provides for the protection of civilians in armed conflict under host state consent.
32. Kaplan 2016.
33. Johnston 2008, 139.
34. Gagliardone 2019.
35. Minzner 2011.

above the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the National Security Law has been widely regarded as ending the "one country, two systems" model that was expected to provide Hong Kong with a "high degree of autonomy" until 2047.[36] In response to British accusations that China had violated its commitments under the 1984 Joint Declaration, Chinese Ambassador Liu Xiaoming insisted that China has always upheld its international obligations and that "the copyright of 'one country, two systems' belongs to Chinese former leader Deng Xiaoping, not the Sino-British Joint Declaration."[37] As developments in Hong Kong show, the CCP's willingness to refine and reinterpret its legal commitments indicates that it is unlikely that the CCP will rely heavily on rule-based restraints to legitimize its international leadership.

Fourth, the CCP has promoted a more ethno-nationalist vision of its rule: suppressing expressions of ethnic and religious identity with foreign ties, particularly Islam and Christianity, and appealing to foreign citizens of Chinese descent to love the motherland. This turn toward ethnic nativism rather than civic nationalism raises concerns about the CCP's willingness to tolerate individual differences and identities[38] and respect foreign governments' sovereignty over their putative citizens. And it feeds doubts that a hegemonic China will want to preserve an interconnected world in which international actors and ideas have opportunities to "penetrate" the leading state and shape its choices in ways that render them more acceptable to other states.[39]

These attributes suggest that the CCP's interests fundamentally conflict with the more demanding components of *political liberalism*, particularly the elevation of individual political rights above state sovereignty. That said, the leaders of post-Mao China have not sought to export a universal ideology or form of government, avoiding an irreconcilable conflict between China's rise and the defense of democracy.[40] As for *economic liberalism*, there are greater tensions between China's state-led mode of authoritarian capitalism and the first form of economic liberalism, premised on unfettered domestic markets, free trade between countries, and few constraints on international capital and foreign investment. But a form of

36. Emily Feng, "Five Takeaways From China's Hong Kong National Security Law," NPR, 1 July 2020. Available at <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/01/885900989/5-takeaways-from-chinas-hong-kong-national-security-law>. Accessed 5 August 2020.

37. "Ambassador Liu Xiaoming Holds an On-Line Press Conference on Law on Safeguarding National Security in HKSAR." Available at <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/dshdjjh/t1796269.htm>. Accessed 5 August 2020.

38. See also Buzas 2021. Ironically, the intellectual architects behind China's assimilationist turn toward eliminating markers of religious and ethnic difference, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang, have cited the US "melting pot" as inspiration. Gerry Shih, "Boiling Us Like Frogs: China's Muslim Clampdown Creeps into the Heartland, Targeting Hui Minority," *Washington Post*, 20 September 2019. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/boiling-us-like-frogs-chinas-clampdown-on-muslims-creeps-into-the-heartland-finds-new-targets/2019/09/20/25c8bb08-ba94-11e9-aeb2-a101a1fb27a7_story.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

39. Ikenberry 2011.

40. Weiss 2019.

re-"embedded" liberalism in which states have discretion to cushion the impacts of free trade could be more compatible with the CCP's desire for a stronger state role in the economy.[41] Finally, with regard to *liberal institutionalism*—governance via principled multilateralism—China has had a mixed record, working within some institutions to advance its interests (the World Bank, International Monetary Fund [IMF], UNSC, WTO, for example) while flouting others (including the rejection of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea [ITLOS] ruling on the South China Sea).[42] The CCP's preference for bilateral negotiations over multilateralism suggests that although China may become an increasingly ambitious stakeholder within existing institutions, its major new international initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, are unlikely to take the form of self-binding multilateral agreements that limit sovereign discretion.[43]

Although some might see persistent differences between China's interests and the LIO as a failure of socialization, Johnston allows that these international processes do not necessarily subsume domestic interests.[44] Moreover, one must also consider the patterns of appropriate behavior into which China has been socialized. Namely, China has risen within a considerably less liberal version of international order in East Asia, where "American-led order is hierarchical but with much fainter liberal characteristics."[45] Finally, as Lake, Martin, and Risse note in this issue, China is not the only state to reject many international intrusions on sovereignty; all states—liberal and illiberal—pick and choose which parts of the LIO to uphold.

Authoritarian Domestic Politics and International Order: Centrality and Heterogeneity

How does an illiberal state like China pick and choose the shape and extent of its engagement with the international order? What does China want from the array of structures, norms, and expectations that constitute the international system? Following Moravcsik, we consider state preferences—the outcomes that a state seeks in the international system—to be shaped predominantly by domestic interests, ideas, and the institutions that aggregate them.[46] State preferences cannot be deduced

41. Ruggie 1982. On embedded liberalism and contemporary challenges, see Mansfield and Rudra 2021, as well as Goodman and Pepinsky 2021.

42. Beijing has also used its economic and political clout as diplomatic leverage to garner support for its positions within existing institutions. See Flores-Macías and Kreps 2013; Foot 2020.

