

China Dissent Monitor

Issue 10: July – September 2025

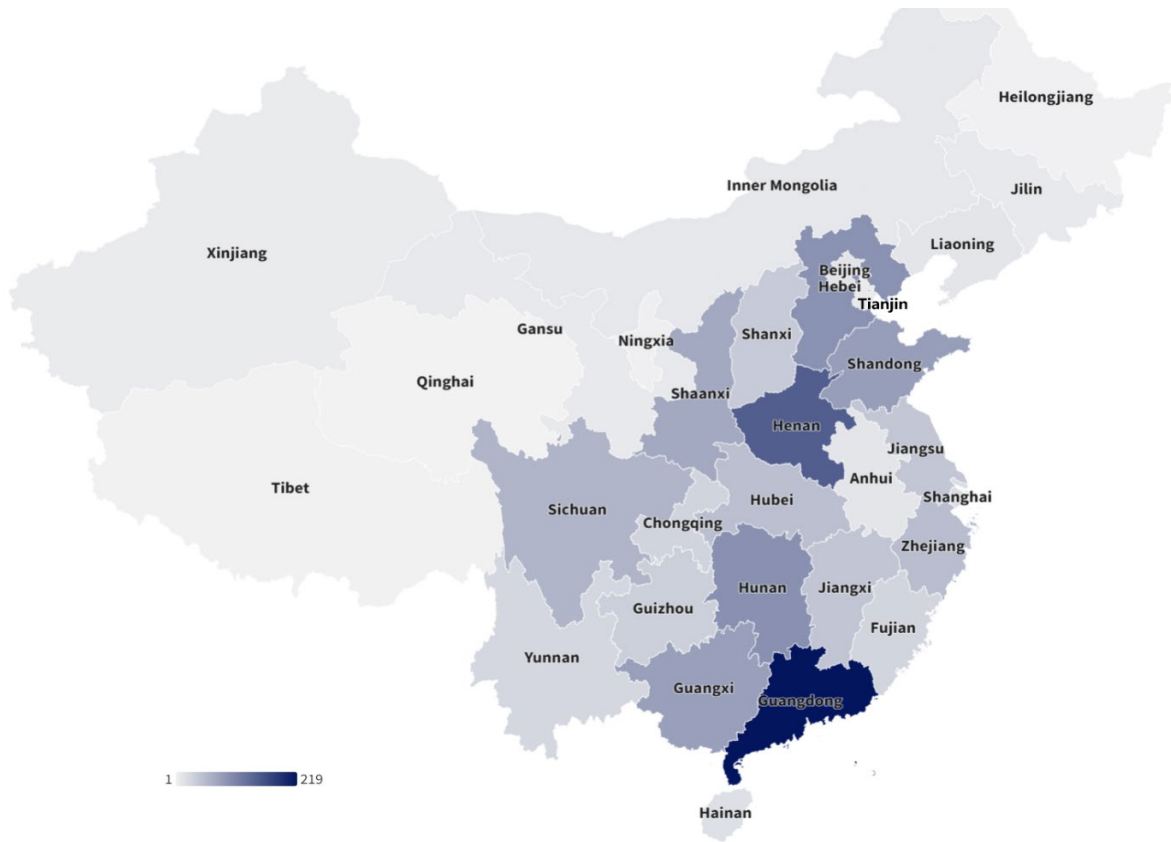
DISSENT EVENTS: 12,331

WHAT IS THE CHINA DISSENT MONITOR?

