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RESEARCH REPORT

China's Internal Security Spending: An Assessment of New Data

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Abstract

Internal security has been a governance priority under Xi Jinping. How does China's budget reflect this prioritization? This research report presents updated data on China's internal security spending, 1992–2022, revealing a mix of continuity and change. Domestic security expenditure continues to rise, more than doubling from 2012 to 2022, but has risen mostly in proportion to the People's Republic of China's overall expenditure. The balance between central and local expenditure has shifted further towards local spending, which, in the context of rising local fiscal constraint, may increase pressure on local public security bureaus. The Ministry of Public Security continues to receive the largest share of domestic security spending, while the proportion of internal security spending allocated to the People's Armed Police (PAP) has decreased, probably reflecting the reorganization of the PAP in 2017–2018. Spending per capita and relative to GDP continues to be higher in locations that are politically sensitive, including Beijing, Tibet and Xinjiang.

摘要

习近平将国内安全置于中国治理议程的首要位置。中国的"公共安全支出"如何体现这一政策优先事项? 本文分析了 1992—2022 年中国内部安全支出数据。研究发现, 2012至2022 年间公共安全支出增长逾一倍, 但其在中国整体财政支出中的占比保持稳定。地方支出比重持续上升, 这一趋势可能会增加地方公安机关的财政压力, 并加剧"违规异地执法"和"趋利性执法"的问题。在分配层面, 公安部获得的支出份额最大, 而分配给武警的公共安全支出占比有所下降, 这一趋势很可能与 2017—2018 年武警部队的改组有关。区域差异方面, 政治敏感地区 (包括北京、西藏和新疆) 的人均支出水平及其相对于 GDP 的比重仍明显更高。

Keywords: stability maintenance (*weiwen*); public security; Political and Legal Affairs Commission (*zhengfawei*); internal security; policing; authoritarian stability; People's Armed Police; China

关键词: 维护稳定(维稳); 公安; 政法; 中国国内安全开支; 武警; 公检法司; 公共安全支出; 应急管理部

This article provides an updated overview and analysis of internal security spending by the People's Republic of China (PRC) from 1992 to 2022, building on work covering 1992–2012 that was previously published in *The China Quarterly*.[1] A new dataset, now publicly available online, covers the past three decades, including the first two terms of Xi Jinping's 习近平 tenure.[2]

Broadly speaking, the updated data on China's internal security spending reveal a mix of continuity and change. China's domestic security expenditure continues to increase rapidly, more than doubling from 2012 to 2022, but has risen mostly in proportion to the rest of the PRC's budget.

1 Chestnut Greitens 2017. This article uses "internal" and "domestic" interchangeably with reference to spending.
2 See original dataset in Chestnut Greitens 2025a.

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The balance between central and local expenditure has shifted slightly more towards decentralized funding of domestic security, providing context for recent high-level expressions of concern about the revenue-generating activities of local public security bureaus (PSBs) in an era of increased local fiscal constraint. Within the internal security apparatus, the Ministry of Public Security (*gong'anbu* 公安部, MPS hereafter) continues to receive the lion's share of domestic security spending, and that share has risen since 2012. By contrast, the proportion of internal security spending allocated to the People's Armed Police (*wujing* 武警, PAP hereafter) has decreased (likely reflecting a reorganization in 2017–2018), although the PAP's budget has continued to rise. Internal security spending, both per capita and relative to GDP, tends to be higher in locations that are politically sensitive, including Beijing, Tibet and Xinjiang.

Overall Trends in China's Internal Security Spending

China's domestic security budget has been a frequent point of reference in both media and academic discourse since internal security expenditure first surpassed spending on national defence in 2011.[3] Internal security spending generally refers to expenditure on China's political-legal system (*zhengfa xitong* 政法系统), which is composed of public security, the procuratorate, courts, and justice (*gongjianfasi* 公检法司), as well as the PAP. It appears under the grouped heading of *gonggong anquan zhichu* 公共安全支出 in publications by the PRC Ministry of Finance. Understanding the PRC's domestic security spending is important for debates over the extent and nature of securitization under Xi Jinping, as well as discussions of China's overall coercive capacity and authoritarian stability.[4]

Such understanding is also important for ongoing discussion on how to interpret and measure China's military spending, as debates over defence spending hinge, in part, on which line-items and categories of spending should be considered part of China's military budget versus the internal security budget (for example, the gendarmerie-like PAP, discussed below), and on how to treat off-budget adjustments to official statistics. External analysts generally agree that China's defence spending is substantially larger than official figures indicate when appropriate off-budget expenses are included, but estimates of *how much* larger vary widely.[5]

