Reputation Management and Administrative Reorganization: How Different Media Reputation Dimensions Matter for Agency Termination

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Abstract

The public organization reform literature has convincingly demonstrated the relevance of media salience for administrative reorganization. However, we still need to expand our understanding of how different media reputation dimensions influence government decisions about whether to terminate administrative agencies. This article combines insights from bureaucratic reputation and agency termination theories to test whether different media reputation dimensions (performative, moral, procedural and technical) increase the likelihood of agency survival. Our findings are based on advanced machine-learning coding of 495,384 articles published in the *People's Daily* from 1949 to 2019 regarding 449 central agencies in China. Event history analyses and piecewise constant exponential models revealed that media salience significantly and negatively influences agency termination probability. Among the four reputation dimensions, only the procedural dimension consistently and the moral and performative dimensions in a certain period of time mitigate agency termination risk. The findings suggest that both the appearance in the media and the specific reputation dimension presented are critical for agencies' survival, and agencies should strategically manage their media reputation to meet the expectations of multifaceted audiences to decrease agency termination risk.

Keywords: Reputation management, Agency termination, Media salience, Machine learning, China

Introduction

Media salience, often seen as a proxy for political salience, plays a central role in shaping political-administrative organizations in democratic systems and influences the dynamics of governance capacity and legitimacy (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2018; Bertelli et al., 2015; Schulz, 2004). Research shows that media salience shapes the preferences of executive politicians, legislative bodies, party politicians and other stakeholders and hence influences the bureaucratic apparatus in parliamentary and presidential systems (Adam et al., 2007; Arnold, 2004; Lavertu, 2015; McCubbins et al., 1989; Spence, 1997).

This article focuses on ministries, departments and agencies[1] as key units in the central civil service of such systems. In democratic polities, agencies' ability to attract media attention not only affects their daily activities but can also be a matter of life and death, i.e., it may determine the survival of an agency. Agency behavior may change in response to different kinds of media salience; for example, agencies might adapt their structures, processes, rules and daily activities to what the media say about them (Fredriksson et al., 2015), blame political principals when facing public criticism (Hood, 2002; Mortensen, 2013; Mortensen, 2016), and accelerate or in some cases delay the speed of policy-making (Carpenter, 2002; Wolfe, 2012). Central studies of media attention indicate that agencies with greater media salience among core voters will have a higher survival rate during various rounds of public sector reform (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015).

However, few studies on agency termination have linked media salience theory with

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[1] The Chinese central administrative apparatus is more complex than the Western one and is organized differently. Therefore, for the purpose of this study we label all these units simply "central agencies" (Ma & Christensen, 2020).

organizational reputation theory. Inspired by the seminal work of Carpenter and colleagues (Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter and Krause, 2012), one can divide reputation dimensions in public media reports into four different types – performative, moral, procedural and technical. To our knowledge, no quantitative studies have sought to capture the different types of organizational reputation in the context of media salience and agency termination.

Our main research questions are accordingly:

- How do different reputation dimensions, covered by the media, influence government decisions about whether to terminate administrative agencies?

- How does this play out in a non-democratic context, i.e., are there typically Chinese characteristics of agency termination?

To test the connections between media salience, reputation types and agency termination, we draw on data concerning Chinese central agencies from 1949 to 2019. We use machine learning methods to classify 495,384 agency-related articles published in the *People's Daily* (PD) into four reputation categories and employ event history analysis and piecewise constant exponential models to test our hypotheses. We find that termination is less likely for agencies that are more prominent in PD, but the effects of different reputation dimensions vary across time periods. Specifically, only the procedural dimension consistently mitigates agencies' risk of termination, while the performative and moral reputation dimensions are significantly and negatively related to agency termination in a certain period of time; the technical dimension contributes little to agency survival in any round of mass reorganization.

Taken together, these findings contribute to the literature on agency termination and

bureaucratic reputation theory. First, we confirm the importance of media salience and the public information it offers to different stakeholders and how this information feeds into government decisions related to agency termination. Second, we elaborate on how the dynamics between media salience and reputation type play out with respect to agency termination. Third, we reveal that the different reputation types originating from the Western context have different meanings in the Chinese context. Last, the empirical evidence from this research may also enrich bureaucratic reputation theory.

We begin by introducing the central agencies in China and explaining how PD fits into China's media landscape. We then review the existing studies relating to agency termination, media attention, reputation management and bureaucratic policy-making. We draw on this literature to develop hypotheses regarding the influence of different reputation dimensions on agency termination. This is followed by a discussion of the methods and data used to test these hypotheses. We conclude with a presentation of our results and a broader discussion of the research and policy implications.

Context

The central agencies in China

The People's Republic of China has been governed by the Communist Party of China (CPC) as the sole ruling party since 1949, and the bureaucratic apparatus is organized according to a unitary system. The government is structured into five tiers: the State Council (the cabinet) at the central level and provincial, prefecture-level, county, and township governments at the local level. Party organs, such as organizational departments in charge of cadre personnel management, operate alongside administrative agencies at each level, and Party secretaries and

government heads are dual leading cadres in charge of Party and state affairs, respectively (Chen et al., 2020).

We focus on central agencies in China, which can be divided into six categories (Ma and Christensen, 2020). The predominant studies about the Chinese bureaucracy concern local government, while the overall understanding of their central counterparts is rather limited. One reason for this is the scarcity of data, but this study has developed a novel dataset to reveal the underlying mechanisms of media salience among central agencies. We exclude Party organs and military departments (including the Ministry of Defense), which are significantly different from administrative agencies.

The People's Daily in China's media landscape

PD, founded in June 1948, is the official newspaper of the CPC Central Committee and the most important media outlet in China. Almost all the most salient party-state news first appears in PD (Stockmann, 2013; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011). All Party and government organs subscribe to PD. Political elites, government officials, professional groups and the masses are all influenced by PD (Hu, 2020; Lu and Ma, 2019). PD covers the whole research period from 1949 to 2019, and it is the only one with such a long history among all the media in China, providing a consistent benchmark for longitudinal research.

The core idea of the reputation mechanism using media coverage is that the media should be an active player who delivers their own rules and values (Salomonsen et al., 2021). Previous studies reveal that the Chinese regime imposes extensive controls over the mass media, including PD, despite the media is under commercial liberalization (Stockmann, 2013;

Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011). Since Chinese mass media is under strong state control from the CPC, it is important to justify how PD could deliver its own rules and values regarding central agencies.

First, the Chinese regime does not impose restrictions regarding news about central agencies. The official propaganda strategy is, on the one hand, to provide "positive propaganda" such as cheerleading for China, the revolutionary history of the Party, and other dimensions of the regime (King et al., 2017). On the other hand, it's important to avoid skeptics of the party-state regime, controversial issues, and discussions that could generate collective actions (Lu and Ma, 2019). PD is functioning under these rules, but it is still an active player who delivers its own rules and values regarding the news about central agencies (Shen, 2015; Zhu, 2010). China adopts a single-party regime, which draws a strict red line for any news about its legitimacy, the party, and many ideological issues. However, it does not provide protection for the administration system, i.e., central agencies (Liang, 2020; Xu and Du, 2019). Even censorship apparatuses allow a great deal of criticism of central agencies and their officials and policies (King, Pan and Roberts, 2017; Stockmann, 2013).

Second, PD does not have any affiliation with the central agencies examined in this study. PD is a ministry-level news organization directly under the Central Committee of the CPC, and its superior unit is the Central Propaganda Department, whose head is a member of the Politburo (Liang, 2020; Shen, 2015). Central agencies, as key units in the central civil service, are affiliated with the State Council. According to PD editor we interviewed[2], the appointment and removal of PD cadres is mainly within the party system without the involvement of the

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[2] On August 7, 2020, one of the authors conducted a three-hour phone interview with a PD senior editor.