43. On transactional networks as the emerging basis of a parallel international order, see Barma et al. 2009.

44. Johnson 2008.

45. Ikenberry 2011, 26–27; see also Kang 2003; Katzenstein 2005.

46. Moravcsik 1997, 518.

from the structure of the system or the distribution of power and capabilities but are determined first and foremost by domestic politics.[47]

Authoritarian regimes are not monolithic, coherent, or static polities. As Wallace notes, the character of authoritarian politics at any given time is affected by "*who* is in power, *how* do they rule, and *why* they do so."[48] Just as US investment in the LIO has been buffeted and shaped by shifting domestic coalitions and ideas as well as by systemic changes in the distribution of power in the system,[49] so are Chinese politics subject to domestic and international contestation.[50]

The international context can also create incentives to alter domestic institutions and practices and foster the diffusion of norms and ideas.[51] International interactions have domestic consequences and can sometimes trigger domestic realignments.[52] Developments at the international level can create opportunities that empower certain domestic interests and ideas. International pressures can help accelerate domestic reforms but also generate domestic backlash, thereby strengthening hardliners.[53] Ultimately, domestic structures and state–society relations condition how international ideas and practices are perceived and adopted.[54]

Research on China's approach to international order has largely focused on the extent of China's compliance and integration with existing institutions and norms, although more recent work has examined China's impact on international institutions.[55] Crucially, these works have not systematically focused on what a rising authoritarian power such as China will seek to achieve, nor have they systematically examined the role of domestic politics in shaping these interests and strategies. Where and on what issues will China lead a "rules-based revolution," in Goddard's terms?[56]

We argue that two characteristics—centrality and heterogeneity—shape the domestic politics of a given international issue area in an authoritarian state. In the next section, we discuss each characteristic of the general framework and then discuss its implications for China.

47. Risse-Kappen 1991.

48. Wallace n.d.

49. See Chaudoin, Milner, and Tingley 2010; Kupchan and Trubowitz 2007; Musgrave 2019; Snyder, Shapiro, and Bloch-Elkon 2009.

50. For example, see Yan 2018 on competing political values and ideological strands in Chinese foreign policy.

51. See Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Risse-Kappen 1994; including elections (Hyde 2011), protests (Weiss 2013), and the geographic distribution of ethnic minority populations (McNamee and Zhang 2019).

52. Putnam 1988.

53. Weiss and Wichowsky 2018; on backlash, see Terman 2016.

54. Risse-Kappen 1994.

55. See Foot and Walter 2011; Johnston 2003; 2008.

56. Goddard 2018. As Kastner, Pearson, and Rector (2018, 43) put it, their theory of Chinese behavior "abstracts away from domestic political dynamics within China, even though it is certain that factors such as public and elite opinion and bureaucratic interests have, at times, influenced Beijing's approach to international regimes."

Centrality

Centrality describes how closely an authoritarian government sees an issue affecting its survival prospects. Issues that are readily linked to a government's self-identified pillars of domestic support are more central than those that are not. Central issues are more likely to galvanize mass attention and conflict among regime elites, jeopardizing the regime's survival. Because authoritarian regimes can be challenged or ousted at any time, the leadership places high priority on preempting or extinguishing threats as they emerge, using a mix of repression and performance to suppress or placate domestic grievances. The costs of repression and the risk that it backfires increase with the centrality of an issue, giving authoritarian regimes more reason to rely on performance to address central issues. Performance can include policies that change outcomes, side payments to losers, and symbolic or rhetorical appeals that signal the regime's morality and affinity with domestic constituents.

Importantly, the centrality of any particular issue to the regime's pillars of support is contested. One of the leadership's main preoccupations is anticipating, preempting, or responding to links between seemingly minor issues and central pillars of regime support. Aggrieved individuals and interest groups often couch their demands in the same language that the regime uses to present its rule as legitimate.[57] By borrowing from and mirroring the regime's language, political entrepreneurs and activists magnify the resonance of their claims. In addition, a major challenge for the leadership is managing issues that touch upon multiple sources of regime support. Many policy choices involve trade-offs that may bolster support in one domain but harm it in another.

International issues vary in how closely they affect these pillars of regime support. A government is more likely to devote resources and attention to international issues that are domestically central than to those that are not. The greater the domestic centrality of an international issue, the more likely the government is to pursue unilateral policies that serve its domestic interests in shoring up these pillars.[58] In addition, international pressure is more likely to backfire when the changes demanded threaten to topple these central pillars of regime support. The greater the domestic centrality of an international issue, the harder it is for the government to concede internationally without suffering a potentially destabilizing domestic backlash.

In turn, the domestic centrality of an issue affects the government's bargaining position at the international level, in the spirit of a two-level game.[59] On central issues, a government that is more willing to "go it alone" in breach of existing norms and institutions is more likely to have leverage to demand international reforms on that issue

57. On the politicization of international issues and the process by which public contestation constrains decision making in a democratic context, see De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021.

58. On normative dimensions of centrality, see Foot and Walter 2013, who argue that when a global norm is domestically salient—or central—the degree of normative fit between global and domestic norms informs Chinese behavior.

59. Putnam 1988.

or to build its own like-minded coalition of states to advance its views in an alternative set of institutions.[60] Ultimately, whether these investments entail greater cooperation or conflict depends on the prevailing norms and practices within a given issue area and the willingness of other stakeholders to make concessions to the government's domestic imperatives.

We next define the central pillars of CCP rule and then illustrate how the domestic positionality of different international issues have affected China's behavior. During the first twenty-five years of CCP rule, adherence to Mao's interpretation of communism and nationalism was the central pillar of regime support; potential challengers were deemed counter-revolutionaries or revisionists. With Mao's death and the move away from a planned economy in the 1970s, the CCP staked its legitimacy on three pillars: nationalism, economic growth, and public safety.

Nationalism. The CCP's ability to secure the nation's defense and territorial integrity has been critical to justifying its rule since the founding of the PRC, when Mao declared that "ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up."[61] As the last two Chinese regimes were ousted by nationalist movements, CCP leaders are especially concerned about defending the nation's sovereignty against foreign encroachment and returning to China the status and privileges of a great power.

Economic growth. The CCP has used growth and a litany of economic statistics, gross domestic product (GDP) in particular, to claim competence and justify its rule in the post-Mao era. Under Deng, the CCP moved away from communist ideology as a barometer of good performance, instead touting slogans such as "To get rich is glorious" and "black or white, as long as it catches mice it is a good cat." In addition to creating opportunities for rents and patronage, economic growth has funded the levers of CCP rule, particularly the coercive apparatus and information control systems that undergird domestic support, enabling the regime to stamp out challenges, co-opt potential rivals, or prevent alternative centers of influence from emerging.