Figure 1 shows China's official internal security spending from 1992 to 2022, placed alongside official defence spending for comparative purposes. It reveals a continued rise in overall internal security expenditure throughout the past decade, continuing the previous two decades of spending growth. In absolute/nominal terms, the domestic security budget more than doubled from 2012 to 2022, rising from 711.2 billion yuan to 1.44 trillion yuan in 2022.[6] Using average market exchange rates for those years, that translates to roughly US$112.7 billion to ~US$214 billion.[7] However, internal security expenditure also shows a plateau from 2018 to 2021, which we explain at least partly with reference to a reorganization that moved parts of the PAP and MPS into a new Ministry of Emergency Management (*yingji guanli bu* 应急管理部, MEM hereafter), which is not included in the Ministry of Finance's internal security expenditure category.

Similar to defence spending, important categories of internal security expenditure do not appear in official totals. And, as with defence spending, the excluded categories could add considerably to

3 Buckley 2011; Blanchard and Ruwitch 2013.

4 For example, Wang, Yuhua 2014; Wang, Yuhua, and Minzner 2015; Chestnut Greitens 2023.

5 For a review of these debates, see Fravel, Gilboy and Heginbotham 2024; Tian and Su 2021; McGerty 2024; IISS 2001–2022; Liff and Erickson 2013. For historical context, see Blasko and Corbett 1998; Cheung 1996; Forsythe 2014; Fravel 2007; Martinson 2014; Tanner 2002.

6 In 2022, China's official defence budget was 1.45 trillion yuan, roughly comparable to but slightly higher than the official internal security budget. For a review of the debate on defence spending measurement, see Fravel, Gilboy and Heginbotham 2024.

7 Figures showing CPI-deflated spending over time and spending relative to GDP appear in Chestnut Greitens 2025a.

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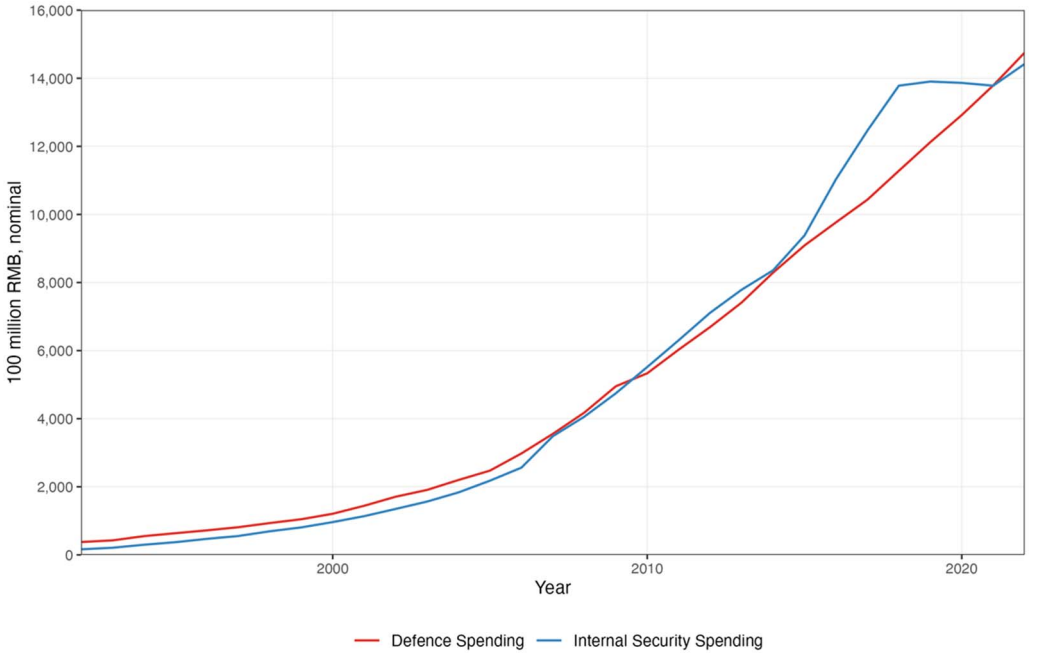


Figure 1. China's Defence and Internal Security Expenditures, 1992–2022

estimates of the total expenditure if published and counted. Extrabudgetary expenditures for internal security include: the Ministry of State Security (*guojia anquanbu* 国家安全部, MSS hereafter), which has both internal and external responsibilities; the Party political-legal commissions that lead and manage public security work at various levels of China's political system; and MEM, which as a new ministry created in 2018 absorbed some previous PAP and MPS units and has some responsibility for planning and maintaining social stability under emergency conditions.[8] MEM, for example, would have added 68.5 billion yuan to internal security expenditure in 2022, an amount 1.4 times larger than the Ministry of Justice (48.3 billion yuan) and slightly smaller than the procuratorate (72.7 billion yuan). The MSS budget under Xi remains unknown, in a period when that ministry has taken on a much more visible role, adding an unknown amount to the total.

