

# The CCP, Campaign Governance and COVID-19: Evidence from Shanghai

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## Abstract:

This paper examines Shanghai's grassroots COVID-19 management as a lens to explore the role of local Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organisations in public policy implementation in China. We bring together literature on the Party-state relationship with literature on 'routine' and 'mobilizational' governance to construct a framework that conceptualises the CCP as the central actor in implementing public policy through campaigns. We distinguish 9 governance techniques deployed by the CCP in grassroots COVID management, which we illustrate with evidence from 37 semi-structured interviews conducted in summer 2021 with secretaries and directors from local Residents' Committees, government officials mobilised to assist with pandemic management, representatives from property management companies and Party-Mass Service Centres, as well as volunteers and residents. We demonstrate that, although Party-led policy implementation elicits comprehensive compliance, it places significant pressure on the system of grassroots governance.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Chinese Communist Party; local governance; party-state relations; policy implementation;

## 1. Introduction

At the time of writing, China remains the last major country in the world to adhere to a 'zero-COVID' policy, which it has maintained since January 2020. At that time, Wuhan, epicentre of the pandemic in China, enforced a strict three-month lockdown, which saw use of public and private transport prohibited and residents forbidden from leaving their apartments, except once every three days to buy food. Similar measures were enacted in cities across China, including Shanghai, Chengdu, Shenzhen and Hangzhou, severely restricting the movements of hundreds of millions of people. However, on 24 March, Wuhan city officials announced the lifting of restrictions: in the previous 24 hours, fewer than one hundred new cases had been recorded across mainland China, with all but four imported from abroad.<sup>1</sup> Other cities soon followed suit and began to return to something approximating normal life; when cases have arisen, officials have acted swiftly to restrict citizens' movements, with policies imposed ranging from the suspension of inter-province tourism, the closure of municipal public transport systems, to the full lockdown of cities. Although these measures are accompanied by digital health tracking systems and a national vaccination programme, restrictions on movements remain the primary tool for municipal governments to control the spread of the virus.

While China's zero-COVID strategy received widespread international praise during the early days of the pandemic,<sup>2</sup> global public opinion shifted in spring 2022 as Shanghai entered a blanket two-month city-wide lockdown.<sup>3</sup> As the rest of the world began to 'live with COVID',

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<sup>1</sup> BBC 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Kupferschmidt and Cohen 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Duckett et al. 2022.

lockdowns have remained central to COVID containment in China. However, although China's zero-COVID policy has proven controversial both inside and outside the country,<sup>4</sup> cases and death rates have remained very low compared to other countries.<sup>5</sup> As of 5 September 2022, the World Health Organization reported 25, 019 deaths in China (approximately 0.0002% of its population) – compared to, for instance, the UK's 188, 242 COVID deaths (approximately 0.3% of its population).<sup>6</sup> In this article, our goal is not to evaluate China's decision to pursue a zero-COVID strategy. Rather, we answer the more technical question: how has it been possible to implement this seemingly draconian and uncompromising policy over the last two and a half years, which requires blanket coverage and fundamental behaviour change in every urban citizen? The answer, we argue, lies in the central role of local Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP) units as managers of the policy implementation process in China's urban grassroots governance system.

Throughout the pandemic, China's President Xi Jinping has consistently pointed to the community as the 'first line of defence' against the virus,<sup>7</sup> a view which appears to be confirmed by recent research suggesting that China's low transmission rates are due in large part to urban governance at the grassroots level.<sup>8</sup> China's urban grassroots management system undertakes crucial work to ensure the functioning of cities and survival of citizens in lockdown: residents' committees (居委会 *juwei hui*, hereafter, RCs) distribute food, masks, water and other necessities to every citizen. RCs are also responsible for monitoring sick residents and patrolling the entrances to the *xiaoqu* (小区, housing estate) in their jurisdiction during lockdowns. In this way, they are able not only to ensure the physical wellbeing of their residents, they also strictly enforce lockdown. In addition, they are also responsible for administering vaccines and achieving centrally set vaccination targets.