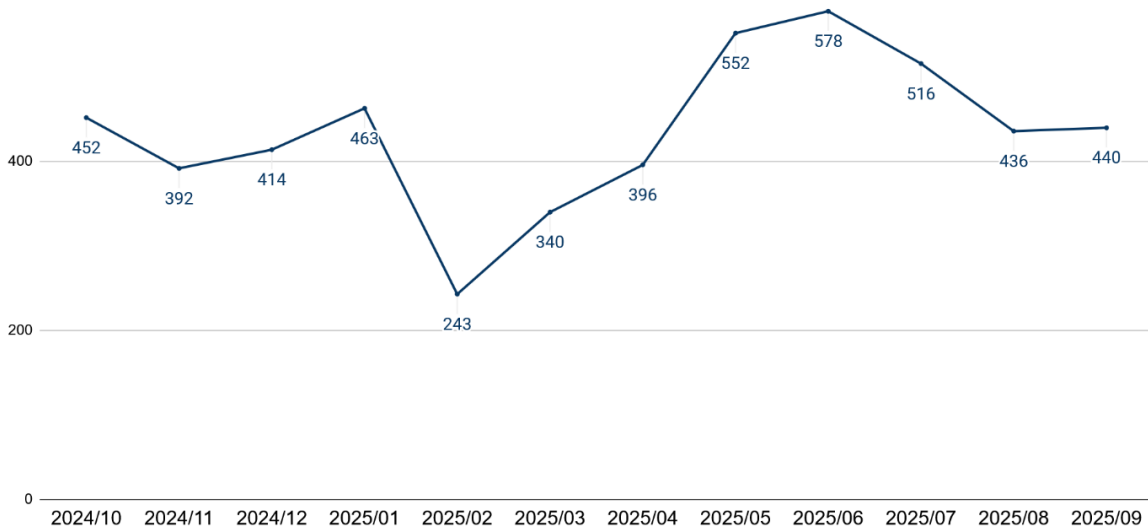
The China Dissent Monitor (CDM) collects and shares information about the frequency and diversity of dissent in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was created in response to the information gap resulting from media restrictions in the PRC and the risks associated with collecting information about dissent and protest from within the country. The project prioritizes capturing offline collective action in public spaces, though cases of less public and online dissent are also included to illustrate diversity among dissent actions. Sources for the CDM database include news reports, civil society organizations, and PRC-based social media. See the full dataset and methodology at chinadissent.net.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Persistent increase in dissent events.** CDM logged 1,392 dissent events in the third quarter of 2025, a 45 percent increase over the same period in 2024, and the sixth straight quarter of year-on-year increases in dissent. The majority of these protests were led by workers (38 percent), property owners (29 percent), and rural residents (15 percent), with the remainder driven by diverse groups such as parents, students, investors, consumers, members of religious or ethnic minority groups, and activists. The top province for protest events was Guangdong (16 percent), followed by Henan, Hunan, Hebei, and Shandong. CDM has logged a total of 12,331 cases of dissent since data collection began in June 2022.
- **Schools as an increasingly common venue for protest.** Two featured analyses in this issue explore dissent linked to education. The first looks at 182 protests by parents and homeowners in connection with school districts, highlighting sustained conflict over perceived unfairness in the distribution of educational resources. The second examines 168 protests by parents, workers, and teachers related to the growing financial strain experienced by schools as a result of China's economic downturn and long-term demographic trends. Together, these featured analyses illustrate the everyday impact of broader social and economic trends on access to education.
- **School safety concerns spark large demonstrations.** After a case of bullying led to massive protests in Sichuan Province this August, CDM looked into a dataset of 128 protests linked to school safety. Analysis indicates that these types of demonstrations are larger and more likely to prompt repression than the average event in the full CDM database.
- **Threatening to jump as a rising form of protest.** CDM has documented the growing use of threat-to-jump protests, in which people typically stand or sit near the edge of a roof or other high location to protest a perceived injustice. Among 307 such events, the monthly prevalence has quadrupled, and more types of protesters began using the tactic this year. A disproportionate number of the threat-to-jump events have occurred in Guangdong Province, and especially in the city of Shenzhen.