Figure 2 shows the share of overall government expenditure devoted to internal security from 1992 to 2022. Although internal security spending has increased as a proportion of overall expenditure since 1992, its share of the budget is not significantly higher under Xi Jinping (2012–2022) than in the previous period (1992–2012). Internal security expenditure remains between 5 per cent and 7 per cent of the overall spending. In 2012, the percentage of national expenditure allocated to domestic security was 5.6 per cent; in 2022, that percentage was 5.5 per cent.

How to interpret internal security as a share of overall spending is, of course, open to interpretation. One possible interpretation is that China has been able to pursue its approach to internal security without a clear budgetary trade-off: growth in domestic security spending, as a line item, has not necessarily come at the expense of other budget categories. This, however, fails to account for "securitization" if other actors in the Chinese political system have been required to take security measures that are accounted for in *their* budgets, rather than appearing solely in the internal security expenditure category.

8 Wang, Yong 2018; Chestnut Greitens and Rinaldi 2026.

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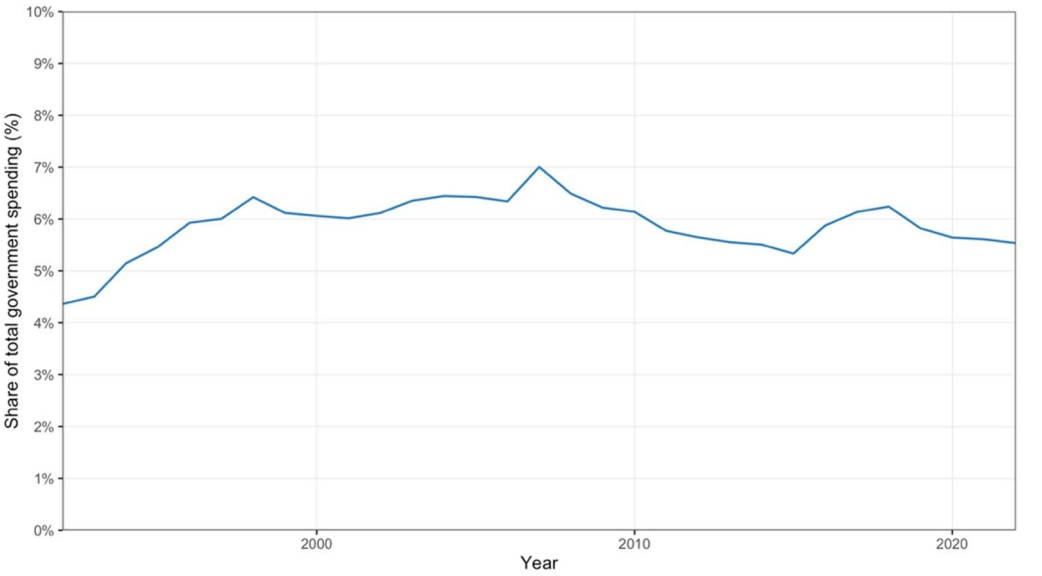


Figure 2. Internal Security Expenditure as a Proportion of Overall Expenditure

There is some indication of securitization dynamics. For example, MEM does not fall under the domestic security budget, but an updated 2025 requirement for local authorities to generate "emergency response plans" now requires non-security actors (such as education systems) to plan for how they will address "social security emergencies," including mass incidents, meaning that emergency management has a strong domestic stability component.[9] Moreover, for the last several years, the PRC has earmarked (by issuing a special long-term treasury bond) an additional 700–800 billion yuan for "implementation of major national strategies and security capacity-building in key areas" that is not included in the regular annual domestic security budget; according to the Ministry of Finance's March 2025 report, the last round of this funding appears to have been spent largely on infrastructure (railways, highways, airports, etc.) and how much of it should be considered internal security spending is subject to interpretation.[10]

One major difference between China's defence spending and its internal security spending is that the latter is primarily the responsibility of provincial and local governments, rather than the centre.[11] Previous work has shown that the burden for spending on domestic security and stability has shifted over time towards localities; Figure 3 shows that this trend has continued. Provincial and local governments are now responsible for slightly more of the PRC's domestic security expenditure than they were a decade ago, from below 80 per cent in the pre-2000 period to 83 per cent in 2012, to 86 per cent of internal security spending in 2022.