Around the world, frontline workers at the street level have been central to controlling the pandemic, adapting policy issued by central government to their highly contextual local environments.<sup>9</sup> However, two interconnected factors distinguish China's policy implementation process from that of other countries: the use of China's governing political party in policy implementation, and China's broader tradition of governing through campaigns. On the first, unlike the majority of countries, local CCP organisations were placed at the centre of COVID management efforts at the community level, with the critical role of ordinary CCP members repeatedly emphasised by Chinese leadership and across the media. In February 2020, at the height of the pandemic in China, a CCP editorial commented: 'Every grassroots Party organization is a strong fighting fortress, and every Party member is a bright red banner, always standing at the forefront of the fight against the epidemic, and the relationship between the Party

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<sup>4</sup> Wei et al 2022; Tian 2022; Boylan et al 2021; Papageorgiou 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Arbel et al. 2022.1

<sup>6</sup> WHO 2022.

<sup>7</sup> People's Daily 2020a

<sup>8</sup> Miao et al. 2020; Zou and Zhao 2021; Gao and Yu 2020; Ahmad 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Gofen and Lotta 2021; Brodtkin 2021.

and the masses is closer and more harmonious.<sup>10</sup> Another analysis of COVID management in Shanghai stated that the primary contributing factor to effective pandemic management was Party-building, which served ‘to strengthen the Party’s grassroots construction and consolidate the Party’s ruling foundation as a red line that runs through social governance.’<sup>11</sup> In short, in China, the local Party plays a pivotal role in COVID-19 management. It is not only the ‘number one power holder’ who oversees decision-making processes, but, as we elaborate below, is also a primary implementer of policy at the grassroots level.

On the second, policy implementation in China is conducted in the style of a ‘campaign’, in which the stable, universally applied rules and regulations that characterise routine governance are suspended, the destination of resources and the focus of government agencies are diverted, motivational slogans are developed and distributed, and citizens are mobilised towards the fulfilment of the given policy. Recent policy campaigns include Targeted Poverty Alleviation<sup>12</sup> and recycling and waste management.<sup>13</sup> China’s COVID-19 management strategy is the latest and arguably most far-reaching of China’s recent campaigns. On 25 January 2020, Xi delivered a speech during the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, widely reported by media and studied by officials at all levels, which set ‘combatting COVID-19’ as the most important political task of all.<sup>14</sup> Over the following two and a half years, the public have been extensively mobilized, with local Party members playing a central role.

These two features of Chinese governance pose a challenge to the literature on Public Administration developed in the Western context, which suggests that political parties are not the primary actors in policy implementation and assumes that policy implementation occurs in a predictable, regularised sequence. Common wisdom is that, once elected to office, political parties set the overall policy directions, formulate objectives and then delegate implementation to apolitical agencies and professional public service workers on the ground.<sup>15</sup> The primary implementers of public policy, according to this literature, are ‘street level bureaucrats’, who interact directly with the public and must interpret centrally issued policy, thereby ‘personifying their agencies’<sup>16</sup> and making decisions that adapt uniform policy to the individual situations of their clients and service-users.<sup>17</sup> Given this possibility for discretion, Western literature has highlighted the divergence between the policies issued by political parties and their interpretation by the formally apolitical practitioners, whose actions may ‘undermine the goals of elected officials’.<sup>18</sup> As Lipsky stated in his classic study of street-level bureaucrats, ‘lower-

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<sup>10</sup> CPC News 2020.

<sup>11</sup> He 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Zeng 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Qin and Owen 2021.

<sup>14</sup> People’s Daily 2020b.

<sup>15</sup> Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Hupe and Hill 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Zacka 2017: 24.