Distribution of protest events, July to September 2025

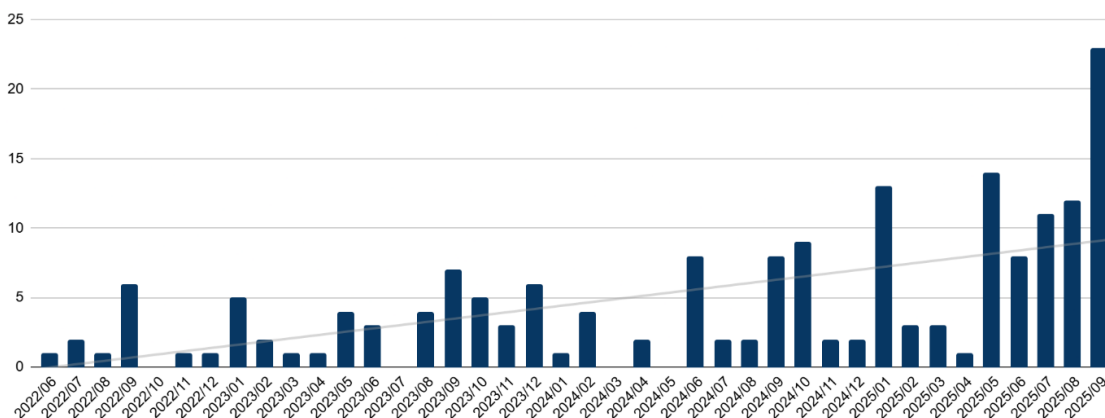


Total dissent events recorded, by year and month

FEATURED ANALYSIS

FINANCIAL STRAIN ON SCHOOLS SPARKS DISSENT

CDM data indicate that dissent events have risen over the past two years as China’s overall economic downturn has driven a surge in related grievances, and it appears that educational institutions are no exception. Since June 2022, schools at all levels and local education authorities have faced a total of 168 protests linked to unpaid wages or benefits and school closures or mergers, rising from an annual average of about 40 protests in 2023 and 2024 to 87 incidents in 2025 (through September).



Numbers of economically driven protests at schools and local education departments

Three main groups of protesters. More than half of the education-related incidents involved workers demanding payment for school construction projects from school administrations or local governments and their education departments (99 cases). The second-largest group of incidents were led by parents protesting school closures or mergers (41 cases), accounting for one-quarter of the total. Protests by teaching staff demanding overdue wages or benefits made up less than one-fifth (28 cases)

Protests by workers and parents are common in the CDM database, though they typically target companies rather than schools. Teaching staff are less active as protesters, with relatively fewer recorded incidents, perhaps because of the risk to their careers or status in the community. However, their demonstrations more directly expose the financial hardships faced by both public and private schools. In 2022 and 2023, CDM recorded at least three incidents in which hundreds of teaching staff staged sit-ins against pay cuts or walked out to demand unpaid wages (cases 52, 1806, and 2429).



Teachers at Yan Tai Development Senior High School staged a sit-in protest against the municipal government's plan to cut salaries. (Source: Weibo)

Local governments facing tighter finances. The increase in economically driven protests against schools seems paradoxical, as national-level data indicate that central government funding for education has [increased](#) year after year. The diversion of funds by local authorities may provide some explanation. Provincial audit [reports](#) released last year revealed that in some areas, education budgets had been withheld, falsely reported, or misused to balance accounts. Such practices long predate the central government's attempts to [prohibit](#) them, and local governments continue to divert education funds through [various means](#), one of which is the withholding of teachers' compensation or benefits.

The steep decline in China's real-estate property market has plunged local governments into a fiscal crisis, forcing them to divert funds from public services like education. Teachers objecting to pay cuts, like buyers of unfinished housing and construction workers demanding back pay, are ultimately victims of the collapse of China's property-driven growth model.

Long-term effects of shrinking populations. Schools also face financial challenges because of a demographic squeeze. China's institutions are struggling to meet the soaring pension demands of a rapidly aging population, leading to protests by retirees (see CDM Issue 5). At the same time, the sharp decline in birth rates has eroded the financial base of the education system. There is an oversupply of schools built and teachers hired during the population's growth period, resulting in more grievances by teachers and parents over unpaid wages and school closures. Protests arising from school closures or mergers totaled 18 incidents, or 11 percent of the 168 education-related incidents since June 2022, with primary schools accounting for about 80 percent of those cases. The remainder involved secondary schools or nine-year schools, reflecting the pressure declining birth rates have exerted on resources for the youngest students.