State Council, not to mention any central agency. This gives PD a relatively independent position when reporting central agencies, making its reports unbiased and neutral.

Third, although central agencies would try to influence how many reports on them appeared in PD and which aspects of their reputation to be highlighted, PD editors have the autonomy to deliver their own rules and values. PD dispatches "running reporters" responsible for different central agencies and how intensive the coverage is relates to how large the agencies are and how much news they produce (Shen, 2015). Agencies may prepare authorized press releases and general drafts for important occasions, and reporters can use these materials in their reports, especially if they have high 'news value' and interest to the readers (Xu and Du, 2019;Liang, 2020; Zhu, 2010). Agencies could initiate more "newsworthy" activities to achieve more exposure in PD, but whether and how they would be published are at the discretion of reporters and editors (Zhang, 2020).

Fourth, media reports on PD have recently had more diverse reputation dimensions. According to a PD editor, initially PD primarily covered public activities and achievements of the Party leadership, but it has increasingly paid more attention to the society at large. Ever since PD was founded, CPC decision-makers have defined it as "the kind of newspaper that connects the heart of the party and the hearts of the people" (Shen, 2015; Zhu, 2010). The PD policy has been revised to reduce government work reports and pay more attention to people's livelihood at the grassroots level. This observation is consistent with Figure 2. Before 1979, the procedural dimension in PD reports was dominant; since then, its salience has declined and become lowest in recent years. In contrast, the performative and technical dimensions have increased dramatically in recent decades. The recent diversification of reputation dimensions

is additional evidence that PD could deliver their own rules and values regarding central agencies.

Theories and hypotheses

The antecedents of agency termination

Public organizations are not immortal, as Kaufman (1976) asserted in his seminal study. Many studies in Western countries show that public organizations do in fact die, even though there is an ongoing debate about the criteria for agency death (Adam, Bauer, Knill and Studinger, 2007; Boin et al., 2010; Carpenter and Lewis, 2004; James et al., 2016; Lewis, 2002; Maccarthaigh, 2014; Rolland and Roness, 2012).

Kuipers et al. (2018) underline that there are basically two types of explanations for why public organizations die. The first and dominant one is that they die as a result of actions and decisions by political leaders, which may come in the wake of reforms, such as New Public Management (NPM) or post-NPM, or of single events (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Second, an institutional legacy approach focuses on how public institutions develop an ability to survive through different kinds of path-dependency mechanisms, but some of them will eventually die nonetheless because institutional support is gradually undermined and then disappears altogether (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

We will concentrate on the first type of approach. Broad studies of reforms, as the ultimate focus of agency termination, clearly show that political and administrative leaders are key actors regarding termination (Hammerschmid et al., 2016; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Executive leaders are often at the center of a tension between efforts to hierarchically steer agency termination and negotiation processes between different actors, whether in or between

election cycles, political turnover and opposition. (Adam, Bauer, Knill and Studinger, 2007; Lewis, 2002; March and Olsen, 1983). Boin, Kuipers and Steenbergen (2010) examine the environmental dynamics that open up opportunities for structural change; these dynamics often include political turnover, policy entrepreneurs and windows of opportunity (Kingdon, 1984).

The context of this study is the central Chinese political-administrative system. There are few reasons to believe that agency termination dynamics are very different from those in the West. The authoritarian one-party state is very hierarchical, and it is crucial for political executives to be able to control the design and development of the administrative apparatus. In a study of structural changes in central agencies in China over seventy years, Ma and Christensen (2020) found a dynamic situation with many agency terminations and births and considerable variation in the numbers and types of agencies. Additionally, agency termination varied greatly between different regimes, meaning that the top leaders had distinctively different administrative policies in this regard.

A more specific follow-up study of one crucial aspect of the power of top leaders with respect to agency termination found that written directives (WDs) from Chairman Mao meant a lot for the survival of central agencies. Thus, political salience was very important and apparently more important than in the West (Chen et al., 2019). The importance of size was also revealed in this study because smaller agencies relied more on Mao's attention, i.e., they had to compensate or be compensated for lack of size through this attention. Or, seen the other way round, higher-ranking agencies controlling core functions had more opportunities to interact with top leaders, and political salience matters relatively less for their survival, since they would anyhow get many attention.

Reputation management and bureaucratic politics

Organizational reputation is defined as "a set of beliefs about an organization's capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences" (Carpenter, 2010, 33). Reputation management, meaning the systematic use by public organizations of various symbolic means to bolster their 'presentation of self in everyday life' (Goffman, 1959), including image building, 'window-dressing', 'double-talk', etc., has increasingly been studied during the last decade (Wæraas and Maor, 2015). Busuioc and Lodge (2016) stress that reputation management is a basic component in increasing attention to accountability, which in bureaucratic politics can cover several types of vertical accountability (Bovens, 2007) but also horizontal or social accountability, which is most closely connected to media salience. Brunsson (1989) basic argument is that organizations' systematic use of myths and symbols to present themselves is intended to increase their legitimacy and hence gain access to additional resources and that balancing action and symbols is better than just relying on instrumental activities and production.

According to Carpenter (2010), an agency's reputation can be divided into four dimensions. First, the *performative* dimension alludes to the perception of whether an agency is delivering outputs and outcomes that relate to its core mission. Second, the *moral* dimension reflects whether an agency is viewed externally as "compassionate, flexible and honest" (Carpenter & Krause, 2012, 27) and regarded as protecting the interests of its clients, constituencies, and members. Third, the *procedural* dimension has a formal instrumental focus and concerns whether an agency follows the appropriate procedural and legal requirements in its decision-

making. Fourth, the *technical* dimension emphasizes the professional capacity, knowledge, and competence that an agency requires to deal with complex tasks and environments.

Focusing on the importance of symbols for decision-making and public policy has a long tradition in political science and public administration studies (Edelman, 1964). In particular, the neo-institutional approach in organization theory has focused on the importance of myths and symbols (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), which later led to an increased focus on reputation management in bureaucratic politics. An early relevant study was the book by March and Olsen (1976) on reforms in higher education, which focused on the impact of symbols and social aspects of decisions. March and Olsen (1983) followed this up with their study on the administrative policies of American presidents over time, where they wrote about the balance between short-term symbolic victories and long-term commitments. In the broad comparative studies of NPM and post-NPM reforms in Australia, New Zealand, and the Nordic countries (Christensen et al., 2007), the importance of myths and symbols is also discussed.

Since Carpenter (2010) redefined the field through his reputation concepts, there have been many studies of bureaucratic politics in general and public reforms more specifically (Carpenter and Krause, 2012; Christensen and Lodge, 2018; Gilad et al., 2015; Overman et al., 2020; Wæraas and Maor, 2015). What these studies all have in common is that they use the same set of core symbols, are becoming increasingly theoretically and methodologically sophisticated, and show the differentiated impact of reputation symbols on bureaucratic political processes.

Christensen and Lodge (2018) show in a study of three sectors in five countries how the use of these reputation symbols varies according to task characteristics, such as visibility of

output and outcome, political sensitivity, public resource commitment and public sector presence. Christensen and Gornitzka (2017) show how the use of reputation symbols varies with time, sector, task, and type of audience. A broad comparative study of China, the USA and the Nordic countries regarding how universities use reputational symbols reveals much variety (Christensen et al., 2021). Overall, Chinese universities use fewer symbols than their US counterparts but imitate some of the same core symbols. Within China, there is also much less variation between universities regarding symbols, i.e., there is greater standardization, which probably reflects the one-party state.