Public safety. The CCP's ability to keep its citizens safe from disease, disaster, crime, and terror has also been a central pillar of its rule. Public health issues commonly trigger domestic outcry and social mobilization, particularly when government

60. As Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2018 put it, a rising power's "outside options" and "indispensability" determine whether it will invest in, demand changes to, or passively accept a particular sector of global governance. Similarly, Goddard 2018 argues that a dissatisfied state's position within international networks determines whether it will integrate, exit, reform, or violently challenge the system.

61. Opening address at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, 21 September 1949, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, available at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_01.htm> accessed 28 November 2020. (The full record is available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-022984-3.50005-0>.)

malfeasance or inattention leads to the deaths of innocents.[62] The Chinese government's initial failure to disclose and act on the danger posed by the 2002–2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak triggered a wave of public concern and what the political scientist Yanzhong Huang has called "the most severe socio-political crisis for the Chinese leadership since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown."[63] The COVID-19 pandemic retraced these steps, with the government's initial delays in confirming evidence of human-to-human transmission, and the silencing of local doctors who tried to inform their colleagues about a new SARS-like virus, eliciting sharp critiques of Chinese-style authoritarianism and calls on Chinese social media for Xi Jinping to step down.[64] Only by silencing domestic critics and outperforming the many other countries that struggled to contain the virus did the Chinese government turn the tide of domestic discontent.[65]

Many international issues are unlikely to impact these central domestic pillars. At the United Nations, most issues are peripheral to these domestic pillars of support. Even though China became a veto-wielding member of the UNSC in 1971, Beijing was relatively slow to take on an active role at the United Nations, reluctant to use its veto power, and often willing to compromise or cooperate with existing frameworks.[66] Some issues, such as sovereignty, have been more domestically sensitive. But even an issue such as sovereignty bundles a number of issues,[67] some of which are more central than others.

Our framework expects that the CCP will invest in and insist rigidly on facets of sovereignty that are more closely linked to central pillars of regime support, particularly the defense of the nation's territorial integrity and activity within its borders, and that are more likely to show flexibility and invest less in other facets, such as peacekeeping and international intervention.[68]

62. Throughout Chinese history, natural disasters such as earthquakes have often been regarded as portents of the government's downfall and the loss of the "mandate of heaven," particularly when they reflect poorly on the government's competence or morality. The shoddy construction of schoolhouses that collapsed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and killed tens of thousands of children remains a potent symbol of the regime's fecklessness. See Sorace 2017; Xu 2017.

63. Huang 2004.

64. See, for example, Xu Zhangrun. 4 February 2020. 许志永. "劝退书." 美好中国 (blog) ["Dear Chairman Xi, It's Time for You to Go," translated by Geremie Barmé, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/dear-chairman-xi-its-time-you-go>, last accessed 28 November 2020]. Available at <https://cmcn.blog/2020/02/04/%e5%8a%9d%e9%80%80%e4%b9%a6/>. Accessed 11 August 2020; Josh Rudolph, "Sensitive Words: 'Where Is That Person? 'Everyday I Pray for Green Jade,'" *China Digital Times*, 11 February 2020. Available at <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/02/sensitive-words-where-is-that-person-everyday-i-pray-for-green-jade/>. Accessed 11 August 2020.

65. Jessica Chen Weiss, "No 'Beijing Consensus': Why the US Risks a Pyrrhic Victory in Confronting China," SupChina, 29 June 2020. Available at <https://supchina.com/2020/06/29/no-beijing-consensus-the-u-s-risks-a-pyrrhic-victory/>. Accessed 21 September 2020; Yanzhong Huang, "Xi Jinping Won the Coronavirus Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, 20 April 2020. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-04-13/xi-jinping-won-coronavirus-crisis>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

66. Johnston 2008.

67. Krasner 1999.

68. On the propensity of states to "re-border," particularly among autocracies, see Simmons and Goemans 2021.

Sovereignty over Taiwan is central to the CCP's nationalist claim that the island is rightfully part of China and that its de facto separation reflects an unfinished civil war. Taiwan is the major unresolved legacy of what party propagandists have termed China's "Century of Humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers, dating from the Opium Wars of the mid-1800s to the state's founding in 1949. As such, the leadership has regarded any moves that would make it appear "soft" on Taiwan independence as potential political liabilities. As Shirk notes, "No matter what public opinion actually is on this matter, the widespread belief that the CCP leaders would not survive politically if they did not fight to prevent Taiwan independence creates its own reality."[69] Johnston concurs: "The party leadership appears to have calculated its more concrete 'interests' in retaining power: Anyone who 'loses' Taiwan not only will encourage a domestic domino effect among unassimilated minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, but also will lose power."[70]

Given the domestic centrality of the Taiwan issue, the Chinese government has invested heavily in keeping Taiwan out of the international system. It has opposed official participation by Taiwan in international organizations, worked to peel away Taipei's diplomatic allies, and sought to limit the character of US diplomatic and military relations with Taiwan. Beijing reacted angrily to advanced US arms sales and staged live-fire missile exercises to protest the visit of former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui to give a speech at his alma mater, Cornell University, in 1995. Beijing has made its economic assistance to third-party states conditional on adherence to "one China." Beijing has also forced foreign corporations, particularly airlines and the Marriott hotel chain, to avoid language on their websites that could be construed as treating Taiwan as a country, allowing "Taipei" instead.