This rising fiscal burden occurs in the context of declining local fiscal revenues and an overall budget deficit. The combination of these trends may explain (and exacerbate) apparent recent concern at senior levels of the party-state leadership that budget pressures could be pushing local PSBs

9 See, e.g., "Fuzhou shi jiaoyu xitong tufa shijian yingji yu'an" (Fuzhou city education system emergency response plan), issued by Fuzhou Municipal Education Bureau, January 2023. For the national-level guidance, see "Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan yinfa 'Guojia tufa shijian zongti yingji yu'an'" (CCP Central Committee and State Council issue "National emergency comprehensive response plan"), 25 February 2025, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202502/content_7005635.htm.

10 MOF 2025.

11 We follow the National Bureau of Statistics conventions in our use of the terms "central" and "local"; for further explanation, please see Chestnut Greitens 2025a. See also Tanner and Green 2007.

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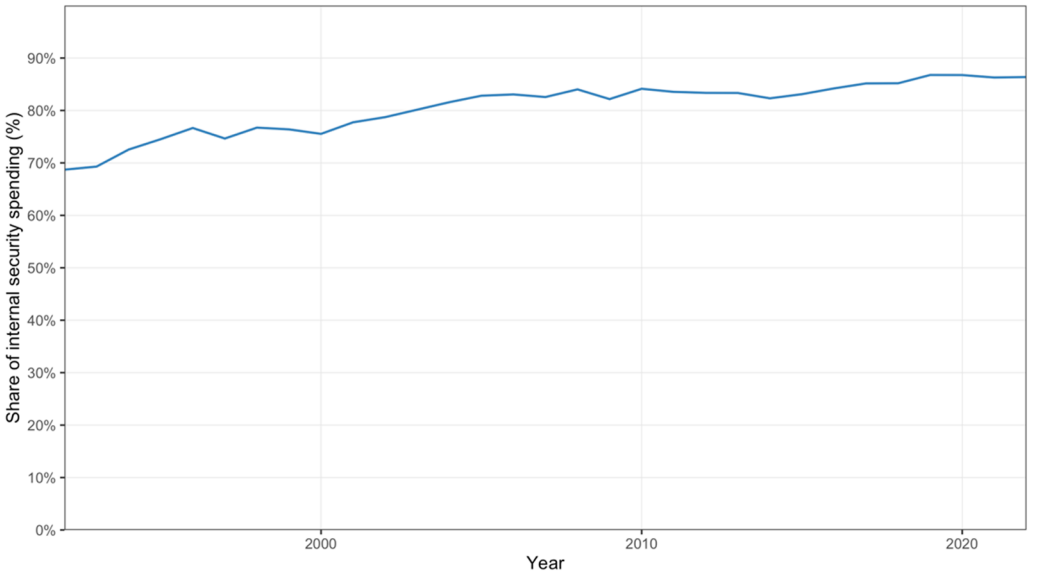


Figure 3. Local Spending as a Proportion of Total Internal Security Spending

to use coercive or predatory tactics to offset revenue shortfalls by imposing false or inflated fines and confiscating property illicitly.[12] In spring 2025, the Supreme People's Procuratorate launched a campaign of targeted supervision to eradicate "illegal cross-jurisdictional and profit-seeking law enforcement" (*weigui yidi zhifa he qulixing zhifa* 违规异地执法和趋利性执法),[13] a phenomenon sometimes known as "distant/deep sea fishing" (*yang bulao* 洋捕捞).[14] The focus in Figure 3 on the domestic security expenditure burden that falls on local governments, therefore, provides a note of caution in assuming, as one might looking at Figure 2, that the party-state has faced no "guns-butter" trade-off when it comes to internal security spending. In China, this may take the form of a trade-off between stability maintenance and routine criminal policing, as the MPS and local PSBs are required to do both. Analyses in both Chinese and English have highlighted resource shortfalls.[15]

Spending Breakdown: Categories

Previous scholarship has noted the utility of understanding "not only the total amount that China spends, but also how it spends these resources."[16] Figures 4–5, therefore, show how domestic security expenditure has been allocated to different actors within China's internal security apparatus.