Media salience, reputation management and agency termination

Schillemans (2008) pointed to the fact that one important aspect of accountability in public organizations is horizontal or social accountability, meaning that leaders try to garner support for policies or reforms directly or through the media, including defending themselves in the event of a crisis. Mediatization of public organizations is, however, complex in the way that the different types of media are in a dynamic relationship with the public organizations they cover (Thorbjornsrud et al., 2014). Organizations try to influence media coverage through reputation management but also the public in general as a receiver (Karlsen et al., 2020). All of this results in public organizations obtaining a certain reputation that may not only determine the legitimacy and resources they receive but also their potential termination.

Schulz (2004) emphasizes that mediatization for organizations has four sub-dimensions: *extension* deals with how media help organizations reach new audiences, which is important for support. *Substitution* means that public organizations use media coverage in their external

presentations and processes instead of relying on traditional internal documents. *Amalgamation* alludes to the fact that public organizations use media coverage in internal non-media processes. *Accommodation* denotes changes in internal structures and competence to cope with the media, for example, hiring media professionals (Maggetti, 2012; Thorbjornsrud, Figenschou and Ihlen, 2014).

Building on this, Fredriksson, Schillemans and Pallas (2015) ask why some organizations to a great extent adapt their structures, processes, rules and activities to the media, meaning that they organize for the media (Pallas et al., 2014). The main results of their study point to the impact of having a modern NPM-oriented management structure, which uses mediatization to increase agency autonomy and increase the individualization and visibility of managers (Hood and Heald, 2006). Bertelli and Sinclair (2015) sought to uncover some of these complex dynamics through a study of massive reorganization processes in the British civil service. They showed that media salience reflects political salience, which further produces more attention and critical coverage. However, they explored one special aspect of this, namely, whether media salience was connected to agency termination. They found that if media salience connected to core political support groups, agencies' likelihood of surviving increased, regardless of whether the media coverage was positive or negative, the likelihood of survival increased.

Familiarity means favorability, and more media coverage helps agencies receive more favors, such as legitimacy and resources. PD is not only the longest-standing newspaper in China, thus covering the whole research period but also China's most popular newspaper read by political elites, professional groups and the masses alike. Given the limited space in PD,

agencies that receive more coverage are more likely to be considered by stakeholders. Prior studies have even shown that coverage per se is more important than the kind of coverage (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015), so that even a report about an agency concerning a scandal or crisis is good because it has already built the protection for this spilling into the leadership and hurting them. All exposure is good exposure.

H1 (Media Salience): Media attention to a central agency is negatively correlated with the likelihood of its termination.

Prior studies have illustrated the importance of media coverage, but few studies have explored the relationship between different reputation dimensions and agency termination. Each news report may illustrate a certain aspect of an agency's reputation dimensions. Recent studies have used the tweets of US agencies and the communication reports of European agencies to portray different reputation dimensions (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019; Busuioc and Rimkute, 2020a; Rimkute, 2020). In this study, we seek to explore the impact of each of the reputation dimensions on agency termination. The prior literature does not theoretically indicate the relative importance of different reputation types to termination and does not differentialize among them. Given that they reflect the varying aspects of organizational reputation, it is possible that some reputation types could be more important than others.

Unlike the UK context, where the different newspapers target different voters and stakeholders (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli and Sinclair, 2018), PD in China has to cover all kinds of stakeholders and the interests of a broad readership. We would expect different reputation dimensions to have different effects. Performative reputation refers to how

audiences evaluate the organization's "quality of decision making," "capacity for effectively achieving its ends," or "announced objectives" (Carpenter, 2010, p. 46). We would expect more news reports showing performative reputation to highlight the achievement of each agency, which may increase the support of both the political elites and the masses.

H2a (Performative Reputation): Media coverage of an agency's performative reputation decreases the likelihood of its termination.

Moral reputation reflects an organization's ethical behavior, including its honesty, integrity, and conformity with the law and social norms and fair treatment of individuals and groups based on an understanding of regime values (Lee and Van Ryzin, 2019). We would expect news reports highlighting an agency's moral reputation to attract the attention of the masses, since if an agency is perceived as compassionate, this will elicit public support. Although China is an authoritarian regime, an increasing number of studies have revealed that public opinion influences government decisions (Meng et al., 2017). Therefore, we can expect that if salience is given to an agency's moral reputation, this will help it win public support and decrease its risk of termination.

H2b (Moral Reputation): Media coverage of an agency's moral reputation decreases the likelihood of its termination.

Procedural reputation refers to the "justness of processes" in an organization and its deliberational, procedural, and decision-making norms (Carpenter, 2010, p. 47). It concerns whether public agencies' conduct is fair and reliable. However, news reports in PD highlighting procedural reputation may be different from those in the Western context. A news report about

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an agency in China pays less attention to agency deliberations and procedures and more attention to their ceremonial and procedural role in administrative activities (or rituals (礼 *li*) in traditional China). For example, many reports are about agency heads attending high-ranking decision-making conferences, state visits, welcome dinners, or many other ceremonial activities with top political elites.

A large number of news reports about agencies' procedural and ceremonial activities illustrate the fact that agencies follow government procedures constitutes the procedural reputation dimension in China, which highlights their political salience. Since most procedural and ceremonial activities are hosted by top Chinese political elites, we would expect that the more procedural and ceremonial activities an agency attends, the more political salience it will get and the lower the likelihood of its termination.

H2c (Procedural Reputation): Media coverage of a central agency's procedural reputation decreases the likelihood of its termination.

Technical or professional reputation emphasizes a particular body of knowledge, skills, and experience (Lee and Van Ryzin, 2019) and concerns an organization's scientific authority, methodological sophistication, and analytical capacity (Carpenter, 2010, p. 47). PD certainly attracts the attention of professional groups. More reports in PD about an agency's technical reputation may establish a reliable image of that agency among professional groups. However, professional groups do not have much influence on the decision-making of the Chinese government, and we would therefore not expect technical reputation to significantly influence agency termination.

H2d (Technical Reputation): Media coverage of an agency's technical will not significantly influence the likelihood of its termination.

Research Design, Methods, and Data

Chinese media in the reputation context

Previous studies reveal that Western media mainly play two roles, critical sources of mediated information about agencies (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015; Gilad, Maor and Bloom, 2015; Maor et al., 2013) and important informal accountability forums (Busuioc and Lodge, 2017; Jacobs and Schillemans, 2016), in the reputation context. Critical reports of central agencies were rare in PD because it could not act as an informal accountability forum as the Western media. We believe that as PD is the most important source of mediated information about agencies, its editors still have the autonomy to deliver their own rules and values by choosing which agencies to mention and which reputation dimension to present, without criticizing any agency.

The media audience serves as an intermediary between different audiences, and this role is well played by both Western and Chinese media. The mass media plays a key role in channeling, and sometimes even structuring, interactions between agencies and audiences (Maor, 2020). Media may also provide channels through which regulatory agencies signal their reputation uniqueness to the manifold audiences (Bovens, 2007). Quality media outlets are expected to discuss stories from several perspectives and to give the floor to several sources (Verhoest et al., 2021). Media can deliver multiple audiences' evaluations in a comprehensive way (Salomonsen, Boye and Boon, 2021) and act as the most important source of information for citizens regarding government performance (Arnold, 2004; Boon et al., 2019b). PD

definitely serves as the critical source of information for citizens regarding agencies' performance (Zhu, 2010), and it even became the only information source for the general public in China in a certain period of time (Shen, 2015). This situation is similar to the importance of media coverage of agencies in Western countries (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2018; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015). Termination is less likely for agencies salient in newspapers popular with the government's core supporters, regardless of the tone and sentiment of media coverage (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015). Ignorance by the mainstream media was worse than criticism, as even central agencies in China should compete for limited attention from decision-makers and the general public (Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019).