<sup>17</sup> Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Meyers and Vorsanger 2007.

level participants in organizations often do not share the perspectives and preferences of their superiors and hence in some respects cannot be thought to be working toward stated agency goals.<sup>19</sup> Brodtkin goes further to argue that street-level bureaucracies are ‘sites of policy conflict, wherein politically contested policy projects may be advanced indirectly through administrative means.’<sup>20</sup> Emerging research on the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that the ability of street-level bureaucrats to influence the overall direction of policy has increased during this period of crisis and flux.<sup>21</sup>

The situation in China is different. Every street-level bureaucracy has a political agency embedded within it: a Communist Party Committee. Thus, agencies that ensure political conformity are embedded in the heart of street-level bureaucracies in China. These Party agencies are not duplicates of the government system, rather, they have very different organizational features and operational rules, which enable them mobilize both the bureaucracy and wider society into a ‘campaign’ for the purpose of policy implementation. In this article, we examine how this campaign is employed in Shanghai in order to combat COVID-19, showing how routine governance has laid the foundations for it, and the dynamics between the Party, the government and the wider public it reveals.

In order to map these dynamics, we chose an ethnographic approach, which allowed us to witness routine governance and campaign governance in action at the grassroots level. We conducted 37 semi-structured interviews during summer 2021 in eight Shanghai *xiaoqu* belonging to three districts: Changning 长宁, one of the earliest districts, Pudong 浦东, one of the newly developed districts, and Jingan 静安, a historically prosperous district with numerous shopping complexes. Residents in the three districts vary across age, income level and social classes, constituting together a cross-section of urban Shanghai. We interviewed a diversity of actors in both state agencies and various social domains, including secretaries and directors from local RCs, government officials ‘sinking downwards’ (下沉干部 *xiachen ganbu*) to assist with pandemic management, representatives from property management companies in *xiaoqu*, Party-Mass Service Centre (党群服务中心 *dangqun fuwu zhongxin*) and Party-Building Service Centre (党建服务中心 *dangjian fuwu zhongxin*) at both the street-level and city-level, a scholar Party secretary in a University, as well as social workers, volunteers and residents. We began by searching online for RCs who had spoken to the media about their work in COVID management. Due to the sensitive and on-going nature of COVID management at the time of fieldwork, we felt that those cadres who had already spoken publicly would be more receptive to our research. To increase the representativeness of our sample, and reduce bias, we also approached neighbouring *xiaoqu*.<sup>22</sup> Most interviews lasted between thirty minutes and four

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<sup>19</sup> Lipsky 1980: 16.

<sup>20</sup> Brodtkin 2013: 23.

<sup>21</sup> Gofen and Lotta 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Although this approach may have potential to produce a pro-regime bias, as will be evidenced below, the vast majority of our respondents spoke candidly to us about their experiences, including those who had not previously

hours, during which we asked them to describe their involvement in pandemic management, their perception of the Party and the government, and their understanding of Party-building. Although we do not directly cite all interviews in the article, we used them inductively to inform the construction of our framework.

This article therefore seeks to contribute to the following three areas of scholarship. First, it distinguishes the Party from the government at the grassroots level, and discusses their respective interactions with the public. In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on the distinctive role of the Party in Chinese governance.<sup>23</sup> Not only does this reflect Beijing's reinvigoration of the Party under Xi Jinping, but also a recognition among scholars that the term 'party-state' does not capture the complicated dynamics in China's local politics. We show that when it comes to grassroots policy implementation, the CCP is a unique and essential mobilizational force that distinguishes the policy implementation process from its iteration in Western contexts.

Second, this article distinguishes 'campaign governance' from 'routine governance' and shows how the Party manages the transition between the two. Political campaigns in the reform era have largely abandoned the destructive features of their Maoist prototype, and have developed into a managed form that applies mobilizational techniques to public administration in order to increase efficiency. This challenges the simplistic dichotomy between revolutionary mobilization and modern bureaucracy; researchers demonstrate that 'managed campaigns' today are used as a tool to deliver governance.<sup>24</sup> However, a perspective that distinguishes the Party's role in this process is missing in the campaign literature, giving a misleading impression that the shift towards managed campaigns implies a retreat of the Party through a process of modern bureaucratization. Our research suggests that the opposite is true: although sharing elements of modern bureaucratic governance, the managed campaign of COVID-19 management reveals the existence of a strong Party with a highly centralized and hierarchical structure.

