

Wukan villagers protest corrupt land sale, 2011

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [an example of paradox of repression](#) [2]
- [local community or neighborhood-level campaign](#) [3]

Timing

Time period notes:

Due to potential for the February elections to be cancelled, the campaign really did last through the election process.

September

2011

to:

February

2012

Location and Goals

Country:

China

Location City/State/Province:

Wukan, Lufeng, Guangdong

Location Description:

Rural coastal village

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Crack down on corruption in local government, stop land confiscation without the consent of the tenants.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 162. Sit-in
- 168. Nonviolent raids

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 034. Vigils >Candlelight
- 144. Stalling and obstruction

- 168. Nonviolent raids

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 034. Vigils
- 144. Stalling and obstruction

Methods in 6th segment:

Notes on Methods:

The "nonviolent raids" selected above indicate the taking over or swarming of government officials. Police were forced out of their offices and out of town and their facilities and vehicles destroyed.

During segments 2, 3, and 6, the campaigners were inactive because they were waiting for government response. While they weren't active in the field, they were constantly poised & organizing for action if necessary.

Segment Length:

3 weeks

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- rural villagers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Xue Jinbo, Lin Zulian, Lang Semao

Partners:

not known

External allies:

Zhu Mingguo, Wang Lang

Involvement of social elites:

not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- rural villagers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- provincial government officials
- rural villagers

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Villagers from neighboring communities

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

3 weeks

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

local government, riot police

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

siege, barricades, bribery (with rice and cooking oil)

Campaigner violence:

It is unclear how violent the protesters were in their taking over of government buildings. It is likely that campaigners struck police officers and brandished "improvised weapons."

Repressive Violence:

Riot police beat protesters with truncheons and fists, made many arrests, and may have tortured one demonstrator to death.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign had somewhat limited goals and a very tight focus. It seems that this benefited their "Achievement of Goals" score, but limited their "Growth."

Wukan is a coastal Chinese fishing village with a population of approximately 13,000. Located in the southeastern province of Guangdong, Wukan rose to international prominence in 2011 when villagers began protesting against corruption at the city level and unfair compensation for land seizure. Villagers claim that, since 1998, more than 400 hectares of land had been seized without compensation and that corrupt Lufeng city officials have skimmed more than 110 million U.S. dollars from commercial land sale.

Fed up with the lack of transparency, communication, and perceived corruption, villagers engaged in a sit in

protest outside of Lufeng government offices on 21 September, 2011 (Wednesday). Official reports indicate that around 50 villagers protested peacefully and held banners and signs.

As more villagers arrived on the scene, the crowd became more aggressive. Villagers blocked roads, damaged vehicles and equipment at a nearby industrial park, and “clashed with the police.” It is unclear if these clashes indicate violent action or who instigated the fighting – most reports from villagers indicate that the police are responsible. Of the protesters, three villagers were arrested.

Thursday 22 September 2011 about 200 villagers “besieged the police station” to demand the release of those arrested the day before. Villagers reported that more than 400 police officers and “hired thugs” attacked the villagers “indiscriminately.” A villager claims that police and “thugs” were “like mad dogs, beating everyone they saw.”

On Friday, the third day of protest, the Lufeng city government released a statement claiming “hundreds of villagers attacked government buildings” and that more than one dozen police had been injured in the clashes. The police retreated from the scene for several days under the direction of Guangdong party chief Wang Yang. Wang claimed he was willing to make a settlement with the villagers in exchange for a return to harmony. Some domestic Chinese political analysts believed he was only buying time to preserve his reputation until the next year, when he planned to be selected for a high level Politburo office.

Riot police and other officials returned to Lufeng four days after abandoning their posts during the climax of the riots. The government agreed to negotiate with a group of thirteen democratically elected representatives from Wukan. Two months later (December) the appointments were made by the government. However, before any negotiations could be completed, five of the representatives were arrested. The arrests took place on 9 December, 2011.

Of those arrested, Xue Jinbo died under mysterious circumstances on 11 December. The police claim that Xue died of a heart attack after admitting to damaging property and disrupting local services. However, his family disputes this claim. After being called in to view the body, Xue’s family was not allowed to take photographs or videos. They claim that his corpse showed signs of torture – lacerations all over the body, blood caked around the nostrils, and thumbs broken and twisted back – and that they have no family history of heart problems.

Starting on 12 December, villagers held daily protest meetings in Wukan. These protests continued throughout mid-December with villagers hoping that central government would intervene and assist in the investigation.

On 14 December, after Xue’s death became widely known, the protests intensified. Villagers stormed the police station. After evacuating, police officers blockaded the city and cut off access to the surrounding roads. 1000 armed officers attempted to regain control of the city, but were unsuccessful. The siege continued.

On 16 December, the government released a statement claiming that it would temporarily stop the sale of agricultural land to developers, but would not return the body of Xue Jinbo. At the same time, 7000 civilians from both inside and outside of Wukan gathered for a memorial vigil on both sides of the police barricade.

The government attempted to sway the villager’s opinions by offering rations of rice and cooking oil to anyone willing to switch to the government side of the conflict. They earned 100 supporters, but their efforts were shut down by villagers.

A breakthrough came on 21 December, when officials agreed to meet the villager’s basic demands. If the villagers cancelled their planned march, Xue’s body would be released and those arrested in the conflict would

be freed. The provincial government, under Wang, also agreed to make the village's financial records more public, to reevaluate local officials accused of corruption, and to redistribute the land which had been confiscated by the local government. The protesters agreed to Wang Yang's terms and ceased their action.

On 1 February 2012 democratic elections were held in Wukan featuring a secret ballot. The villagers elected more than 100 committee members, including protest leader Lin Zuluan and Xue Jinbo's daughter, Jianwan. According to The Wall Street Journal's Josh Chin the election was "free of the Communist Party meddling that typically mars Chinese election results."

Some observers credit the conflict's peaceful resolution to Wang Yang, whose "Wukan Approach" serves as a major aspect of his policies throughout the province. Others criticize Wang and believe that his détente was an attempt to keep his hands clean until the politburo nominations were completed. Wang was ultimately not appointed to the Politburo Standing Committee but he continues to use the "Wukan Approach" when it is applicable.

Additionally, the Wukan protests have served as a model followed by other Chinese protesters. The brutality and harsh crackdown that has marked "mass events" in China's recent past have largely been replaced by extended détentes and somewhat more successful negotiations.

Research Notes

Influences:

The behavior/strategy of campaigners and the policies of provincial government leaders have been copied in protests throughout China. (2)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

This case is tagged with "Regime Change" because free elections were held at the local level. These elections replaced corrupt, establishment officials with people who more realistically represented the village. While Wang Yang did get a boost in popularity for his handling of the case, he was never really "opposed" to the campaigners. The local government regime changed dramatically, the provincial government changed only a small bit.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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