Internet governance also directly affects the CCP's survival prospects and sovereignty over activity within its borders.[71] Xi Jinping has publicly framed the issue of cyber security and cyber sovereignty as necessary to defend the nation from internal and external threats and to ensure a stable economy: "Without web security there's no national security, there's no economic and social stability, and it's difficult to ensure the interests of the broader masses."[72] The CCP has also portrayed the Internet as a modern battleground against foreign efforts to weaken and divide the nation. As Xi put it, "Western anti-China forces have continuously tried in vain to use the internet to 'pull down' China."[73] The Chinese leadership has made clear that controlling activity on the Internet in China is a matter of life or death, regarding it as "the main battleground of

69. Shirk 2006.

70. Johnston 2008, 210.

71. On authoritarian perceptions and responses to the challenges posed by the Liberal International Information Order (LIIO), see Farrell and Newman 2021.

72. "Xi Jinping Calls for Tighter Grip on Internet to Ensure Stability," *South China Morning Post,* 21 April 2018. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2142758/chinese-president-xi-jinping-calls-tighter-grip>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

73. Speech at the National Propaganda Work Conference, 19 August 2013 [in Chinese]. Available at <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/1204/c40531-30440415.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

struggle over public opinion" and warning that "winning or losing public support is an issue that concerns the CPC's survival or extinction."[74]

Given the domestic centrality of the Internet, the Chinese government has been determined to embed "respect for cyber sovereignty" into international discussions of Internet governance. Xi Jinping laid out China's position at the 2015 World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, where he emphasized "respect for cyber sovereignty" as the first principle needed to advance "the transformation of the global Internet governance system."[75] China's 2016 national cyber strategy also listed "respecting and protecting sovereignty in cyberspace" as the first principle. Support for state sovereignty in cyberspace is not uniquely Chinese; the independent Tallinn Manuals also agree that "the principle of sovereignty applies to cyberspace."[76] But at the fourth meeting of the UN Group of Governmental Experts Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, China worked with Russia to "expand the statement of the sovereignty norm."[77]

On less central facets of sovereignty, such as humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping, the CCP has been more willing to compromise. On peacekeeping, Wuthnow writes that China's stance evolved from "principled opposition in the 1970s, to begrudging acceptance in the 1980s, to limited participation in the 1990s, to active contributions in the early twenty-first century."[78] On international intervention, China dropped its initial opposition to the R2P principle, ultimately endorsing its application in multiple countries, including Darfur, Libya, Yemen, and Mali.[79] In Syria, Beijing supported a number of UNSC resolutions and abstained on several others, initially reserving its veto for actions it associated with the threat of forcible regime change, and later seeking to preserve host state consent.[80] As Börzel and Zürn, note, this "pushback is different from full rejection or even dissidence."[81] Along with Russia, China has sought to defend the authority of the UNSC as an institution, while countering the most intrusive applications of the R2P principle, particularly after the 2011 intervention in Libya led to the extrajudicial killing of its long-standing dictator, Muammar al-Qaddafi.

That there are international issues that touch on central pillars of regime support does not necessarily mean that the government is unable to make concessions,

74. "Study History, Be Close to the People," *China Daily*, 25 July 2013. Available at <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2013-07/09/content_16749701.htm>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

75. "Remarks by President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Second World Internet Conference," 16 December 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Available at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1327570.shtml>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

76. Jensen 2017.

77. Segal 2017, 7.

78. Wuthnow 2013, 13.

79. Fung 2016.

80. Foot 2020; Fung 2018.

81. Börzel and Zürn 2021.

particularly as part of an international agreement that helps the government's interest regarding another central issue. For example, Fravel shows that the CCP has been willing to make territorial compromises with neighboring states in order to shore up domestic security and control over minority populations.[82] Similarly, many international issues affect multiple pillars of regime support, meaning that shifting conditions and emerging crises can galvanize unexpected changes in the government's strategy.

China's changing stance in international discussions on carbon emissions is a prime example of an international issue that touches on two central pillars: economic growth and public health. Initially, the CCP viewed international efforts to limit carbon emissions as threatening to domestic economic growth. Chinese negotiators echoed the developing world's chief refrain: that rich countries bear primary responsibility because of their historical emissions.[83] China's resistance to bearing the costs associated with carbon limits persisted through the Copenhagen meetings in December 2009, where its behavior "appeared calculated to frustrate progress."[84] During this period, the domestic centrality of growth imperatives drove China's international opposition to binding emissions targets.

As high levels of air pollution threatened public health, the Chinese government strenuously tried to repress domestic awareness of the issue. In 2007, the World Bank estimated the number of Chinese killed every year by pollution to be 750,000, but this figure was scrubbed from initial public pronouncement after pressure from Chinese government officials.[85] It was not until the scale of the catastrophe was revealed and galvanized mass and elite outrage that the Chinese government shifted strategies, emphasizing public welfare over growth and investing in international efforts to limit carbon emissions.

In April 2008, the US Embassy began collecting samples of small particulate matter and publishing the results hourly on Twitter, ignoring the Chinese government's objections that this was "interfering in the internal affairs" of the PRC. In October 2010, the account tweeted that Beijing's air was "crazy bad," twenty times the World Health Organization's guidelines. Programmers had jokingly coded that label for scores beyond index, not expecting it to be triggered.[86] In the fall of 2011, the US Embassy's monitoring equipment again registered scores so polluted that they were "beyond index," even though the Beijing city government had reported that the air was only "slightly polluted."[87] Real estate developer Pan Shiyi

82. Fravel 2008.
83. Lewis 2008, 162.
84. Christoff 2010, 639.
85. David Barboza, "China Reportedly Urged Omitting Pollution-Death Estimates," *New York Times*, 5 July 2007. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/05/world/asia/05china.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020. Note that the World Bank's report also includes water pollution.
86. Barbara Demick, "US Embassy Air Quality Data Undercut China's Own Assessments," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 October 2011. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2011-oct-29-la-fg-china-air-quality-20111030-story.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020.
87. Ibid.