Figure 4 shows that the MPS continues to receive a much larger share of domestic security spending than any other actor. This share has increased over time, rising from 50 per cent in 2012 to 57 per cent in 2022. In nominal terms, this increase represents something between a doubling and tripling

12 "Shakedown: the Chinese government is cracking down on predatory law enforcement." *The Economist*, 27 March 2025; Chestnut Greitens 2025b.

13 "Zuigao jian bushu kaizhan weigui yidi zhifa he qulixing zhifa sifa zhuanxiang jiandu" (SPP deploys special judicial supervision on illegal cross-jurisdictional and profit-seeking law enforcement). Supreme Peoples' Procuratorate, 26 March 2025, https://www.spp.gov.cn/tt/202503/t20250326_691422.shtml. Accessed 9 May 2025.

14 "Falü jie renshi huyu dujue zhuli zhifa, gaige fa mo fanhuan zhidu" (Legal professionals call for end to profit-seeking law enforcement, reform of the fine and confiscation return system). *Nanfang dushi bao*, 9 November 2024, https://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/A/html/2024-11/09/content_19490.htm.

15 Scoggins 2021; Shi and Zhang 2015. On strains on public security funding in the pre-Xi era, see Me 2004; Xie 2013; Xie and Shan 2013; Xie and Dang 2013; Ye 2006; Yao 2004.

16 Chestnut Greitens 2017, 1002.

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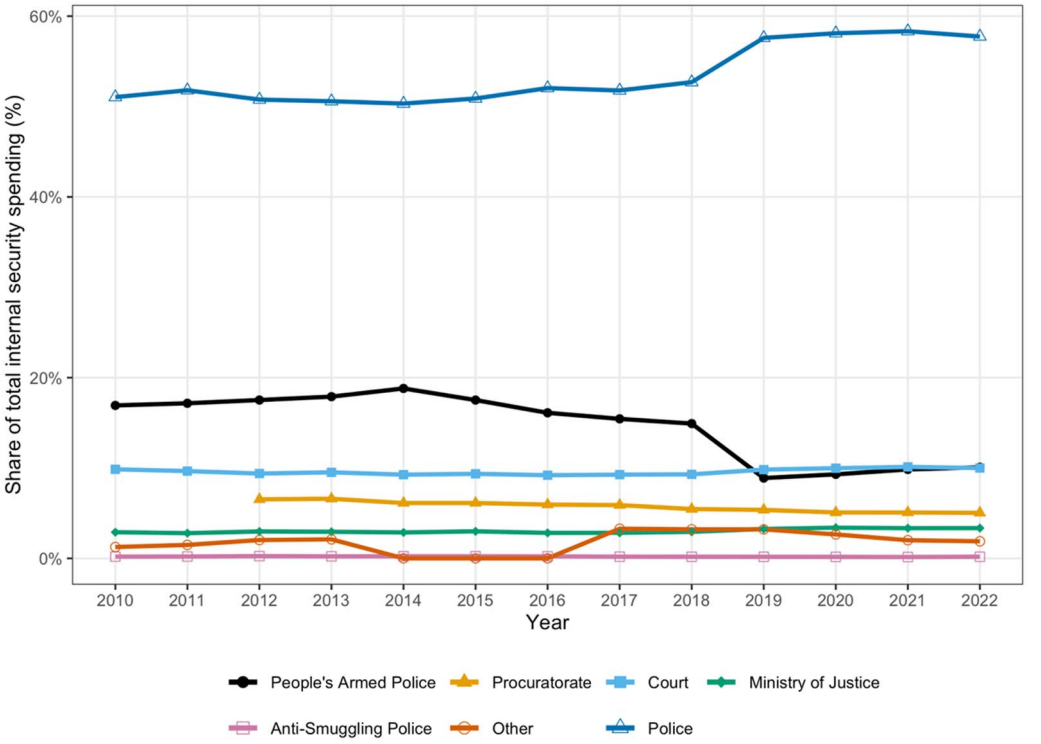


Figure 4. Categorical Breakdown of China's Internal Security Spending
Notes: The main previous analysis of these categories, covering 1996–2009 (Chestnut Greitens 2017) aggregated amounts from local figures, which employed different categorizations. Because this would not compare "like to like," and pre-2010 national-level categorical data are not available, Figures 4–5 cover only 2010–2022.

of the MPS budget over the course of a decade: from 361 billion yuan in 2012 to 832.7 billion yuan in 2022.