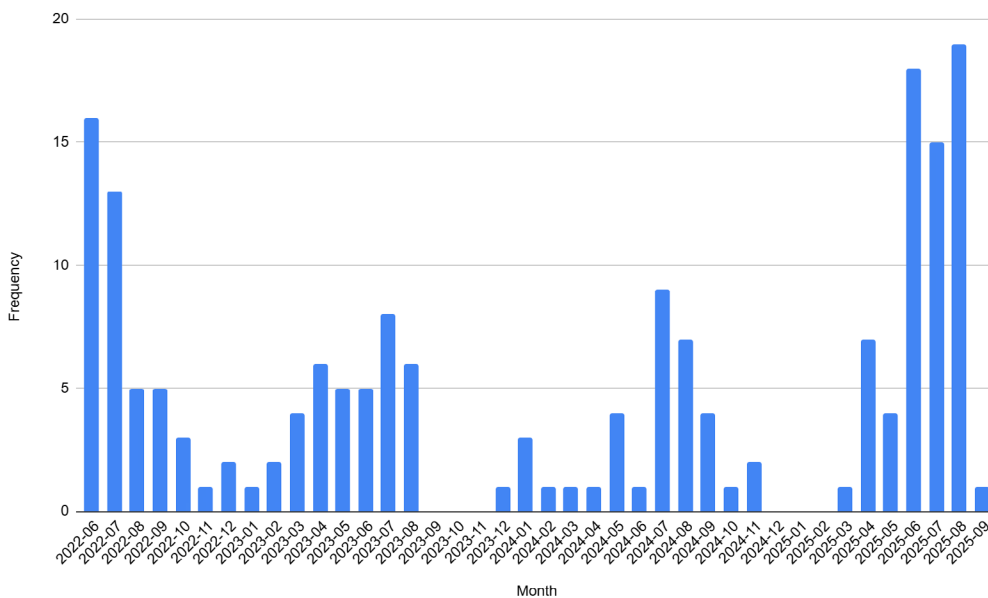
The decline in demand for schools is especially evident in rural areas, and one report suggests that this trend will accelerate in the coming years. Within the span of just one week from late August to early September of this year, CDM recorded eight protests over the closure or merger of rural primary schools in Guangdong, Henan, and Shanxi Provinces. Five occurred in Guangdong, indicating that even regions with comparatively strong fiscal conditions face mounting pressure to redistribute educational resources.

Although the central government has rolled out policies aimed at economic restructuring and boosting birth rates, both the deterioration of local government finances and the steep decline in population growth are long-term structural challenges that are unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future.

PROTESTING SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICIES AND INEQUITY

The central government’s “[nearby enrollment without exams](#)” rule for compulsory education is meant to ensure that children attend schools in their residential district. In practice, it has done little to reduce education inequities or ease demand for “school district houses”—homes purchased specifically to gain access to optimal school districts. With limited spots in top public schools, parents often pay high prices for such property. Unclear zoning rules, [sudden policy changes](#), and [strict documentation for migrant children](#) further intensifies competition, creating pressure on families that sometimes culminates in protest.

Cyclical protests and links to property-sector conflict. Since June 2022, CDM has recorded 182 protests related to school districts. The protests peak each year from June to August, just before the new school year and amid enrollment results, which may exacerbate parental dissatisfaction with school district issues. Guangdong Province accounts for the largest share of school district protests (22 percent), followed by Shaanxi (15 percent) and Henan (13 percent). At the provincial city level, Xi’an leads the country in such protests, followed by Guangzhou, Zhengzhou, and Zhanjiang. [Issue 8](#) of CDM also observed that Xi’an was among the top cities for protest per capita in China, with much of it driven by disputes in the property sector, which may point to the tensions between local housing and education resources.