Western media always serve as an important informal accountability forum in which agencies provide accounts of their behaviors to the general public (Jacobs and Schillemans, 2016; Maggetti, 2012), with important repercussions for agency reputation (Busuioc and Lodge, 2017). Western media do not merely serve as neutral conveyors of information; instead, media actors are active players in the political game (Boon et al., 2019a; Verhoest, Boon, Boye and Salomonsen, 2021), which they play according to their own rules and values, and they frame stories accordingly (Deephouse, 2000; Salomonsen, Boye and Boon, 2021). As such, the media are able to intervene in the relationship between an agency and its audiences, either by furthering or by impeding the interests and activities of the organization in question and/or its stakeholders in a specific situation or over time (Frandsen and Johansen, 2015). The media, therefore, have an active influence on public opinion, including judgments on reputations (Ruder, 2015).

PD also has a function of public opinion supervision. It had established a Readers' Letters

Edition since 1950 under the party instruction of "carrying out criticism and self-criticism in newspapers" (Liang, 2020). However, critical letters only take one-third of the Readers' Letters Edition (Xu and Du, 2019). Those critical letters are carefully selected by PD editors (Zhang, 2020) and mainly criticize local governments, focusing on political inconsistency with the Party, corruption, separation from the masses, and work mistakes of the local government (Zhu, 2010). Only a small fraction criticize central agencies (Liang, 2020). As a party newspaper, PD is cautious when selecting critical letters. The critical letters should not be arbitrary, must obey and serve the overall situation of the party and the country and must not be too much or too concentrated. Those letters should let the masses see the party and government's response to negative phenomena, and strengthen their confidence (Shen, 2015; Xu and Du, 2019). In sum, PD could criticize the misbehaviors of local governments and sometimes those of central agencies but under the control of the Party regime. Therefore, PD could not act as an informal accountability forum as Western media.

Western media can be critical sources of mediated information and informal accountability forums at the same time, while PD could only be the critical source of mediated information, which could still be used to measure agency reputation. First, previous agency termination studies showed that media coverage is important for agency survival despite its tone and sentiment (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli and Sinclair, 2018; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015). Given the scarce space of important public media, the appearance and exposure of agencies could increase their likelihood of survival (Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019; James, Petrovsky, Moseley and Boyne, 2016). Second, we admit that reputation threats are the central concept of the reputation literature (Salomonsen, Boye and Boon, 2021; Verhoest, Boon, Boye

and Salomonsen, 2021). However, neutral information could also generate different kinds of reputation dimensions, and even neutral communications (Busuioc and Rimkute, 2020a; Rimkute, 2020), website pages (Christensen, Gavrila, Ma and Ramirez, 2021; Christensen and Ma, 2020), tweets (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019) and surveys (Lee and Van Ryzin, 2019; Overman, Busuioc and Wood, 2020) could have different reputation meanings. As public media act as a mediated information source, different reputation dimensions can attract different audiences, and reputation management still works. We believe that not only the appearance in the media is critical for agencies' survival, but also which reputation dimensions presented have impacts on agencies' survival.

Unit of analysis and data sources

We developed crawler software using the JAVA language, which crawled the information from the PD website (http://data.people.com.cn/). Articles that contained the names of central agencies and were published during the survival time of each agency between October 1949 and December 31st 2019 were downloaded and counted.[3] A total of 1,147,196 articles containing either the full names or the abbreviations of approximately 449 agencies were downloaded.

Since the Xinhua News Agency is China's national news service like the Associated Press and Reuters, most reports mention this as a source. Xinhua authored 651,812 of the articles, which may significantly influence our results. Therefore, we excluded Xinhua from our sample.

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[3] For some agencies PD only gives their abbreviations in its reports, for example, National Development and Reform Commission 国家发展和改革委员会 was also reported as Guojia Fagaiwei 国家发改委 and sometimes as Fazhan gaigewei 发展改革委. This abbreviation problem applied to 216 agencies. We tried to find all the possible simplified names, downloaded those articles published during the survival time of each agency and checked the data against the full-name data manually to obtain comprehensive results.

That gave us a final total of 495,384 articles containing either the full names or the abbreviations of agencies. (The distribution of these articles is illustrated in Figure A1.) The unit of analysis is the agency-year, and we aggregated the daily coverage of central agencies into yearly data. Other data concerning the level, rank and function of central agencies are from archival sources.

Dependent variable

We chronicled organizational change in central agencies from 1949 to 2019 by using archival records. The survival timespan of each agency, which runs from the year of its establishment to the year of termination (where applicable), is listed in the archive. We used this indicator to judge whether an agency was terminated or not in certain years, coding 1 for termination and 0 otherwise.

Independent variables

Our independent variables were media salience and different kinds of reputation. We used the total number of PD articles mentioning central agencies per edition as a share of the number of PD editions in each year to measure media salience. PD published six editions in 1949, and from then on, it changed the number of yearly editions fourteen times. In 2019, PD published twenty editions (Figure A2 shows the changes in the number of PD editions each year). The total number of PD articles mentioning central agencies per edition is a reliable indicator of media salience (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Based on previous reputation management studies (Busuioc and Lodge, 2016; Busuioc and Rimkute, 2020b; Christensen, Gavrila, Ma and Ramirez, 2021), we also classified each media report into one of the four reputation types. We took the total number of PD articles mentioning central agencies and classified them into reputation types per edition to measure the specific dimension of organizational reputation. For example, performative reputation was measured by the total number of PD articles mentioning a particular agency that were classified as performative reputation per edition for each year.

A common obstacle in reputation management research is how to measure different kinds of reputation. The primary measurement of bureaucratic reputation was developed through survey instruments (Lee and Van Ryzin, 2019; Overman, Busuioc and Wood, 2020) and artificial scoring (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017; Christensen and Lodge, 2018). A recent study demonstrated how machine-learning techniques can help us learn about organizational reputation by using tweets (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019). Since the average length of PD articles ranges from 1000 to 3000 words and a large number of words makes coding and machine learning difficult, we elicited the title of the article and the paragraphs mentioning central agencies, which each normally includes approximately 150 words of a similar length, using tweets (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019). We focused on these new paragraphs in coding and machine learning.

We used the supervised machine learning (ML) method to classify the 495,384 PD articles into four reputation types. This comprised two steps: hand-coding and ML algorithm training and application.

Concerning hand-coding, we randomly selected 4,900 articles from the pool, and one of the authors and two research assistants, who had enough knowledge about reputation theory and different reputation types, manually coded reputation types based on the keyword tables independently. We referred to previous studies to define the keywords for each dimension (Busuioc and Rimkute, 2020a; Busuioc and Rimkute, 2020b; Rimkute, 2020) and adapted them to the context of Chinese language, culture, and administration. (The keywords of each reputation dimension can be found in Table A1; examples of PD articles mentioning the four types of reputation are also listed in the appendix). While it is possible for each article to belong to multiple reputation categories, it is conventional for the ML algorithm to classify each one into a single category (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019). Therefore, the coders considered which reputational dimension best fits the articles. Three coders first independently coded each articles into one reputational dimension according to the frequency of the corresponding keywords. A total of 82.51% of the coding results were the same after the first round of coding, and they discussed inconsistent coding results and settled the differences to reach the final conclusions.

ML algorithm training, testing and application. Based on the hand-coded data, we developed an ML algorithm to code the remaining articles, and each news report was classified into one reputation dimension (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019). Among the various common algorithms that can classify text, we chose Gradient Boosted Decision Trees (GBDT)

as the baseline algorithm to build the classifier and used Naive Bayes (NB) and Random Forest (RF) as alternative algorithms to perform robustness checks.

