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RESEARCH REPORT

Discovering Controversies through Reversions: A Text-based Analysis of China's Two-phase Bill Changes

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Abstract

This study uncovers hidden disputes in China's law-making process by systematically tracking bill changes across executive and legislative phases. Utilizing an original dataset of 45 executive-initiated bills (2008–2023), it identifies a consistent pattern of reversions – instances where executive-approved changes to draft bills were overridden in the legislature – revealing the National People's Congress to be a key policy battleground. Reversions are concentrated in bills concerning health, safety and environment, often involving scope, regulatory frameworks and legal liability. Combined with qualitative case studies, these findings demonstrate the legislature's crucial role in facilitating monitoring and negotiation in the policy process, offering new insights into executive–legislative dynamics in China's single-party regime.

摘要

本研究以 2008 年至 2023 年间国务院提请全国人大常委会审议并通过的 45 部法律案为对象, 系统追踪草案从行政机关到立法机关的两阶段文本演变。研究发现, 立法过程中存在"回撤"现象, 即国务院阶段对法律条款的修改在后续人大审议阶段未获采纳。该现象表明, 人大阶段实际上提供了一个重要的政策博弈平台。分析显示, 回撤主要集中在卫生、安全与环境领域的法案, 内容涉及适用范围、监管体制以及法律责任等主题。基于典型案例的质性分析进一步揭示, 人大阶段在立法过程中发挥的监督与协商功能, 是导致回撤现象产生的重要机制。本研究为理解中国体制下的行政/立法互动关系提供了新的实证视角。

Keywords: China; NPC; two-phase lawmaking; executive and legislative phases; bill change; reversion

关键词: 中国; 人民代表大会; 两阶段立法; 行政机关阶段与立法机关阶段; 法律草案修改; 回撤

Recent studies of China's law-making process demonstrate that the National People's Congress (NPC) serves as a critical site for elite bargaining and contestation over policy.[1] While these works offer important insights, they primarily focus on intra-legislature activities and, at best, only touch on the preceding executive phase indirectly. Lawmaking in China is a "multi-stage, multi-arena" process.[2] A government bill is typically drafted and approved by the executive before being presented to the legislature for deliberation and passage.[3] One cannot develop a fuller picture of the dynamics of lawmaking and legislative–executive relations without examining this early, crucial phase. This article aims to fill that gap by analysing and comparing bill changes across executive and legislative phases.

1 See, e.g., Lü, Liu and Li 2020; Truex 2020; Jiang 2024.
2 Tanner 1995; 1999.
3 In this article, "bills" refer specifically to those intended to become law.

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This article utilizes a unique dataset to trace bill evolution from the executive room to the legislative floor. Using a combination of statistical and content analyses of 45 executive-sponsored bills enacted between 2008 and 2023, it reveals an intriguing pattern of reversion, where changes adopted during the executive phase are later overturned in the legislature. This finding provides strong evidence that China's national legislature functions as an important arena for policy negotiations. Additionally, the article maps the variety of disputes that often remain obscure due to the regime's opaque decision making. This article finds that reversions occur most frequently in health, safety and environment bills, typically concerning topics such as scope of application, regulatory frameworks and legal liability. Qualitative case studies illustrate the specific monitoring and negotiation mechanisms underpinning reversions.

Bridging the Gap: Linking Executive and Legislative Phases of Lawmaking

Authoritarian legislative studies have increasingly moved from broader outcomes, such as regime durability and economic performance, to micro-level processes.[4] Recent scholarship characterizes authoritarian legislatures as dynamic policy-making arenas, documenting bill and proposal submissions, deliberations and amendments, and gridlock.[5] Despite advances in the study of intra-legislature activities, a critical antecedent remains underexplored: the pre-legislative executive phase and, crucially, its linkage to the subsequent legislative phase.[6] Lawmaking in China typically unfolds in a basic two-stage sequence, whereby bills are developed and approved in the pre-legislative executive phase before being presented to the legislature for deliberation and passage.[7] Understanding this preceding phase is essential for tracing the bill's evolution and establishing the baseline against which the processes and outcomes of the legislative phase can be meaningfully assessed.[8]