Monthly frequency of protests related to school districts

Protests over structural inequities. Many demonstrations in this dataset are driven by shortages of public school spots and perceived unfairness in enrollment policies. In July 2025, hundreds of parents and students rallied in Shaanxi Province’s Xixian New Area after many students who scored above the admission threshold were denied spots and faced the costly alternative of private schools (case 4538). Similarly, in July 2023, after Xi’an’s high school entrance exam results were released, parents protested based on their belief that [returning students from Henan](#) were taking local school spots, raising cutoff scores, and leaving many local students without placement. Suspicions of inflated numbers and a [gray admissions market](#) prompted Xi’an’s mayor to promise a full investigation, and several officials were detained (case 1827).



Parents protest in front of the Xi’an government building, holding a banner that reads “My child will not be a casualty of new and careless policies.” (Source: China Digital Times)

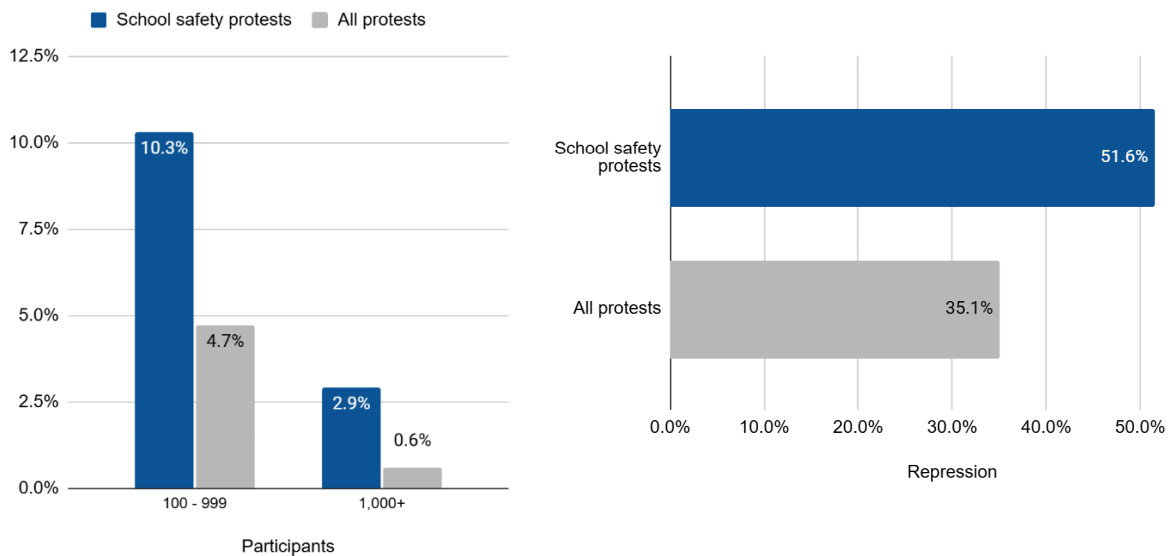
Protests over alleged fraud. Some of these events are also linked to allegations that property developers or authorities misrepresented school district information and misled families into making costly home purchases. In June 2025, residents of Hengda Dijing and Xingfu Jiayuan in Xianyang, Shaanxi Province, protested after developers and the government promoted these properties as granting access to the Boya school district. Later boundary changes assigned children to schools that were still under construction, preventing them from attending their desired schools and lowering property values. Police eventually suppressed the protests, detaining and beating several parents (case 4537).

Government efforts to ease school district housing tensions. Some cities have implemented [multischool zoning](#), bundling elite schools with ordinary ones to make placements more randomized, while others have introduced [teacher rotation programs](#) to narrow performance gaps. Certain regions have also experimented with abolishing the urban household registration (hukou) priority and replacing it with lotteries, weakening the incentive to buy property solely for school access. These policies have temporarily lowered housing prices and transaction volumes, but they also create new uncertainties, as many parents fear their children will be assigned to lower-performing schools. Critically, the reforms only redistribute existing resources and do little to address deeper structural problems, such as a shortage of high-quality schools and the urban-rural divide. Behind each protest lies the story of families forced to invest enormous financial resources and endure profound stress in pursuit of better opportunities for their children. Unless China significantly expands the supply of high-quality education, competition and resentment are likely to persist.