sent multiple messages to more than 16,000,000 followers on Weibo calling for the Chinese government to monitor $PM_{2.5}$ rather than just PM_{10}, including a poll in which more than 90 percent of 40,000 respondents agreed. Days later, Premier Wen Jiabao acceded, saying that the government needed to improve its environmental monitoring and bring its results closer to people's perceptions.[88] The government added $PM_{2.5}$ to a more restrictive set of standards in February 2012, with monitoring stations broadcasting hourly reports installed in dozens of cities by the end of that year.[89]

The domestic centrality of air pollution as a public health crisis spurred the Chinese government to shift gears. As Xi Jinping explicitly noted: "our environmental problems have reached such severe levels that the strictest measures are required … If not handled well they most often easily incite mass incidents."[90] A documentary on the health consequences of China's toxic air by former CCTV journalist Chai Jing garnered more than one hundred million views in forty-eight hours before being abruptly censored by Chinese authorities.[91]

Because sources of smog—principally coal—also emit substantial amounts of carbon dioxide, the Chinese government's efforts to combat air pollution simultaneously sought to reduce carbon emissions.[92] As Wu put it, China "shifted from a climate free-rider to a climate protector."[93] In November 2014, Presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping reached a historic agreement setting "new targets for carbon emissions reductions by the United States and a first-ever commitment by China to stop its emissions from growing by 2030."[94] Leading up to the Paris Conference of Parties (COP)-21 meetings, bilateral cooperation between the two largest emitters continued with the United States–China Joint Presidential Statement on Climate Change. China's support was indispensable to making the Paris meetings successful, where countries promised to make nationally determined contributions (NDCs) without a punishment process.

China's climate strategy shifted again as concerns about economic growth came to the fore in 2018, following the United States–China trade war and efforts to constrain

88. China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development 2012; Oliver 2014.

89. Oliver 2014.

90. 习近平关于总体国家安全观论述摘编 [Excerpts from Xi Jinping's Views on Overall National Security], The Central Party History and Literature Research Institute of the Communist Party of China, 2018, 181–82.

91. Celia Hatton, "Under the Dome: The Smog Film Taking China by Storm," BBC, 2 March 2015. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-31689232>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

92. In contrast, developed countries such as the United States had largely resolved air pollution as a political issue before climate science developed. In addition, natural resource endowments factored into Chinese decision makers' calculus. Whereas hydraulic fracturing (fracking) shifted US energy production to natural gas and away from coal, Chinese fracking efforts have yet to take off, in part because of a combination of poor geology and limited water resources as well as weak intellectual property protections that have dampened interest from the technologically leading US firms.

93. Wu 2016.

94. Mark Landler, "US and China Reach Climate Accord After Months of Talks," *New York Times,* 21 December 2017. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/world/asia/china-us-xi-obama-apec.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

credit expansion. These economic pressures pushed the Chinese government to loosen regulations on industrial pollution, leading firms in Beijing's environs to increase production, and Beijing's air pollution returned with a vengeance in the winter of 2018.[95]

Seen through our framework, China's international climate leadership is less the result of a principled stance than the byproduct of shifting domestic imperatives between growth and public health.[96] Curbing emissions became a critical task for the government once Chinese citizens identified smog as air pollution rather than "fog." The quantification of air pollution provided a focal point for mass and elite criticism. Growing social pressure on the government to protect public health, even at the expense of slower economic growth, helps explain China's about-face on climate change within a span of 10 years. Yet as the Chinese economy slowed in 2018 and then contracted for the first time in decades with the onset of COVID-19, the government refocused its efforts and prioritized domestic growth and employment over clean development.

Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity describes the degree of domestic division and contestation over government policy regarding a given international issue. Divergent interests and ideas about how to achieve those preferences can arise at both the mass and at the elite level, often rooted in geographic, economic, institutional, and ideological differences.[97] Even in authoritarian regimes, one can discern heterogeneity in surveys of public opinion, private and public commentary by policy elites and experts, and the statements and actions of state-owned and private industries, local governments, and central ministries. Leaked documents and archival material indicate that divisions within the regime's inner circle or politburo are often critical to authoritarian decisions, but may not become publicly available until much later.

Although most subnational actors in authoritarian systems lack formal veto power, their preferences and the implicit or explicit threat of noncompliance or disruptive protest may still affect the leadership's decision making, constrain implementation, and require side payments to minimize opposition. Even in authoritarian systems

95. Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China, "生态环境部通报重点区域2018年10月 -2019年1月环境空气质量有关情况 [The Ministry of Ecology and Environment notified the key areas from October 2018 to January 2019 on ambient air quality]", 20 February 2019, <http://www.mee.gov.cn/xxgk2018/xxgk/xxgk15/201902/t20190220_693001.html>, last accessed 28 November 2020. The increase is less drastic if one expands the time frame to March 2019, although it still shows a reversal after years of consistent progress. Lauri Myllyvirta, "Air Pollution Around Beijing Rebounds As Coal Consumption Rises by 13 Percent," *Unearthed* (blog), 22 May 2019. Available at <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2019/05/22/air-pollution-china-beijing-coal-2018/>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

96. On the political contestation between "climate vulnerable" and "climate forcing" actors and constituencies, see Colgan, Green, and Hale 2020.

97. On ideological heterogeneity in a democratic context, see, for example, De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter, 2021.

such as China's, power is fragmented and contested.[98] Central and local leaders face distinct incentives and possess different levels of information, making principal-agent problems pervasive.[99] Central decisions must be interpreted and implemented by multiple agents of the state at various levels of government, who in turn face the challenge of curbing the behavior of powerful industries and economic interests. In addition, when state leaders set out a general direction but leave the specifics to be hashed out, concentrated domestic interests can dominate both the design and implementation stages of the policy process. For example, Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative has provided an encompassing but vague slogan that "makes it easy for domestic interest groups to use a national policy as cover to pursue their own agenda."[100]

The heterogeneity of domestic interests varies widely across international issue areas. An issue characterized by low domestic heterogeneity means that there is relatively little contestation over what the government should do at the international level. Low heterogeneity can arise when there is a mass–elite consensus in favor of a particular outcome, with minimal or weak dissent. Low heterogeneity also characterizes issues about which a small set of actors has an outsized stake in the outcome, and the majority is indifferent. In such cases, concentrated domestic interests can dominate or capture the policy process without opposition. In turn, the preferences of those concentrated interests can directly shape the government's international stance.

