

# China's Strategic Censorship

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*While it is often assumed that authoritarian regimes inevitably fear and restrict media independence, permitting watchdog journalism can actually help such regimes maintain power by improving governance. Yet such a strategy risks facilitating a coordinated uprising if discontent is revealed to be widespread. A formal model shows that under some conditions, a regime optimally permits investigative reporting on lower-level officialdom, adjusting how much reporting is allowed depending on the level of underlying social tensions. This strategy yields many of the benefits of free media without risking overthrow. An extension shows why an increase in uncontrollable information, such as from the Internet, may result in a reduction in media freedom. The model sheds light on important aspects of China's media policy and its evolution and on authoritarian media control more broadly.*