This article bridges that gap by adopting a corpus-based method and using an original collection of bill texts to analyse and compare policy changes across the two phases. Recent years have seen the increasing application of text-as-data methods to study legislative processes. Scholars have employed innovative similarity metrics to trace the evolution of policy ideas, track legal modifications and examine parliamentary amendments to bills.[9] This article draws on this literature to assess the textual changes made by the executive and the legislature to 45 executive-initiated bills in China from 2008 to 2023. Further, it combines fine-grained content analysis and case studies to explore bill change patterns, classify topical themes and probe underlying mechanisms, ultimately advancing our empirical understanding of executive-legislative dynamics in lawmaking.

Background: China's Two-phase Law-making Process

In China, executive-initiated bills first undergo drafting, revision and approval within the State Council (pre-legislative, executive phase). Only then do they advance to the legislative phase for deliberation and passage by the NPC and/or its Standing Committee.[10]

4 Gandhi, Noble and Svolik 2020, 1367.
5 See, e.g., O'Brien 2008; Truex 2016; 2020; Lü, Liu and Li 2020; Noble 2020; Jiang 2024; 2025; Feng, Hou and Liu 2024; Yang and Gao 2025; Lei, Liu and Wang 2025; Chiba, Ieong and Jiang 2025.
6 Exceptions are case-based studies offering rich detail on both phases. See, e.g., Tanner 1999; Cho 2006.
7 The State Council remains the primary sponsor of legislation, although bills submitted by non-executive state organs (e.g. NPC special committees) have increased in recent years.
8 Studies of parliamentary democracies have documented the importance of this executive phase. See Gava, Jaquet and Sciarini 2021; Lysek and Zbíral 2022.
9 See, e.g., Wilkerson, Smith and Stramp 2015; Gava, Jaquet and Sciarini 2021.
10 The Standing Committee is the main deliberative body. Bills submitted to an NPC session must first be deliberated and approved by the Standing Committee.

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The executive phase comprises three core stages: drafting, inter-agency review and leadership approval.[11] Following initial drafting by the designated ministries, bills enter an intensive bureaucratic review stage dominated by the relevant State Council bodies (line ministries and agencies).[12] This stage involves a lengthy process of opinion solicitation, interdepartmental negotiation and consensus building. Following multiple rounds of revision and further review by the Ministry of Justice, the phase concludes with formal approval at the State Council Executive Meeting.[13] Since 2008, in response to both the NPC's transparency initiative and its internal procedural requirements, the State Council has increasingly released bill drafts for public comment.[14] This public consultation, if conducted, typically follows the completion of internal reviews.[15] However, while post-consultation revisions are considered to reflect societal input, several factors suggest a more complex dynamic. First, the quality of internal reviews may vary across bills, sometimes failing to adequately solicit or incorporate diverse bureaucratic perspectives.[16] Stakeholders who feel ignored or cut out of internal discussions may use public consultations as a platform to (re)assert their position and influence bill content.[17] Second, internal review and public consultation may overlap or run in parallel, making it difficult to distinguish the input of regime actors from that of societal stakeholders.[18]

The legislative NPC phase begins with bill introduction by the leading drafting unit, followed by group deliberations, public consultations and revisions, culminating in voting and passage. A bill typically undergoes three deliberations by the NPC Standing Committee (NPCSC), with participation from the relevant State Council departments and NPC special committees. Since 2008, almost all pending bills have been made available online for public comment following their initial deliberation.[19] In addition, the NPC working committee collects feedback from all relevant parties through field investigations, seminars and forums.[20] The bill evolves through these stages, incorporating deliberation opinions and broadly solicited feedback. Once revisions are finalized, a voting draft is submitted for floor voting and passage, bringing the legislative phase to its conclusion.[21]

11 Tanner 1995; 1999.

12 This process is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice (managed by the Legislative Affairs Office prior to 2018).

13 "Woguo de lifa jiben chengxu shi zenyang de?" (What are the basic steps in China's legislative process?). www.npc.gov.cn, 12 February 2014, http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c2434/c23274/c23279/201905/t20190522_215468.html. Accessed 21 October 2024.