On issues characterized by high heterogeneity, both masses and elites may be divided over what international outcome the government should seek to achieve, with multiple stakeholders arguing at cross purposes. The higher the heterogeneity of domestic preferences and mobilized interests, the greater the likelihood that policies benefit some at the expense of others, whose opposition may need to be defused with side payments. On issues with high domestic heterogeneity, international commitments are likely to face compliance and enforcement challenges. As such, the anticipation of partial implementation may be necessary in order for national-level negotiators to reach international agreements.[101]

Low- and high-heterogeneity issues carry different domestic risks and rewards for the regime. Issues that unite a mass–elite consensus make it difficult for the government to show flexibility in the face of foreign pressure, as it risks a wider domestic backlash and defection or punishment of other elites. But international success on a low-heterogeneity issue can also give the government a larger boost in domestic support, as masses and elites are united in supporting that outcome.

98. On the variety of constraints that leaders of different regime types face in foreign policy, see Hyde and Saunders 2020; Weeks 2008, 2012, 2014.

99. Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988.

100. Yuen Yuen Ang, "Demystifying Belt and Road," *Foreign Affairs,* May/June 2019. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-05-22/demystifying-belt-and-road>.

101. Mertha and Pahre 2005.

In contrast, issues characterized by significant domestic divisions are challenging because some constituency will feel aggrieved that the government did not prioritize its interests. Side payments may defuse some of this opposition in the short run, but also give those actors resources and reasons to continue their efforts to lobby, petition, or protest in the future. If the government instead uses targeted repression against disgruntled losers, it can clear short-term obstacles but increase long-term resentment. In short, the downside risk to the regime is typically lower when an issue is characterized by high heterogeneity because domestic divisions reduce the likelihood of a united challenge to its rule. But the upside rewards are also lower for high heterogeneity issues because the government must use costly side payments or targeted repression.

Turning now to China's international interactions, a number of issues are characterized by low domestic heterogeneity. The reunification of Taiwan with mainland China is a goal that unites both masses and elites in China. Involvement in UN peacekeeping operations and the safety of Chinese citizens overseas are also issues on which there is relatively little domestic disagreement. On these issues, the Chinese government has set policy without much mass or elite dissent. As for low-heterogeneity issues about which a concentrated domestic interest dominates the policy process, a prime example is China's refusal to join the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines. As Johnston notes, it was the Chinese military's interest in continuing to use land mines that drove the government's refusal to sign the treaty despite international pressure.[102]

On many other international issues, the Chinese government faces substantial domestic divisions. For example, export-oriented industries that benefited from a stable, undervalued renminbi (RMB) have fought against revaluation, arguing that it would undermine social stability by leaving millions of Chinese workers without jobs. To pursue RMB appreciation, the Chinese leadership had to placate these interests with subsidies and other preferential policies.[103] On cyber sovereignty, the strength of domestic interests in having access to an open and unfiltered Internet has meant partial and porous implementation of Chinese government efforts to control cyber activity within its borders.[104] The government has tolerated widespread use of virtual private networks (VPNs) to jump the Great Firewall. Periodic crackdowns have made it harder for users with Chinese-made VPNs to access the outside Internet, while still allowing elites with access to foreign-made and purchased VPNs to browse freely.[105] And some intensive forms of monitoring, such as real-name IP registration and

102. Johnston 2008, 138–39.
103. Steinberg and Shih 2012.
104. Roberts 2018.
105. James Palmer, "China Is Trying to Give the Internet a Death Blow," *Foreign Policy* (blog), 25 August 2017. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/25/china-is-trying-to-give-the-internet-a-death-blow-vpn-technology/>. Accessed 30 May 2019.

mandatory "Green Dam" filtering software on new computers, were stymied by opposition from the public and private businesses.[106]

High domestic heterogeneity has also characterized China's engagement with international efforts to address climate change, with particular opposition from polluting industries and the local governments that benefit from those revenues. These divisions have caused difficulties with the implementation and enforcement of China's international environmental commitments. Local officials have often resisted central directives to shut down polluting firms, as economic development remains of primary significance in cadre promotion evaluations.[107] Chinese officials and industries are also adept at gaming the system and providing as-if compliance with environmental regulations and incentives. Two examples are fudging pollution counterfactuals to gain resources through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) as well as cheating on chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) agreements. One study found that more than 85 percent of CDM projects had a low likelihood of "emission reductions being real, measurable, and additional."[108] China is also a party to the Montreal Protocol banning the production of CFC-11, which depletes atmospheric ozone and has "a global warming potential 4,750 times that of carbon dioxide." However, international investigators in 2018 traced an increase in CFC-11 to numerous chemical plants in China, which had resorted to producing the banned substance because its replacement was more expensive and less effective.[109]

At the same time, the interests of China's renewable energy industries have shaped its efforts to combat climate change in more positive ways. China's investments in renewables served to help its firms establish a leading position in a growing sector, but these policies have also generated positive externalities to help global efforts to combat climate change. In 2017, China accounted for more than half of global solar installations and 37 percent of wind turbines, and China's dominance is even stronger in manufacturing.[110] Because of the falling cost of Chinese-subsidized renewables, other countries have become "more confident that a gradual shift towards a low-carbon economy will not necessarily harm their long-term growth strategies."[111]

106. Guobin Yang, "'Green Dam' as a Case of Online Activism in China," Columbia University Press (blog), 1 July 2009. Available at <https://www.cupblog.org/2009/07/01/green-dam-as-a-case-of-online-activism-in-china/>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

107. See Kostka and Hobbs 2012; Lorentzen, Landry, and Yasuda 2014.

108. Cames et al. 2016, 152.

109. Environmental Investigation Agency, "CFC-11 Illegal Production and Use in China: Blowing It," Environmental Investigation Agency, 9 July 2018. Available at <https://eia-international.org/report/blowing-it/>. Accessed September 21, 2020.