GBDT is known to perform well on text classification tasks, and it is also one of the most transparent and interpretable algorithms (Anastasopoulos and Whitford, 2019). Through a process of training and testing, an algorithm is developed as follows: text pre-processing, training, testing, and performance (the specific process is illustrated in the appendix). Tables A3 and A4 show the confusion matrix and performance metrics of the GBDT algorithm after repeated adjustments and comparisons. The F1 scores of the four dimensions are 0.69, 0.63, 0.77 and 0.64, respectively, while the overall accuracy is 0.68. (The performance of the NB and RF algorithms is illustrated in Figures A4 & A5 and in Tables A6, A7, A9 and A10.) We used the classification model of the GBDT algorithm to classify the remaining data and gathered the distribution of each agency into four reputation dimensions. The process through which the classification was transformed into the reputation variables in the analyses is illustrated in the appendix (see Tables A26) and we logged the reputation variables as previous studies (Verhoest et al., 2021).

Control variables

We controlled for the conventional variables that may affect agency termination, including function, age, size, budgetary constraints, and importance (Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019).

A recent methodological critique (Carpenter, 2020) argues that it is perilous to compare agencies of different policy and procedural types with one another without taking account of their differences. The function of agencies is one of the most classic control variables in the

agency termination literature (Boin, Kuipers and Steenbergen, 2010; Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019; James, Petrovsky, Moseley and Boyne, 2016; Lewis, 2002; Yesilkagit, 2021), and it can be divided into different categories across various countries, such as regulatory, research, and service for external/internal customers (James, Petrovsky, Moseley and Boyne, 2016); foreign affairs, social policy, monetary policy and general (Boin, Kuipers and Steenbergen, 2010); and general services, security, economy and social policies (Yesilkagit, 2021). Chinese agency functions are complicated, and we followed the Chinese government classification to split them into four categories: macroeconomic and monetary; specialized economic; education, technology, culture, social security, resources, and environment; and administration and general affairs (Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019; Ma and Christensen, 2020). In the baseline regression, agency function is indicated by a dummy, which is coded 1 for economic agencies (including macroeconomic and monetary agencies and specialized economic agencies) and 0 for others (see Table A13 for the list of various agency types). In the appendix, we used the original four function types and interacted them with reputational variables to explore the possible moderating effects.

Agency size is measured by the total number of staff, which is also called full-time equivalents (FTE) in previous studies (Salomonsen, Boye and Boon, 2021; Verhoest, Boon, Boye and Salomonsen, 2021). Given its skewed distribution, we log-transformed agency size (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli and Sinclair, 2018; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015; Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2021). An agency can be created either with the approval of the National People's Congress (NPC) or through a directive of the State Council, and we developed a dummy to control for their varying legitimacy. Agencies can be ranked at

different administrative levels, which denote varying autonomy and resources, and we created a dummy for the ministerial level, using the vice-ministry level and below as the base category. Agencies can be listed in central leading small groups, which means they hold more authority in making key decisions, and we developed a dummy to indicate this.

We also controlled for the impact of agency director turnover, and a dummy was used to indicate whether the agency head was replaced. Agency age is one of the often-discussed factors in explaining agency termination, and there are two camps about it. One argument is the "liability of newness," which argues that new organizations are at greater risk than older ones (Baum, 1989; Stinchcombe, 1965; Wollebaek, 2009). Organizations can enhance their durability by building reputation among multiple audiences over time (Carpenter, 2001). The other view articulates that organizations can fall out of step with changing technologies and broader environments, which increase the risk they face as they age (Boin, Kuipers and Steenbergen, 2010; James, Petrovsky, Moseley and Boyne, 2016). Taken together, we expect that there might be a U-shaped relationship between agency age and termination. Agency age was measured by the total number of years since its establishment, and we included its square term to estimate the possible nonlinear effects (Boin, Kuipers and Steenbergen, 2010; Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019; James, Petrovsky, Moseley and Boyne, 2016; Yesilkagit, 2021). We included total central government spending in the logarithmic term to capture the effect of fiscal health on agency termination. Agencies enjoy different levels of prestige, and we followed prior studies to create two dummies of high and medium levels of prestige, using the low level as the baseline group (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Lee and Schuler, 2020). The summary of the key variables is listed in Table A4.

Model specifications

It is appropriate to use an event history analysis (survival analysis) method because the dependent variable is a dummy indicating the termination of agencies and our data set is time-series cross-sectional. We used a random-effects model instead of a fixed-effects model for two reasons. First, the Hausman test suggests that the estimates of both models are significantly different ($p > 0.1$), and the random-effects model is more suitable. Second, many of our agency-level controls are time-invariant dummies, and their estimates would be impossible in a fixed-effects model. In the regression models, we report robust standard errors clustered at the agency level to mitigate heteroscedasticity.

The political cycles of the central government over the past seventy years can be divided into several periods, and government priorities have shifted dramatically over the different time periods. We would therefore expect there to be variations in reputation effects over time; prior studies have shown what direction those variations take depending on the respective type of regime or top leader (Ma and Christensen, 2020). We use the incumbent political leaders in the various periods as a point of departure and divide the seventy years into three periods, namely, the time before the Cultural Revolution (BCR) (1949–1966), the Cultural Revolution (CR) (1967–1976), and the Reform and Opening-up (RO) (1977–2019). We would expect the effects of media salience and specifically the four reputation dimensions on agency termination to vary across the different periods. Piecewise constant exponential (PCE) models were introduced to demonstrate the dynamic mechanisms during different periods of agency termination.

Results

Descriptive analyses

The descriptive statistics of the key variables are reported in Table 1. We included 5,397 observations of 449 agencies from 1949 to 2019. Annual PD reports on each agency per edition ranged from 0 (several agencies during the CR) to 375.83 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972), with a mean of 8.36 and a standard deviation (SD) of 19.96.

Insert Table 1 about here.

The changing dynamics of annual media salience and the four reputation types per edition are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively. They show that central agencies have been increasingly covered by PD, and their media attention has increased over time. Across the three periods, media salience was lowest during the CR (1967–1976) and highest after the RO (1977–2019). Among the four reputation types based on the GBDT algorithm, the procedural dimension was dominant before the RO. Since then, its salience has declined and become lowest in recent years. In contrast, the performative and technical dimensions have been most salient in recent decades.

Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2 about here.

Regression model estimates

Model 1 of Table 2 shows that total media salience is negatively and significantly associated with agency termination, and a 1% increase in media coverage decreases the risk of agency termination by 2.85%. Attention to an agency in PD decreases the likelihood of its termination, and H1 is supported.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Models 2, 3 and 4 reveal that the four reputation dimensions based on all three algorithms are differently related to agency termination. We find that the performative, moral and procedural dimensions are all significant and negative. The results show that a 1% increase in the performative, moral and procedural dimensions decreases the risk of agency termination by 1.59%, 2.14% and 1.96%, respectively, based on the GBDT algorithm. The technical dimension is not significant under the GBDT and NB algorithms, and it is only negative and slightly significant ($p<0.10$) under the RF algorithm. The results suggest that our four hypotheses (H2a-H2d) are supported.

With regard to the control variables, we find that NPC approval, small leading teams, government spending, and the prestige of agencies are not significant. The turnover of directors is negatively correlated with agency termination. We find an inverted U-shaped relationship between agency age and termination. Ministry-level, economic and large agencies have a larger risk of termination.

We used the piecewise constant exponential model to estimate the varying effects of total

media salience on agency termination (see Table 3). Media salience is significant and negative across all three time periods, but its magnitude varies. Media salience was most important during the CR period, followed by the RO period and the BCR period.