14 The Working Rules of the State Council (2008) introduced a conditional requirement to release bill drafts for public comment. See "Guowuyuan guanyu yinfa guowuyuan gongzuo guize de tongzhi (2008)" (Notice of the State Council on issuing the working rules of the State Council (2008)). *PKULaw*, https://open.pkulaw.com/hwchl/103527.html. Accessed 20 March 2025. There is a growing literature on public consultation in China, see He and Thøgersen 2010; He and Warren 2011; Truex 2017; Balla 2017; Kornreich 2019.

15 As such, the published executive-phase draft typically does not represent the initial draft provided by the drafting unit. "Guowuyuan fazhi bangongshi falü fagui gongkai zhengqiu yijian zanxing banfa (jielu) (2011 xiudin)" (Interim measures of the Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council for soliciting public comments on draft laws and regulations (excerpts) (2011 revision)), http://www.fsou.net/html/text/chl/1729/172904.html. Accessed 13 March 2025.

16 Jiang 2024.

17 Tanner 1999, 220.

18 For example, during the Export Control Law process, another round of internal review was conducted after the public consultation. See "Guanyu Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chukou guanzhi fa (cao'an) de shuoming" (Explanation on the Export Control Law (Draft)), http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c2/c30834/202010/t20201019_308341.html. Accessed 20 March 2025.

19 In April 2008, the Chairpersons' Council of the NPCSC decided that draft laws should, in principle, be published online for public comment. However, exceptions exist: bills concerning national security are typically withheld, and technical amendments and package legislation, which are often approved after a single review, are also exempt. See "Term review: how long did it take the 13th NPC to pass a law?" *NPC Observer*, 1 May 2023, https://npcobserver.com/2023/05/01/china-npc-bill-law-legislative-time/#c61e0355-4db2-496b-80d5-419b5c379b3b. Accessed 30 October 2024.

20 See Arts. 19 and 39 of the Legislation Law (2023 Amendment), http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c2/kgfb/202303/t20230314_424438.html. Accessed 20 October 2024.

21 See Arts. 27 and 44 of the Legislation Law (2023 Amendment), http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c2/kgfb/202303/t20230314_424438.html. Accessed 20 October 2024.

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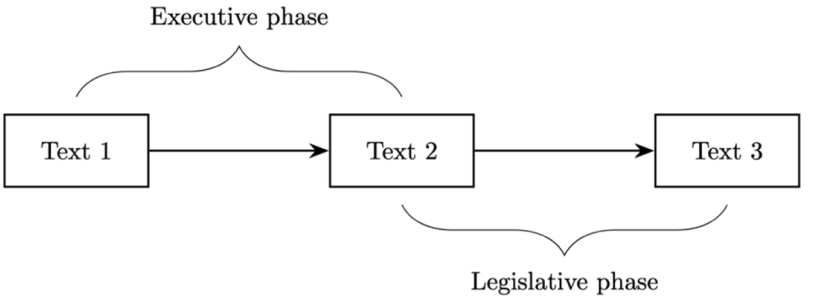


Figure 1. Bill Text Evolution Across the Two-phase Process

Characterized by its public and consultative nature, the changes made to the bill during this phase are shaped by the NPCSC alongside a wide range of government and societal stakeholders.

Data, Methods and Results

Because public consultations are conducted in both phases, three versions of a bill are available: the draft released by the State Council (executive-phase draft, Text 1), the draft released by the NPCSC following its first deliberation (legislative-phase draft, Text 2), and the final adopted version (final law, Text 3). Figure 1 offers a simple illustration. During the 11th, 12th and 13th terms (2008–2023), 92 independent executive bills were enacted.[22] Of these, 81 had their legislative-phase drafts published (88 per cent), while 45 had their executive-phase drafts released (49 per cent). This discrepancy is attributable to differences in legal requirements. In 2008, the NPCSC Chairpersons' Council implemented a requirement for bill drafts to be published after the NPCSC's initial deliberation,[23] whereas the executive phase operates under a much weaker mandate,[24] resulting in fewer State Council drafts being published. Nevertheless, I used this partial transparency to construct a dataset of all bills where both Text 1 and Text 2 are available, ultimately including 45 bill cases for analysis.