110. See "Global Market Outlook for Solar Power (2018-2022)" report, available at <https://www.solarpowereurope.org/global-market-outlook-2018-2022/>, accessed 21 September 2020; Global Wind Energy Council statistics and wind report, available at <http://gwec.net/global-figures/graphs/> and <https://gwec.net/global-wind-report-2018/>, accessed 21 September 2020. Nine of the ten largest solar exporters are Chinese, with the tenth being a Chinese–Canadian joint venture. David Kirton, "China's Solar-Panel Makers Dominate Global Exports," *Caixin Global*, 24 January 2019. Available at <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2019-01-24/chinas-solar-panel-makers-dominate-global-exports-101374069.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

111. Falkner 2016.

Nevertheless, the type of renewable energy technology that China is exporting has more to do with its industries' interests than with what is needed abroad. Take, for example, China's global promotion of ultra-high-voltage electricity grids developed by one of its gargantuan state-owned enterprises, State Grid. Although lauded from a climate-change angle as a potential solution for reducing intermittency problems of renewables by linking more distant power sources with less wasted current, the actual grids being constructed are mostly in countries where fossil fuels dominate.[112]

As these examples illustrate, heterogeneity does not have a straightforward relationship with international cooperation or confrontation. Rather, it helps explain the nature of the domestic constraints and incentives that a government brings to the international table. Greater heterogeneity is likely to produce tougher and more drawn-out international negotiations as well as increasing the likelihood of implementation failure, requiring more monitoring and possibly enforcement in international agreements. Partial compliance may in turn make it more difficult for other governments to assess Beijing's intentions to determine whether Beijing reneged after negotiating in bad faith or simply lacked the capacity to bring wayward domestic actors in line.

Centrality and Heterogeneity: Malleability and Movement

As Table 1 illustrates, centrality and heterogeneity do not map neatly onto one another. Some highly central issues are also highly heterogeneous, such as cyber sovereignty and climate change. Some highly central issues are characterized by relatively low heterogeneity, such as Taiwan. Some issues are characterized by low centrality and low heterogeneity, such as most issues before the United Nations and China's involvement in international peacekeeping. Finally, some low-centrality issues are characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity, like nonproliferation agreements to halt the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and related missile technology. These are not issues that directly affect the core pillars of regime legitimacy; therefore, China has not invested much international effort in addressing them,[113] but national-level cooperation has been undermined by subnational Chinese actors with a strong countervailing interest. For example, Johnston notes that China "played an important role in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (helping redesign a key reactor to reduce Iran's future plutonium output)," but also failed to halt the export of ballistic missile technology to Iran.[114]

112. James Temple, "China's Giant Transmission Grid Could Be the Key to Cutting Climate Emissions," *MIT Technology Review*. 8 November 2018. Available at <https://www.technologyreview.com/2018/11/08/138280/chinas-giant-transmission-grid-could-be-the-key-to-cutting-climate-emissions/>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

113. As Kastner, Pearson, and Rector note, China has "generally complied with the regime since the late 1980s without investing significant resources in organizing or sustaining cooperation." Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2018, 139.

114. Johnston 2019a, 29.

Yet no static representation (as in Table 1) depicts the malleability and movement of issues as domestic actors try to manipulate the apparent centrality and heterogeneity of a given issue. For example, subnational actors may link their demands to a central pillar in order to increase the likelihood of side payments or loopholes that protect them from international commitments. In a bidding war for government attention, subnational actors that amplify the centrality of their interests are more likely to succeed than those whose interests remain peripheral and parochial.

For example, during protracted negotiations over China's admission to the WTO, an array of industries, ministries, and provincial governments lobbied heavily for continued protection, some more successfully than others. The telecommunications industry and its affiliated ministry, the Ministry of Information Industries, succeeded by linking demands for protection to the national interest rather than a desire to avoid market competition. As Pearson notes, "Industry officials claimed foreign Internet providers would use access to China's Internet markets to steal economic information, disseminate propaganda via email, and use the Internet to support dissidents or undermine the party. Such arguments tapped into deep worries about loss of Chinese sovereignty to foreign powers. Widespread fear of social unrest made such arguments especially potent."[115]

TABLE 1: *Domestic centrality and heterogeneity in China's international approach*

	Low heterogeneity	*High heterogeneity*
High centrality	• "Homeland" issues; e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang • Maritime and island disputes	• Internet governance • Climate change • Trade • Belt and Road Initiative • Exchange rates
Low centrality	• Most issues before the United Nations; e.g., peacekeeping • Ottawa Treaty banning landmines	• Iran nuclear deal

In addition, the government may also try to increase the centrality of an international issue in order to reduce domestic dissent and demonstrate resolve in international negotiations. For example, by framing resistance in Hong Kong and the United States–China trade war as part of a national struggle reminiscent of the Opium War, Korean War, and other protracted disputes in which China eventually prevailed, the Chinese government has built public support for the costs of conflict, raised the domestic cost of international concessions, and signaled its intent to stand firm against foreign pressure. As Shi and Zhu note, the Chinese government has used its propaganda powers to frame the

115. Pearson 2001, 362–63.

United States–China trade war as an existential struggle for the Chinese nation's development. When framed as a geopolitical struggle with the United States, Chinese survey respondents were much more supportive of the government's handling of the trade war than when the trade war's economic costs were mentioned.[116]