Insert Table 3 about here.

We expected the impact of performative, moral and procedural reputation dimensions to differ across the different time periods. In Table 4, we examine their varying effects on agency termination across the three time periods based on different algorithms. We find that only the procedural dimension is consistently significant and negative across all three time periods under different algorithms. The performative dimension is significantly negative during the CR and RO periods under different algorithms, while the moral dimension is significantly negative during the BCR and RO period. The technical dimension is consistently insignificant.

The results show that the performative dimension is increasingly important since CR. During the CR period with political chaos, the performative dimension would contrite to agency survival by illustrating their achievement and necessity. Since the RO era, the Chinese government has emphasized economic and societal issues over ideological confrontation, which has made the performative dimension more important. News reports would highlight an agency's moral reputation to attract the masses' attention, since an agency would elicit public support if it is perceived as compassionate. The results show that the moral dimension was indispensable for agencies to get public support during the BCR and RO periods, except during the abnormal CR period.

Procedural reputation originally refers to an organization's deliberational, procedural, and decision-making norms in a Western context, but news reports in PD highlighting the agencies' ceremonial and procedural role in administrative activities. The results show that procedural reputation was vital and became increasingly important over time. The results also show that the technical dimension contributes little to agency survival, since technical terms or reports can neither arouse the interest of the masses nor impress political elites.

Insert Table 4 about here.

Following the tradition of previous studies about media salience and agency termination (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli and Sinclair, 2018; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015), we do not distinguish between positive and negative media reports for the following reasons. First, what stakeholders may learn from positive or negative news stories can be idiosyncratic, making it difficult to offer directional hypotheses about their tone and sentiments; this may therefore introduce a large degree of measurement error (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015). Second, the classification into four reputation types provides more accurate information than a simple positive/negative classification. Third, media coverage may be positive or negative, but mostly it is neutral. For instance, neutral reports account for 88% of reports in Western newspapers (Salomonsen, Boye and Boon, 2021). The majority of PD reports about central agencies are neutral, and very few are negative.

Robustness checks

We run a series of robustness checks to show that the results are reliable by using alternative model specifications and measurements.

Apart from the logit model used in the event history analyses, we used Cox and cubic spline models to perform robustness checks (see Table A5, A8, and A11). The Cox model is a conventional event history analytic model, while the cubic spline model, which includes the duration and cubic splines of time, could account for the potential time dependence problem (Beck et al., 1998; Nicholson-Crotty and Carley, 2015). The main results still stand. We also include different measurements of function type in the regression, and the model estimates using this new approach still stand (see Table A12).

We re-estimated the models by including the independent variables without log transformations (Tables A27, A28 and A 29), which show that the main results are similar.

We also examined the moderating effects of agency type on the relationship between reputational variables and agency termination, which suggests that they work to some extent (see from Table A14 to Table A25).

Apart from supervised ML used in this study, we also used the LDA model, one of the most frequently used topic models, to analyze PD articles in different periods, which are illustrated in Figures A6, A7, A8, and A9 and Tables A30, A31, and A32. The results show that the topic model is not suitable to extract the four reputation dimensions from a large amount of text.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article describes one of the first quantitative studies documenting the effects of different

reputation dimensions on central agency termination in an authoritarian regime. The results show that the total number of media reports significantly and negatively influences the probability of agency termination, suggesting that media coverage is relevant to the survival of administrative agencies. Among the four reputation dimensions (Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter and Krause, 2012), only the procedural dimension consistently mitigates agencies' risk of termination, the performative and moral reputation dimensions are significantly negatively related to agency termination in a certain period of time, while the technical dimension contributes little to agency survival in the various rounds of mass reorganization. These findings add to our understanding of agency termination and contribute to the literature on organizational restructuring (Busuioc and Lodge, 2017; Busuioc and Rimkute, 2020b; Rimkute, 2020).

The findings also deepen our understanding of reputation management and its relevance for agency termination (Salomonsen, Boye and Boon, 2021). Prior studies confirm the importance of media salience for agency survival (Bertelli and Sinclair, 2015; Bertelli, Sinclair and Lee, 2015; Maggetti, 2012), but they do not differentiate between reputation types and their varying effects on agency termination. Our findings show that media salience in general and reputation management specifically affect the risk of agency termination. It is presumed that the space available in PD is fixed and that agencies therefore have to compete with one another for coverage and to attract the attention of various stakeholders (Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019). Media salience can partially reflect the strategic importance and capacity of an agency in competing with its peers to elicit resources and attention, and stronger agencies can thus survive even during reorganization campaigns (Karlsen, Kolltveit, Schillemans and

Thorbjørnsrud, 2020).

Chinese central agencies mainly use performative and technical dimensions, but their effects on agency termination are much lower than those of moral and procedural ones, which is similar to the case of Chinese universities (Christensen and Gornitzka, 2017; Christensen and Lodge, 2018). In regard to reputation management, less is more, and agencies disclosing more about less-attended aspects such as procedural and moral reputation dimensions will benefit more in terms of survival. Since economic development replaced ideological confrontation as the dominate party-state rule since RO (Wang et al., 2021), the performative reputation has been increasingly important for the Chinese government. In line with our expectation, the technical dimension is consistently less salient than other dimensions for agency termination.

Procedural reputation is highly correlated with political salience, and it matters significantly for agency termination. Since most procedural and ceremonial activities are hosted by top Chinese political elites, agencies with more procedural reputation dimensions will have more political salience. The moral dimension is more likely to elicit support and legitimacy from the masses, which help agencies survive except during the abnormal CR period. The moral dimension can be most easily manipulated by agencies, and they are incentivized to publish more articles illustrating their moral reputation. The performative reputation has become increasingly important since RO, and agencies can highlight their achievement and capacity for effectively achieving their ends to increase the support of both political elites and the masses.

For administrative agencies to survive and develop, it is crucial to manage public relations,

particularly media coverage (Boon, Salomonsen and Verhoest, 2019a; Boon et al., 2020), as this is highly relevant to their institutional legitimacy (Mortensen, 2013; Mortensen, 2016; Wolfe, 2012). Although all reputation dimensions matter to some extent, it is procedural, moral and performative dimensions that have effects on central agencies. Organizations should consider which reputation dimensions are most salient to their survival and progress and should develop effective strategies to cater to the needs and preferences of their key stakeholders, i.e., top leaders (Chen, Christensen and Ma, 2019). Our findings also show that different reputation dimensions matter differently across the various time periods. In other words, organizations have to match their reputation management strategies to sociopolitical circumstances (Lavertu, 2015; Stromberg, 2015; Wolfe et al., 2013); otherwise, reputation might be a curse instead of an asset.

There are three ways in which this study is limited, and we recommend that future studies should be performed to better understand agency survival and termination. First, the effects of reputation dimensions might be moderated by other contextual and agency-specific variables, and these can be explored in future studies. Second, the mechanisms by which reputation dimensions matter in agency termination may be examined in qualitative studies. Finally, the findings might not be entirely applicable to other contexts with different political regimes and media circumstances, and we hope future studies will be able to replicate and extend our results.