The limited availability of executive-phase drafts, owing to the State Council's selective disclosure, introduces potential selection bias. To address this, I conducted a balance check (Table 1), comparing key variables between bills with and without public consultation in the executive phase.[25] The results reveal notable differences: bills that underwent executive-phase public consultation (sample) had fewer co-sponsored, foreign/security, low-priority and 11th-term bills than those that did not. It should be noted that the findings are based on this specific sample and may not be generalizable to bills with these characteristics.

To assess bill textual changes across phases, I employed a similarity algorithm to compare sequential bill versions.[26] Each bill is divided into articles, and cosine similarity scores are calculated to match articles between consecutive versions. This process generates a dataset that systematically

22 This includes bills co-sponsored by the executive and other state organizations. An independent bill refers to one that establishes, revises or amends a single law. Package legislation is excluded.

23 Exceptions exist. See Fn. 19.

24 The State Council's 2008 requirement for bill publication was conditional, applying only to those that closely involved the public interest. This requirement was removed in the 2013 amendments to the State Council's working rules. See "Guowuyuan guanyu yinfa guowuyuan gongzuo guize de tongzhi (2013)" (Notice of the State Council on issuing the working rules of the State Council (2013)), https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2013/content_2371592.htm. Accessed 20 March 2025.

25 The online Appendix provides a balance assessment between bills with and without public consultation in the legislative phase.

26 This approach is inspired by Zheng, Siyao, and Meng n.d.

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Table 1. Bills With Versus Without Public Consultation in the Executive Phase

	With Public Consultation	Without Public Consultation	p-value
Legislation type			0.318
Law	22 (48.9)	17 (36.2)	
Revision	12 (26.7)	12 (25.5)	
Amendment	11 (24.4)	18 (38.3)	
Co-sponsor	0.04 (0.21)	0.26 (0.44)	0.005
Class I	0.76 (0.43)	0.40 (0.50)	0.001
Law word length (logged)	8.71 (0.87)	8.58 (0.63)	0.426
Legislative term			<0.001
11^{th}	2 (4.4)	27 (57.4)	
12^{th}	21 (46.7)	7 (14.9)	
13^{th}	22 (48.9)	13 (27.7)	
Policy domain			0.068
Economic development/regulation	17 (37.8)	13 (27.7)	
Education, culture and society	8 (17.8)	6 (12.8)	
Health and safety	9 (20.0)	5 (10.6)	
Environmental protection	5 (11.1)	2 (4.3)	
Foreign affairs/security	4 (8.9)	16 (34.0)	
Legal/political affairs	1 (2.2)	3 (6.4)	
Other	1 (2.2)	2 (4.3)	
Observations	45	47	

Notes: Co-sponsor indicates a bill jointly proposed by the executive and another state organ; Class I indicates a bill that ranks as a priority in the NPCSC's legislative plan from its first inclusion. Values are mean (SD) or n (per cent). The p-test values indicate the statistical significance of differences between the two groups.

tracks article-level changes throughout the two-phase process. (See the online Appendix for detailed methods.)

A manual inspection of a random sample from this dataset revealed a previously undocumented pattern: *reversion*. It occurs when changes adopted and approved in the executive phase are later overridden in the legislature. This discovery carries significant implications, as reversion has the potential to systematically 1) map key points of policy division throughout the legislative process,[27] and 2) substantiate the NPC's role as an important arena for policy negotiations. To enable systematic empirical analysis, I operationalized reversion as occurring when a substantive change made to an article from Text 1 to Text 2 (executive phase) is later undone from Text 2 to Text 3 (legislative phase), returning the affected content to its original status.[28] Applying this operational definition to the full sample, I identified and validated 158 confirmed instances of reversion. (See the online Appendix for validation details.)

Out of the 45 bill cases analysed, 40 exhibited instances of reversion. Table 2 highlights the ten bills with highest number of reversions. These bills predominantly concern high-salience domains, such as health, safety and environmental regulation, where debates persist throughout the legislative processes. Prior qualitative research corroborates these findings, revealing the contested nature of these

27 Research shows that reverts cluster persistently around points of disagreement within an article's content. See Gandica, Sampaio dos Aidos and Carvalho 2014.