Figure 5 removes the MPS so that budget allocations across other actors can be seen more clearly. The remainder of the domestic security budget goes to actors across the political-legal system, including the procuratorate (*jiancha* 检察), courts (*fayuan* 法院), Ministry of Justice (*sifa* 司法), customs anti-smuggling police (*jisi jingcha duiwu* 缉私警察队伍), and other unspecified expenditures, as well as a continued category of funding for the PAP.[17]

The biggest change apparent in the 2012–2022 data is what looks like a sizeable drop in the share of domestic security spending allocated to the PAP, from 17.5 per cent of the internal security budget in 2012 to ~10 per cent in 2022. Nominal PAP spending dropped in absolute terms, from 205.6 billion yuan in 2018 to 123.6 billion yuan in 2019, rising again to 145.5 billion yuan in 2022.[18]

It seems unlikely that the PRC cut spending on functions carried out by the PAP by roughly 40 per cent in a single year, especially given the relative continuity observed across other aspects of the internal security budget. In fact, the same table that shows the PAP budget dropping from 2018 to 2019 also states that PAP spending in 2019 was 118.7 per cent of its 2018 level – clearly at odds with

17 China's anti-smuggling police are a specialized criminal police force for smuggling cases. They are based in the General Administration of Customs (*haiguan zongshu*, Bureau of Anti-Smuggling), under the dual vertical leadership of Customs and the MPS. They are centrally funded and managed day-to-day by Customs; local public security organs have no direct authority over the anti-smuggling police, but the two are expected to cooperate. State Council 1998.

18 Thus, despite the proportional drop, the absolute PAP budget in 2022 is still larger in absolute terms than the 124.6 billion yuan allocated in 2012.

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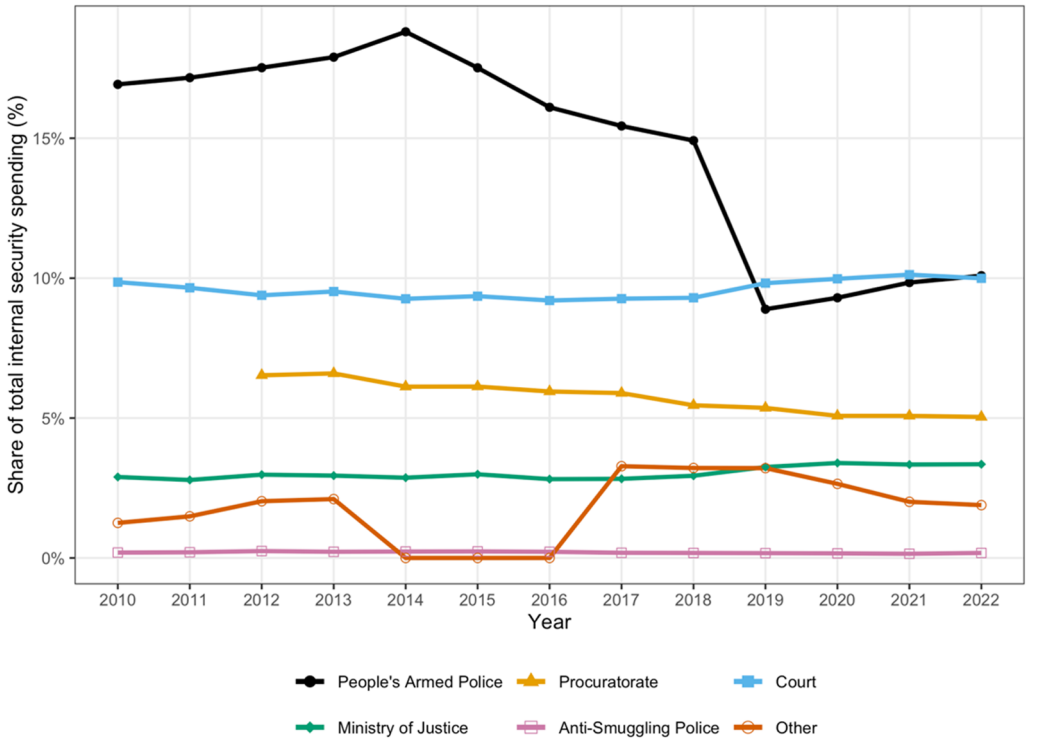


Figure 5. Categorical Breakdown of Internal Security Spending (excluding the MPS)

the reported absolute drop and suggesting that an unexplained change in categorization/classification or measurement may be affecting the statistics provided.[19] Moreover, the continued appearance of the PAP in the domestic security budget, rather than the defence budget, suggests that China's leaders continue to view it as having an internal security role.[20]