Conclusion

Can the LIO survive the challenge of China's growing influence and desire to reshape global governance? China's authoritarian character is at odds with key aspects of the system, particularly the emphasis on political liberalism and rules-based multilateralism. At the same time, the CCP has not spent significant energy defeating these liberal principles internationally except where they threaten its domestic survival and sovereignty. China has profited from its participation in the LIO and remains a staunch defender of the Westphalian order on which it was built. Indeed, at times the Chinese government has appeared more invested in preserving existing arrangements than the United States has, hence the irony of Xi Jinping defending free trade at Davos and COVID-19 cooperation at the World Health Assembly.[117]

The CCP has behaved strategically, investing in reshaping or rejecting international arrangements in issue areas that are central to its domestic rule and being more willing to free ride or defer to international practices on issues that are more peripheral. China's domestic "social purpose" does not require the wholesale destruction of the existing international order, although it favors a more conservative version that emphasizes Westphalian norms of sovereignty and noninterference. Within the United Nations, for, example China has sought to alter international obligations on human rights to emphasize the primacy of state sovereignty, oversight of civil society, and economic development.[118] At the same time, under international pressure, the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank adopted rhetoric about the environmental and social consequences of its policies similar to those led by developed countries. And the IMF applauded China's announcement of a debt-sustainability framework in response to international criticism of the Belt and Road Initiative.

To understand the variation in China's approach to international order, we have proposed a framework grounded in the domestic politics of authoritarian rule. Two factors, centrality and heterogeneity, shape the PRC's approach to various

116. Shi and Zhu 2019.

117. Peter S. Goodman, "In Era of Trump, China's President Champions Economic Globalization," *New York Times,* 17 January 2017. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/business/dealbook/world-economic-forum-davos-china-xi-globalization.html.> Accessed 21 September 2020. Michael Bociurkiw, "Is China the New Leader on the World Health Stage?" CNN, 20 May 2020. Available at <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/20/opinions/world-health-assembly-xi-trump-bociurkiw/index.html>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

118. Foot 2020; Piccone 2018.

issues in the area of international order. The more closely an international issue touches upon one or more of the central pillars of the regime's rule, the more the regime will invest internationally in that issue and resist international pressure. The greater the heterogeneity of domestic interests regarding an international issue, the more the regime will face competing demands from different subnational actors, requiring offsetting policies and partial implementation to appease countervailing interests. Although these characteristics are distinct, they can be strategically linked. For example, the CCP's nationalistic framing of the trade war aimed to reduce domestic heterogeneity by increasing its centrality.

Foregrounding the role of domestic politics is essential for understanding why and on what issues a powerful state chooses to invest in international leadership, and when it might choose to walk away from or shirk previous commitments. Our framework suggests that China's international leadership is more likely to be a byproduct of the CCP's domestic self-interest than a principled effort to provide public goods, although that was often the case for the United States. Acknowledging the primacy of domestic drivers also cautions against optimism that naming and shaming will lead to greater Chinese convergence with the LIO or hopes for a ratcheting-up of voluntary commitments and compliance.[119]

Domestic politics affect a state's preferences and negotiating strategies in ways that system-level factors, such as the balance of outside options or position within international networks of influence, cannot wholly predict. The strategic setting matters, but these system-level attributes are often endogenous to domestic calculations.[120] Although developed here in reference to authoritarian states, centrality and heterogeneity can provide a generalized framework to study the domestic pressures that governments across the spectrum of regime types face in relation to the LIO.

The future of the international order will depend on domestic political shifts not only in China but also in the United States and other leading members. China is not alone in shifting toward more ethno-nationalist policies; such trends are also apparent in democracies from India to Israel.[121] And many countries, including the United States, share China's ambivalence about some of the more intrusive elements of the liberal order, such as the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice.[122]

On the other hand, the United States and other "like-minded" democracies could choose to build an enhanced but less universal set of institutions, with demanding standards of membership that would likely exclude China and other illiberal

119. Anne-Marie Slaughter, "The Paris Approach to Global Governance," *Project Syndicate* (blog), 28 December 2015. Available at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/paris-agreement-model-for-global-governance-by-anne-marie-slaughter-2015-12?barrier=accesspaylog>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

120. For example, Kastner, Pearson, and Rector attribute China's growing interest in multilateral climate change cooperation to public consciousness around air pollution, a domestic shift that made China's "outside options" less favorable. Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2018, chapter 7.

121. See also Buzas 2021.

122. Lake, Martin, and Risse, 2021.

states.[123] China might be willing to change its practices in order to participate in some of these new arrangements, but only if the domestic price was not too high.

Our framework suggests that China would be more likely to show flexibility on issues that are less central. But even on issues that are highly central, such as trade, investment, intellectual property, technology, and the environment, their high heterogeneity means that the CCP may still be willing and able to make progress toward a set of international commitments. These negotiations are likely to be difficult and would require domestic side payments and risk partial enforcement to accommodate competing domestic interests. In contrast, on issues that are more central and less heterogeneous, the CCP is more likely to go it alone, forge an alternative coalition of states,[124] or work to shift norms in a less liberal direction.

Illiberal pressures from leading authoritarian states, along with populist challenges from within leading democratic states, might combine to produce a more minimalist version of the LIO. Reweighting international norms to privilege national sovereignty would require tolerating more political and ideological diversity than the "postnational liberalism" that blossomed after the Cold War.[125] A less domestically intrusive but still open and rules-based international order would help satisfy the Chinese government's desire for a world safe for autocracy alongside democracy.[126] Without such modifications, China's growing influence will likely lead to more conflict outside the system than competition over the rules inside it.

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123. See Hart and Magsamen 2019; Ikenberry 2020.
124. Lake 2018.
125. Börzel and Zürn 2021. See also Kupchan 2014.
126. Weiss 2019.

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