28 This excludes technical, non-substantive changes to a bill, such as language simplification, grammar correction or formatting.

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Table 2. Top Ten Bills with Most Reversions

Law	Reversion (count)
Food Safety Law (2015 Revision)	22
Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law (2017 Amendment)	10
Work Safety Law (2014 Amendment)	9
Atmospheric Pollution Prevention and Control Law (2015 Revision)	9
Vaccine Administration Law (2019)	9
Mental Health Law (2012)	6
Medicinal Product Administration Law (2019 Revision)	6
Agricultural Product Quality and Safety Law (2022 Revision)	6
Traditional Chinese Medicine Law (2017)	6
Anti-domestic Violence Law (2015)	5

Source: Author's count.

policy spaces, primarily due to fragmented governance structures and greater public attention.[29] In contrast, tax-related legislation showed minimal to no reversion. This suggests that potential disputes over tax affairs are typically resolved before a bill reaches the legislature, either because of a prevailing policy consensus or because the executive branch serves as the decisive arena for settling such disputes.

To explore the content of these bills, I adopted a grounded theory approach,[30] conducting an inductive content analysis to manually classify the reversion cases into six themes: (1) regulatory system/authority, referring to the framework of institutions, agencies and mechanisms that administer, manage and enforce regulations; (2) scope of application, referring to the subjects and range of matters governed by a law or specific provision; (3) compliance obligations/measures, referring to the legal obligations regulated entities must fulfil or the (proactive) actions authorities must take to enforce them; (4) offences/penalties, referring to prohibited actions and the sanctions or liabilities prescribed for committing them; (5) procedural requirements, referring to the mandated steps, procedures or methods that must be followed to achieve a legal or regulatory outcome; and (6) guiding principles, referring to principle-based, declarative statements that establish a framework for action or prioritize implementation efforts. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of reversion themes. The top three are scope of application, regulatory system/authority and offences/penalties. This indicates that these topics are the subject of intractable disputes, spanning from executive discussions to legislative deliberations. The online Appendix provides representative examples of each theme.

The Logic Behind Reversions

Recent research advances our understanding of the NPC's amending role by quantifying the extent of bill changes in the legislative phase. However, it offers limited insights into the substantive importance of particular amendments.[31] Proponents of the rubber-stamp view may argue that these adjustments are merely minor, technical refinements anticipated by the executive. This study challenges that premise by systematically documenting two patterns: 1) the legislature's reversion of executive-approved changes, and 2) these reversions consistently touch upon policy substance. The

29 See, e.g., Truex 2020; Zhang, Lei, et al. 2013.

30 Grounded theory is a method designed to allow categories to emerge inductively from data. See Glaser and Strauss 1999. Human content analysis was chosen over topic modelling to capture nuanced semantic context. Given the inherent subjectivity involved, this classification should be considered exploratory.

31 Jiang 2024; 2025.

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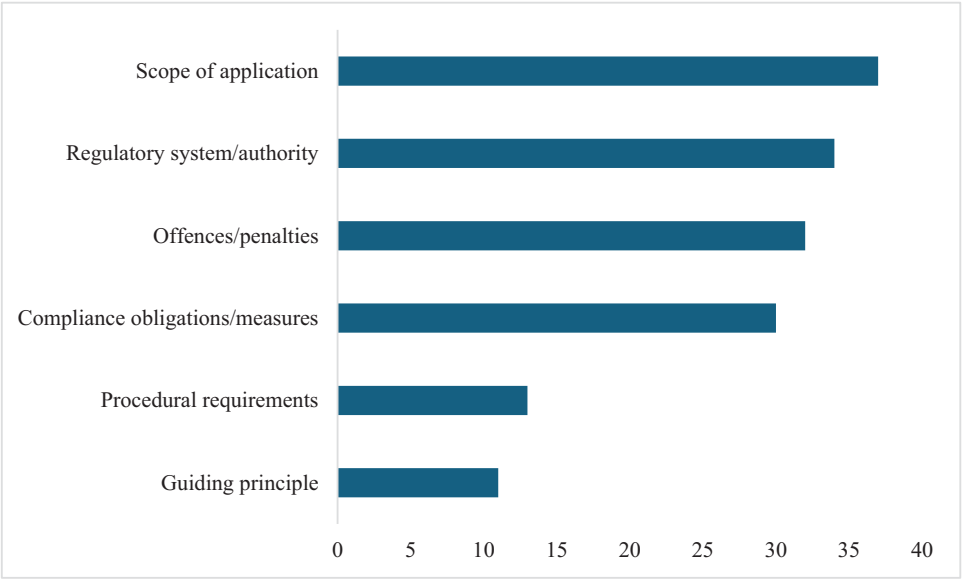