BY THE DATA

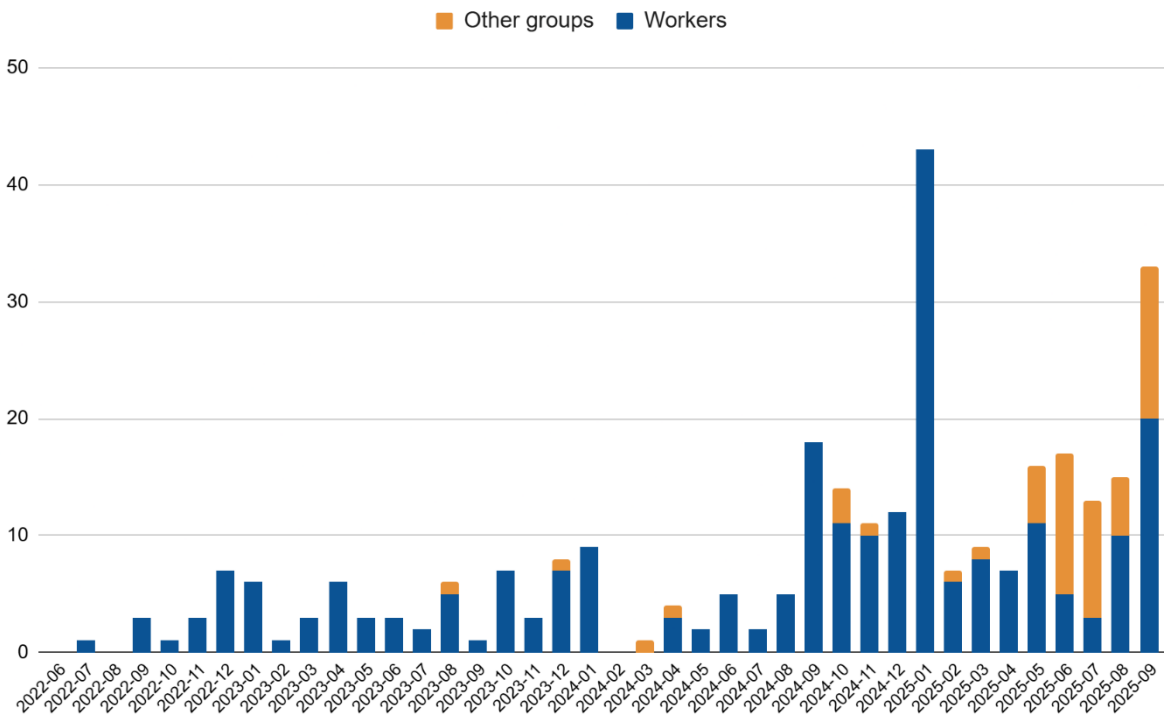
SCHOOL SAFETY CONCERNS SPARK LARGE DEMONSTRATIONS

After a brutal case of bullying at a school in Jiangyou, Sichuan Province, local residents joined together on August 4 to express [dissent](#) against authorities’ handling of the case and attempts to suppress their protests. This culminated in massive demonstrations on the streets in which participants were recorded chanting “no to bullying” and “give us back democracy.” Internet posts about the events seemed to initially outpace censors and received considerable national attention and [international news coverage](#). CDM data show that such dissent over school safety issues in China is widespread, with 128 protests occurring in at least 73 cities across 23 provinces or regions since September 2022. Problems at the center of the protests include bullying, abuse from teachers, unsafe food, or students who commit suicide after apparent pressure or mistreatment in school. Like the events in Jiangyou, school safety protests are notable in that they are often larger than average. In 13 percent of the cases in this subset, the demonstrations attracted hundreds or thousands of participants, whereas only 5 percent of dissent events in the full CDM database reached that scale. The targets in the vast majority of school safety protests are public schools, universities, or local governments. This may explain why CDM has documented repression in more than half of these events: other statistical analysis of CDM data has found that large-scale protests and protests targeting the government are both associated with repressive responses.