We assess that what appears as a drop in PAP spending likely reflects the reorganization in 2017–2018 that moved the PAP into the national defence system, placing it solely under the Central Military Commission (CMC), rather than in a dual-authority arrangement with the State Council. Two aspects of that reorganization moved specific units out of the PAP. First, the Guards and Border Defence Forces were transferred to the MPS. In Figure 4, the MPS displays a non-linear increase in its share of domestic security spending in 2018–2019 that offsets the drop in PAP expenditure share, suggesting that funding for these forces may have transferred from the PAP subcategory of expenditure to the MPS one. Second, the PAP's Forestry and Firefighting Forces were merged (along with some non-PAP entities) into the new Ministry of Emergency Management, and thereby removed from domestic security spending totals altogether. If included, China's new emergency management expenditures in 2019 would offset about half the drop in PAP spending from 2018 to 2019.[21]

19 This is the "final accounts as percentage of previous year" value.

20 Wuthnow 2019. For what a PAP role could look like in a wartime/conflict scenario, see Rinaldi 2025.

21 The decision to bring the PAP under the national defence system was implemented in 2018. See "Zhonggong zhongyang jueding tiaozheng Zhongguo renmin wuzhuang jingcha budui lingdao zhihui tizhi" (CCP Central Committee decision to adjust leadership and command structure of the PAP). *Xinhua*, 27 December 2017, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2017-12/27/content_5250896.htm; on what units the Ministry of Emergency Management incorporated from where, see Wang, Yong 2018.

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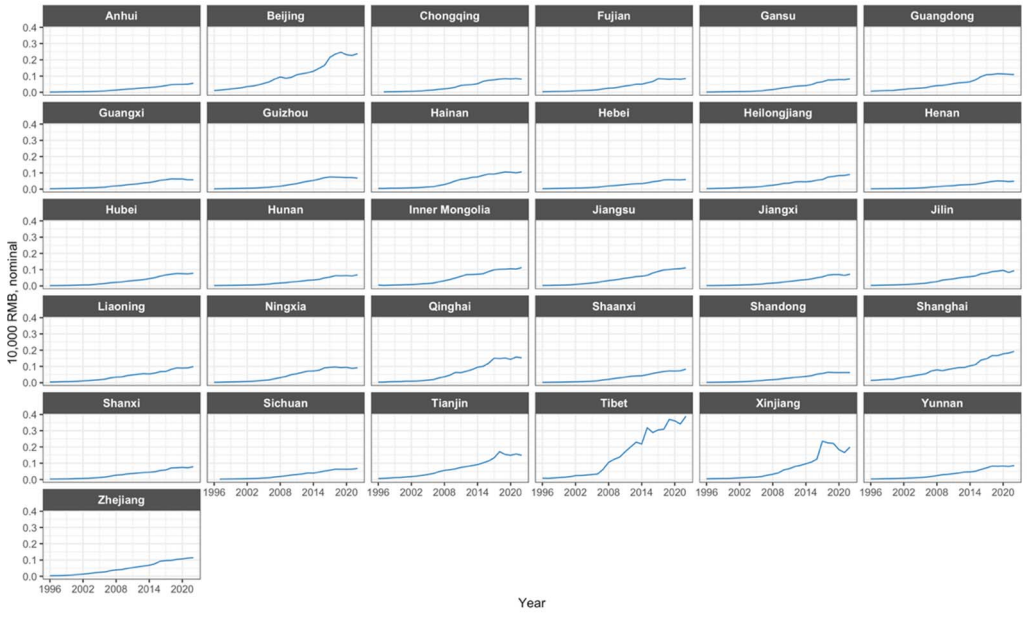