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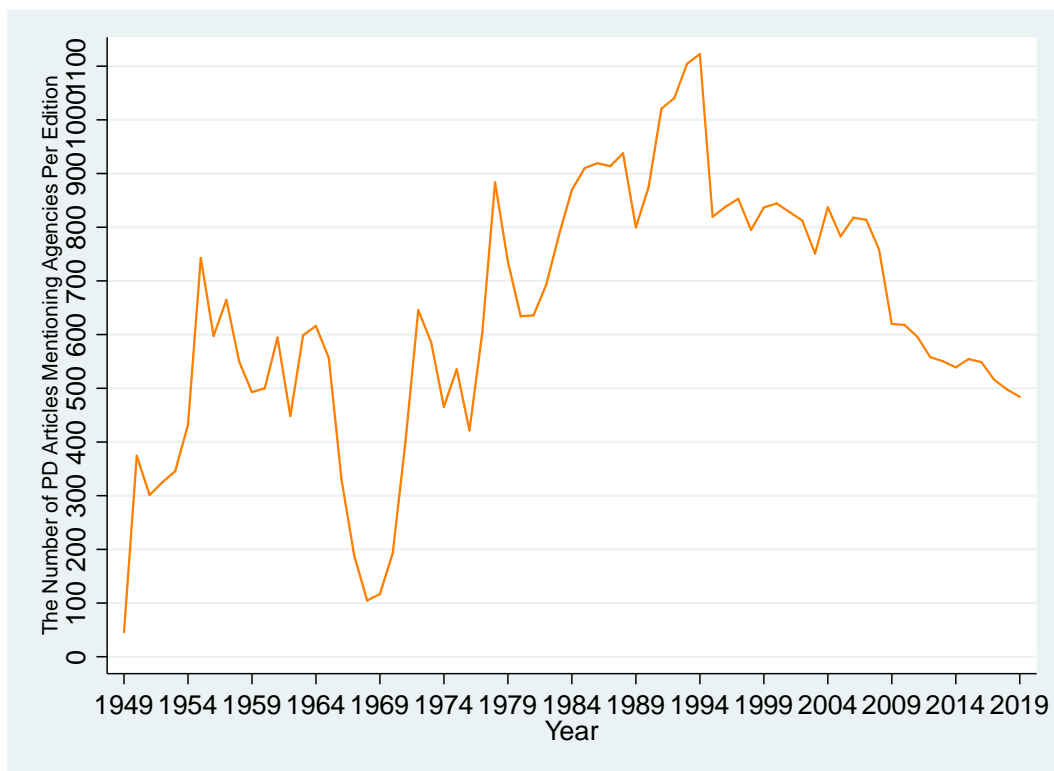
Figures and Tables

Figure 1 Total Number of PD Articles Mentioning Central Agencies Per Edition (1949–2019)
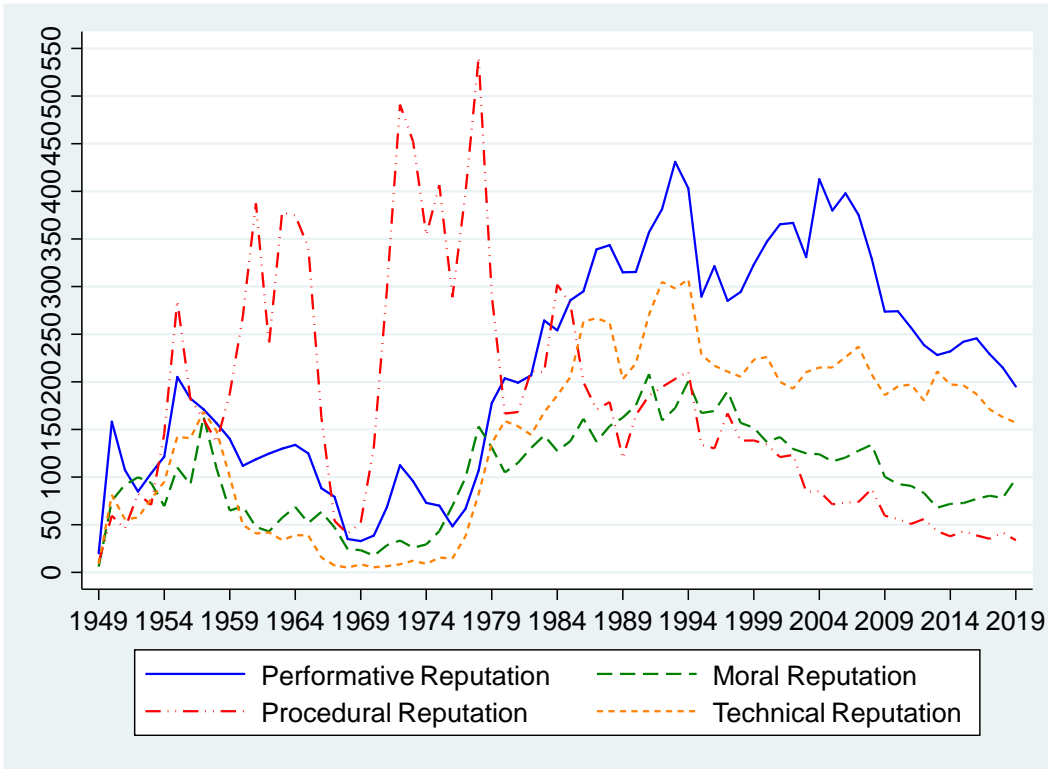
Figure 2 Total Number of Four Reputation Dimensions in PD Articles Per Edition Based on GBDT Algorithm (1949–2019)

Table 1. *Variable Definition and Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Total media	8.362	19.959	0	375.833
Performative	2.841	6.717	0	97.667
Moral	1.353	2.218	0	24.833
Procedural	2.288	11.460	0	261.500
Technical	1.881	3.839	0	51.250
Total media (log)	1.536	1.090	0	5.932
Performative (log)	0.870	0.836	0	4.592
Moral (log)	0.609	0.627	0	3.252
Procedural (log)	0.603	0.742	0	5.570
Technical (log)	0.697	0.732	0	3.956
Size	497.634	561.335	10	5870
Size (log)	5.724	1.035	2.303	8.678
NPC approval	0.622	0.485	0	1
Ministry-level	0.707	0.455	0	1
Small leading team	0.089	0.284	0	1
Head turnover	0.133	0.137	0	1
Age	10.737	11.095	0	65
Age (squared)	238.355	487.013	0	4225
Government spending	5637.327	9530.835	68.050	35168.548
Government spending (log)	7.341	1.603	4.220	10.468
Economic function	0.472	0.499	0	1
High prestige	0.171	0.376	0	1
Medium prestige	0.615	0.487	0	1
Low prestige	0.214	0.410	0	1

Note: *N*=5397. The statistics of reputational dimensions per edition using the GBDT algorithm are reported.

Table 2. *Event History Analysis of Central Agency Termination*

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Variable	Baseline	GBDT	NB	RF
Total media (log)	-2.854***			
	(0.404)			
Performative (log)		-1.591***	-2.008***	-1.505***
		(0.533)	(0.497)	(0.484)
Moral (log)		-2.140***	-1.508***	-1.562***
		(0.516)	(0.428)	(0.506)
Procedural (log)		-1.962***	-2.110***	-2.104***
		(0.350)	(0.363)	(0.350)
Technical (log)		-0.154	-0.333	-0.839*
		(0.461)	(0.404)	(0.437)
Size (log)	0.314**	0.256*	0.260*	0.257*
	(0.156)	(0.139)	(0.140)	(0.138)
Ministry-level	1.004***	1.082***	1.055***	1.037***
	(0.351)	(0.309)	(0.309)	(0.302)
NPC approval	0.338	0.363	0.342	0.336
	(0.326)	(0.284)	(0.286)	(0.279)
Small leading team	-0.358	-0.162	-0.194	-0.226
	(0.473)	(0.439)	(0.450)	(0.440)
Head turnover	-2.226**	-1.924**	-1.869**	-1.920**
	(0.871)	(0.783)	(0.779)	(0.782)
Age	0.390***	0.325***	0.326***	0.313***
	(0.127)	(0.113)	(0.116)	(0.115)
Age (squared)	-0.00536**	-0.00456**	-0.00452**	-0.00431**
	(0.00213)	(0.00196)	(0.00195)	(0.00195)
Economic function	1.001**	0.753**	0.739**	0.755**
	(0.409)	(0.350)	(0.351)	(0.345)
High prestige	-0.767	-0.709	-0.643	-0.603
	(0.629)	(0.556)	(0.568)	(0.554)
Medium prestige	0.306	0.194	0.232	0.225
	(0.455)	(0.394)	(0.401)	(0.389)
Government spending(log)	-0.0188	-0.0937	-0.0921	-0.0892
	(0.111)	(0.0984)	(0.101)	(0.0989)
N	5397	5397	5397	5397
AIC	2225.0	2225.9	2231.1	2230.5
BIC	2317.3	2338.0	2343.2	2342.5
Log likelihood	-1098.5	-1096.0	-1098.6	-1098.2
χ^2	122.6	106.8	102.2	107.7

Note: Robust standard errors clustered by agency are in parentheses. AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01 (two-tailed).