Figure 2. Distribution of Themes
Notes: Total occurrences of each theme, presented in descending order.

findings invite a more fundamental question: what explains the occurrence of legislative reversions in China's single-party, executive-dominant regime?

The existing literature suggests two primary mechanisms.[32] First, stakeholders who were unaware of adverse changes adopted during executive approval may leverage the legislature as a platform for *additional oversight*. While the executive-level public consultation enables input from all affected parties, the subsequent opinion adoption, revision and approval processes are relatively private. This privacy prevents excluded stakeholders from detecting potentially negative amendments to the draft legislation.[33] However, the mandatory publication of the bill draft upon legislative entry reduces information asymmetry, allowing these actors to "monitor and challenge" proposals they dislike.[34] Second, stakeholders who were forced to compromise during the executive decision making may leverage the legislature as a venue for *further negotiations*. While some actors participate in earlier consultations, they may lack sufficient bargaining power to block undesirable changes.[35] Since the details of a bill's content are not finalized at the point of executive approval, these stakeholders can use the legislative floor to re-open debate. Particularly, the public and consultative nature of the legislative phase empowers previously disadvantaged stakeholders. By forming a policy coalition with allied legislators, marshalling evidence from like-minded experts and mobilizing sympathetic public opinion, they are able to contest and ultimately overturn prior unfavourable changes.[36]

32 Recent studies of authoritarian legislatures provide important theoretical grounding for the interpretation of reversions. Specifically, the monitoring mechanism draws directly from Noble's "discovery" pathway, while the negotiation mechanism synthesizes Noble's "spillover" dynamics, Lü et al.'s policy coalition framework and Tanner's insights into NPC lawmaking. See Lü, Liu and Li 2020; Noble 2020; Tanner 1999.
33 Jiang 2024; Noble 2020.
34 Noble 2020, 1425.
35 Paler 2005, 308; Tanner 1999, 220.
36 Tanner 1999, 221, 225.

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Who drives reversals? Given the broad range of actors who may exert influence during the legislative phase, it is difficult to provide a definitive answer regarding their precise identity.[37] Yet these actors, whether they are legislative members, bureaucratic factions, societal groups or hybrid coalitions, consistently exhibit a common characteristic: they were disadvantaged in the executive decision making. This disadvantage stems from being excluded from the negotiation and revision processes or lacking sufficient veto power, which limits their ability to monitor and/or block unfavourable changes earlier in the process. The subsequent legislative phase, with its institutionalized transparency and consultative procedures, offers these actors formal channels through which to scrutinize, challenge and ultimately overturn the executive-approved revisions with which they disagree.

Here, I use two bill cases to demonstrate these mechanisms.[38] The 2007 Anti-Monopoly Law (AML) illustrates how the legislative phase can facilitate negotiation. China's WTO accession necessitated the creation of an anti-trust framework, culminating in the AML. A hotly debated issue during the law-making process concerned the AML's jurisdiction over regulated industries.[39] The 2004 draft prepared by the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) called for universal application and unified jurisdiction, aligning with WTO commitments and the ministry's institutional agenda.[40] However, this approach faced strong opposition from sectoral regulators and state-owned enterprises (SOEs). These powerful stakeholders successfully lobbied the State Council leadership to carve regulated industries out of AML jurisdiction, maintaining sector-specific oversight instead.[41] This concession dissatisfied the MOFCOM and competition law experts involved in the drafting process, but they were unable to block this negative proposal during executive approval in 2006.[42] The subsequent legislative phase enabled them to revisit the debate and strengthen their position. Through coordinated NPCSC deliberations, expanded academic engagement and targeted media campaigns, the pro-competition coalition ultimately succeeded in removing the hostile provision,[43] affirming the AML's authority.[44]