THREATENING TO JUMP IS A GROWING FORM OF DISSENT

Since CDM began collecting data in June 2022, it has documented 307 cases of “threatening to jump” (威胁跳楼) as a form of dissent, in which protesters typically stand or sit near the edge of a roof or other high location to draw attention to a perceived injustice. Although they rarely attempt to jump in practice, the act itself often involves real safety risks. In nearly all of the events, the focus of the protest is an economic grievance such as unpaid wages or stalled housing projects. Critically, this mode of dissent is becoming both more frequent and more widely adopted across groups. Its monthly prevalence in CDM data has quadrupled between 2022 and 2025. Whereas previously it was exclusively a method used by workers, CDM has documented its frequent use this year by homebuyers and small-business owners, so much so that they outnumbered worker-led events in June and July. The tactic’s spread beyond workers may be a product of greater public awareness: the increase in threat-to-jump protests by workers in the months leading up to the 2025 Lunar New Year was so dramatic that its relative visibility could have prompted other groups to quickly adopt it. Another possibility is that the marked overall increase in economic grievances during 2025 has motivated various groups of protesters to experiment with more risky forms of dissent.



Threat-to-jump protests by month and group



A threat-to-jump protest by workers in Dongguan, Guangdong Province (Source: Douyin)

Threat-to-jump protests are striking for their geographical concentration. While at least one event has occurred in each of 25 provinces or regions, nearly 37 percent (113 events) have occurred in Guangdong Province, which only accounts for 16 percent of the complete CDM database. Zooming in further, several cities in Guangdong stand out for their disproportionate number of threat-to-jump protests. Shenzhen, Foshan, Zhuhai, Zhanjiang, and Yangjiang all have between two and eight times more threat-to-jump events than their share of total dissent events would suggest. In absolute terms, Shenzhen has far more of these protests than any other provincial city, and all 43 of its events were led by workers. While the cause is unclear, it could be linked to the historical legacy of more than a dozen workers who, amid poor working conditions, committed suicide by jumping off buildings at the Foxconn factory complex in Shenzhen in 2010, a series of incidents that received widespread international attention. Such shocking past events have made threatening to jump a symbolically powerful tool for expressing desperation in the face of rights violations.

City	Events	Share of threat-to-jump	Share of all protests	Share of worker protests
Shenzhen	43	14.5%	4.0%	6.9%
Foshan	14	4.7%	1.2%	1.9%
Zhengzhou	14	4.7%	2.9%	1.8%
Dongguan	14	4.7%	1.8%	3.4%
Guangzhou	11	3.7%	3.5%	4.3%
Huizhou	8	2.7%	1.0%	1.6%
Changsha	7	2.4%	1.4%	1.3%
Wuhan	7	2.4%	2.0%	1.9%
Nanchang	6	2.0%	0.7%	0.7%
Fuzhou (抚州)	6	2.0%	0.3%	0.3%
Zhuhai	6	2.0%	0.6%	0.9%
Xi'an	6	2.0%	3.6%	3.7%
Zhumadian	5	1.7%	0.7%	0.1%
Nanjing	4	1.4%	0.8%	0.9%
Qingdao	4	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%
Jiaxing	4	1.4%	0.5%	0.9%
Zhanjiang	4	1.4%	0.7%	0.6%
Putian	4	1.4%	0.2%	0.3%
Yangjiang	4	1.4%	0.2%	0.2%
Hangzhou	4	1.4%	1.2%	1.3%

Top 20 provincial cities by number of threat-to-jump protests. Blue highlight indicates that the city's share of this type of protest is two or more times greater than its share of all protests or worker protests.