Table 3. *Piecewise Constant Exponential Model of Central Agency Termination with Total Media Salience*

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)
Time	1949-1966	1967-1976	1977-2019
Time period	-8.505***	-7.867***	-1.228
	(1.123)	(1.667)	(0.967)
Total media (log)	-0.882***	-2.340***	-1.825***
	(0.146)	(0.459)	(0.143)
Size (log)	0.325**	-0.0866	0.208
	(0.111)	(0.142)	(0.107)
Ministry-level	1.214***	0.286	0.688**
	(0.363)	(0.306)	(0.215)
NPC approval	-0.790*	-0.122	0.407*
	(0.378)	(0.448)	(0.200)
Small leading team	-1.180**	1.118**	0.374
	(0.458)	(0.394)	(0.399)
Head turnover	-4.073*	0.0783	0.240
	(1.704)	(0.735)	(0.336)
Age	4.526***	0.483***	0.169***
	(0.426)	(0.103)	(0.0324)
Age (squared)	-0.490***	-0.0114	-0.00314**
	(0.0816)	(0.00591)	(0.00115)
Economic function	-0.102	0.168	0.630**
	(0.209)	(0.265)	(0.207)
High prestige	-0.738*	-1.533**	-0.681
	(0.370)	(0.484)	(0.431)
Medium prestige	-0.0113	-0.689*	-0.0393
	(0.288)	(0.281)	(0.282)
Government spending (log)	-0.672***	0.497*	-0.398***
	(0.149)	(0.207)	(0.0883)
N	5885		
AIC	-3131.8		
BIC	-2871.2		
Log likelihood	1604.9		
χ^2	5931.7		

Note: See Table 2.

Table 4. *Piecewise Constant Exponential Model of Central Agency Termination with Four Reputation Types Based on Different Algorithms*

Model	GBDT			NB			RF		
Time	1949-1966	1967-1976	1977-2019	1949-1966	1967-1976	1977-2019	1949-1966	1967-1976	1977-2019
Time period	-8.941***	-8.077***	-1.333	-8.641***	-8.276***	-1.174	-8.888***	-8.255***	-1.215
	(1.130)	(1.742)	(0.938)	(1.158)	(1.752)	(0.925)	(1.162)	(1.837)	(0.920)
Performative (log)	0.659	-5.519*	-0.735**	0.566	-7.965*	-0.776**	0.643	-7.932*	-0.907**
	(0.371)	(2.229)	(0.279)	(0.378)	(3.443)	(0.242)	(0.456)	(3.742)	(0.298)
Moral (log)	-1.634**	-1.241	-1.662***	-1.383**	-0.856	-1.795***	-1.331**	-0.752	-1.339***
	(0.511)	(1.433)	(0.385)	(0.503)	(0.872)	(0.363)	(0.500)	(1.529)	(0.406)
Procedural (log)	-0.985**	-1.706*	-2.041***	-0.995**	-1.802**	-2.181***	-0.849**	-1.852**	-2.366***
	(0.378)	(0.713)	(0.459)	(0.341)	(0.604)	(0.495)	(0.297)	(0.604)	(0.566)
Technical (log)	-0.0714	0.329	-0.370	-0.0108	0.714	-0.408	-0.181	-1.500	-0.454
	(0.344)	(1.530)	(0.293)	(0.365)	(1.727)	(0.262)	(0.344)	(0.976)	(0.263)
Size (log)	0.314**	-0.0898	0.231*	0.273*	-0.101	0.243*	0.295**	-0.102	0.221*
	(0.111)	(0.145)	(0.105)	(0.113)	(0.137)	(0.105)	(0.114)	(0.143)	(0.105)
Ministry-level	1.258**	0.260	0.845***	1.315***	0.261	0.835***	1.247***	0.191	0.843***
	(0.389)	(0.322)	(0.197)	(0.374)	(0.320)	(0.195)	(0.379)	(0.329)	(0.199)
NPC approval	-0.808*	0.0541	0.423*	-0.799*	0.0702	0.462*	-0.754*	0.0854	0.422*
	(0.374)	(0.483)	(0.183)	(0.374)	(0.476)	(0.183)	(0.378)	(0.484)	(0.186)
Small leading team	-1.083*	1.195**	0.490	-1.120*	1.163**	0.623	-1.141*	1.154**	0.571
	(0.481)	(0.415)	(0.418)	(0.468)	(0.395)	(0.402)	(0.471)	(0.393)	(0.418)
Head turnover	-3.955*	0.00396	0.191	-3.731*	0.257	0.195	-4.086*	0.0604	0.214
	(1.639)	(0.818)	(0.312)	(1.632)	(0.760)	(0.307)	(1.624)	(0.814)	(0.315)
Age	4.554***	0.458***	0.160***	4.533***	0.456***	0.167***	4.534***	0.445***	0.163***
	(0.495)	(0.107)	(0.0312)	(0.484)	(0.106)	(0.0309)	(0.494)	(0.102)	(0.0318)
Age (squared)	-0.496***	-0.0107	-0.00282*	-0.492***	-0.0103	-0.00296**	-0.494***	-0.0103	-0.00290*
	(0.0949)	(0.00628)	(0.00111)	(0.0924)	(0.00605)	(0.00110)	(0.0957)	(0.00569)	(0.00113)

Economic function	-0.178	0.158	0.567**	-0.193	0.0964	0.500*	-0.139	0.177	0.547**
	(0.210)	(0.271)	(0.197)	(0.227)	(0.276)	(0.196)	(0.215)	(0.273)	(0.197)
High prestige	-0.754	-1.518**	-0.717	-0.944*	-1.417**	-0.766	-0.697	-1.424**	-0.708
	(0.392)	(0.491)	(0.416)	(0.388)	(0.492)	(0.408)	(0.389)	(0.486)	(0.428)
Medium prestige	-0.0864	-0.819**	-0.135	-0.217	-0.708*	-0.119	-0.0626	-0.722**	-0.135
	(0.331)	(0.300)	(0.255)	(0.321)	(0.281)	(0.246)	(0.336)	(0.279)	(0.254)
Government spending (log)	-0.603***	0.550*	-0.426***	-0.597***	0.571*	-0.455***	-0.593***	0.594*	-0.436***
	(0.142)	(0.218)	(0.0861)	(0.135)	(0.223)	(0.0867)	(0.143)	(0.240)	(0.0849)
N	5885			5885			5885		
AIC	-3153.3			-3158.1			-3151.4		
BIC	-2832.7			-2837.4			-2830.8		
Log likelihood	1624.7			1627.0			1623.7		
χ^2	6290.1			6125.8			6344.0		

Note: See Table 2.