Figure 6. Domestic Security Spending per Capita over Time by Province

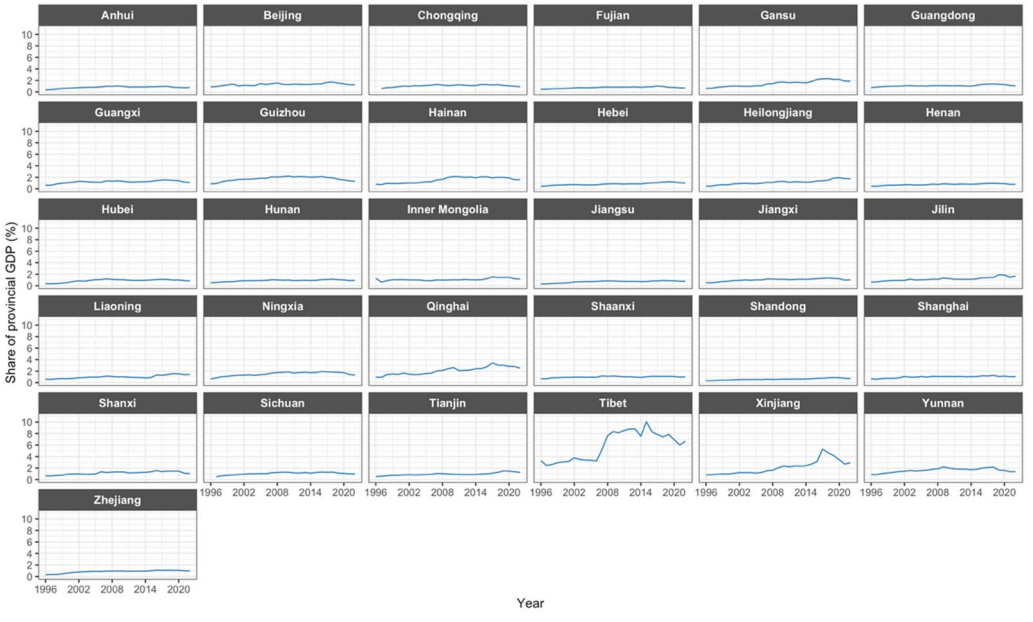


Figure 7. Domestic Security Spending over Time by Province Relative to GDP

Spending Breakdown: Geography

Given how heavily China's internal security apparatus relies on subnational funding, it is also important to look at how such spending is borne at the provincial level. Figures 6–7 show domestic security expenditure by province, first per capita and then relative to GDP.

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Table 1. Per Capita Internal Security Spending in Politically Sensitive Provinces

Year	Baseline (other) spending per capita	Sensitive province spending per capita	Difference	Ratio
2012	470	1,310	840	2.8
2022	910	2,750	1,840	3.0

Notes: Values reflect mean internal security expenditure (yuan/person, nominal).

Figure 6 suggests that every province in China has spent more per capita on internal security since 1992. However, per capita spending has been particularly prone to increase in locations that are politically sensitive. This includes Beijing, as China's capital, which is consistent with a concept of "political security" that prioritizes protecting China's socialist system, the Party leadership and Xi Jinping as the core of that leadership. It also includes the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where security crackdowns by the authorities during this time period appear to have required higher levels of spending both per capita and relative to regional GDP than China's other provincial-level units. This finding is consistent with other research showing that these particular municipalities and regions are also allocated more internal security (PAP) manpower.[22]

Table 1 shows that provincial-level units that are plausibly more politically sensitive with respect to internal security (Beijing, Tibet and Xinjiang) spent more on internal security per capita than other provinces in 2012, *and* that the gap in per capita security spending between these provincial-level units and others has widened between 2012 and 2022.

In 2012, China spent 2.8 times as much per person on domestic security in the three most politically sensitive provinces (Beijing, Tibet and Xinjiang) as it did on average in the rest of the country. By 2022, it spent over three times as much, creating a spending gap of ~1,840 yuan/person each year between these provinces and the rest.

Figure 7 shows domestic security spending by province relative to GDP as an alternative way of thinking about the financial burden imposed by security on each provincial-level unit.

Conclusion

This article presents updated data on China's internal security spending from 1992 to 2022, with a specific focus on changes during Xi Jinping's tenure. Compared to the pre-2012 period, the updated data reflect a mix of continuity and change. China's internal security expenditure has continued to rise, more than doubling from 2012 to 2022, but has risen mostly in proportion to the PRC's overall budget. The balance between central and local expenditure has shifted further towards local spending, which may increase pressure on local PSBs given rising local fiscal constraints. The MPS continues to receive the largest share of domestic security spending, with that share increasing from 2012 to 2022; meanwhile, absolute spending on the PAP has increased while its share of internal security spending has declined, which reflects its 2017–2018 reorganization. Domestic security spending per capita and relative to GDP continue to be higher in locations that are politically sensitive, including Beijing, Tibet and Xinjiang. These data point to the continued utility of examining China's internal security spending statistics but also highlight the continued need to provide context to make them appropriate indicators that generate useful insight into China's coercive capacity, its political economy and the functioning and stability of its overall political system.

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Competing interests. None.

22 One could also plausibly include Shanghai as the PRC's major financial centre. Wuthnow 2019.

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