The 2014 revision of China's Environmental Protection Law (EPL) exemplifies how the legislative phase enables more effective monitoring.[45] In 2011, amending the 1989 EPL was added to the NPC's legislative agenda in response to mounting public pressure over pollution crises. The Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) proposed an ambitious draft to the NPC's Environment Protection

37 Legislative-phase changes are driven by a range of regime and societal stakeholders, with the Standing Committee's deliberation opinions likely carrying greater weight. As many Standing Committee members are affiliated with various government bureaucracies, it is likely that their perspectives are shaped by these connections. See Jiang 2025.

38 The two bill cases presented here fall outside the primary sample: the AML predates the analysed timeframe (2008–2023), and the EPL revision bill was formally submitted by an NPC special committee, not the State Council (executive). Nevertheless, the high-profile nature of these two bills provides unique, in-depth insights into drafting and revision through rich, first-hand accounts by direct participants (law-making officials and experts). Drawing on these primary sources, including participants' writings, memoirs and comment letters, as well as the secondary sources based on them, the case analyses yield reliable, process-tracing evidence that allows for a clear illustration of the monitoring and negotiation mechanisms that underpin legislative reversions. The unique analytical leverage provided by this evidence, which is largely unavailable for the laws in the primary sample, makes these two cases an important qualitative supplement to the quantitative findings.

39 Ng 2018, 219–220.

40 Ibid.

41 Wang 2010.

42 Wang 2007, 40.

43 "Fan longduan fa youwang yuedi tongguo" (Anti-Monopoly Law expected to pass by end of month). *Sinanet*, 21 August 2007, https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2007-08-21/105113710398.shtml. Accessed 7 March 2025; Ng 2018, 226.

44 For a detailed interpretation of this amendment, see Ng 2018, 222–23.

45 Despite being a non-executive bill, the monitoring mechanism illustrated in the EPL revision case is directly relevant to understanding reversion dynamics for executive bills. This relevance stems from a key deficit common to both executive and non-executive bills: their finalized pre-legislative content remains private until legislative introduction. The EPL case, therefore, remains highly valuable for its ability to demonstrate in detail how the legislative phase compensates for this opacity (e.g. mandatory bill draft publication), in a mechanism applicable to executive-sponsored legislation.

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and Resources Conservation Committee (EPRCC), featuring strengthened regulatory measures.[46] The EPRCC, however, systematically marginalized the MEP's input, producing a conservative draft that favoured powerful stakeholders, such as the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and local governments.[47] These substantive deviations were not entirely visible to the MEP until the EPRCC draft was published following its legislative introduction.[48] After discovering its proposals had been significantly diluted, the MEP adopted a "go public" strategy, openly releasing a detailed critique of the EPRCC draft.[49] By mobilizing support from its bureaucratic networks, as well as expert and civil society allies, the MEP ultimately compelled significant revisions to the EPRCC draft during legislative passage.[50]

This study constructed an original, fine-grained dataset capable of tracing bill changes throughout China's two-phase law-making process. By identifying and analysing instances of reversion across phases, it 1) captures a variety of policy disputes often obscured in a single-party authoritarian regime, 2) reveals a key mechanism in China's inter-branch policymaking interaction, and 3) demonstrates the NPC's functional role as an effective arena for policy change. It is important to note, however, that these findings derive exclusively from laws with publicly available drafts during both phases. This sample underrepresents 11th-term, co-sponsored, low-priority and foreign/security affairs bills. Readers should consider these scope conditions when interpreting the results.

Supplementary material. The Appendix for this paper is available online at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741026102239.

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46 Zhang, Lei, et al. 2013, 1032.

47 Ibid., 1032–33.

48 "Huanbao bu qiangshi jieru lifa boyi" (Ministry of Environmental Protection asserts strong influence in legislative tug-of-war). *Nytchinanet*, 12 November 2012, https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20121112/cc12wangqiang/. Accessed 7 March 2025.

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50 From this perspective, the EPL case also serves to illustrate the negotiation mechanism.

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