Third, the article provides an in-depth ethnographic-oriented picture of COVID management in three Shanghai districts. We reveal an increasingly pressurized grassroots infrastructure, exhausted after 18 months of mobilizational governance, in which Party secretaries are required to shoulder ever greater workloads and manage increasingly hierarchical chains of command. Our article provides a framework that brings together the 'Party vs state' literature and 'campaign vs routine governance' literature to conceptualise this unique role of the Party in local governance in China, using COVID-19 management as a case study.

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spoken out. Perhaps their candour can be explained by the immense pressure they were feeling and the need to 'offload'.

<sup>23</sup> Zheng 2009; Thornton 2013; Snape and Wang 2020; Seppänen 2021; Mittelstaedt 2021; Li et al. 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Perry 2011, Zhou 2012, Wang 2018, Kennedy and Chen 2018, Zeng 2020.

The article has five sections. First, we summarise existing research on the Party-state relationship and managed campaigns in China, showing that current literature does not explain the Party's central role in campaign governance, and providing a framework that brings insights from the first into the second body of work. The second and third sections discuss routine and campaign governance in COVID-19 management respectively, illustrated with evidence from our interviews. The fourth section summarises the effects of campaign governance on exhausted grassroots workers. The fifth section concludes the article with evaluations on the CCP's role in COVID-19 management and provides suggestions for further research.

## 2. The Party's Role in Campaign Governance

The relationship between China's state and Party organisations at the central level has varied over time and consists of three stages, and has been the focus of much scholarly attention.<sup>25</sup> Before 1987, the Party, as the founder of the state, obtained its legitimacy from the revolutionary tradition and 'took the place of the state' (以党代政 *yidang daizheng*). At this time, a number of deputy secretaries of Party committees at all administrative levels had been in charge of the work of different government departments.<sup>26</sup> The second stage began with the 13<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress in 1987, when the general secretary of CCP Zhao Ziyang announced the policy of 'Party state separation (党政分开 *dangzheng fenkai*)',<sup>27</sup> which sought to achieve a clearer division of labour and a reform of the Party's leadership, although most of the attempts were abandoned abruptly at the end of the 1980s with the outbreak of the Tiananmen Square protests.<sup>28</sup> The third stage started with Xi's arrival in office in 2012 and demonstrated a return to the 'Party-state unity (党政合一 *dangzheng heyi*)'. At the 19<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress in 2018, the Central Committee issued the *Plan on Deepening Party and State Agency Reform*, overhauling the Party-state institutional structure and enhancing Party leadership. This plan saw the weakening of the state's agency and the transfer of power to the Party.

Analysing these changes in the Xi era, a growing number of scholars profess to 'bring the Party back in' to studies of Chinese politics. This work can be broadly divided into three strands, the first taking a governance perspective, the second a legalistic perspective, and the third a sociological perspective. According to the classic interpretation in the Western literature, governance refers to 'the changing boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors, and to the changing role of the state.'<sup>29</sup> It highlights the 'pluralistic cooperation between state and society'<sup>30</sup> and the 'extensive participation of non-state actors'<sup>31</sup>. Adapting this perspective to the Chinese context, Thornton argues that a new relationship between Party, state and society has emerged, 'in which a more independent Party mediates between the smaller reform-era state

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<sup>25</sup> See Brødsgaard and Zheng 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Chen 2018; Tang and Wang 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Zhao 1988.

<sup>28</sup> Snape and Wang 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Rhodes 2012: 33.

<sup>30</sup> Guo 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Guo 2022.

and an increasingly mobile and diverse Chinese society'.<sup>32</sup> Shen *et al.* similarly characterise the current trend as revealing 'the administration's retreat and the party's advance'.<sup>33</sup> However, Snape and Wang, echoing the conclusions of wider literature on state transformation, have challenged this view, arguing that the state's shift towards regulation and management has not reduced its overall size; rather, there has been a 'complex reshuffle between Party, state, and society involving changing state roles, increasing social organization (industry association) roles, and efforts by the Party to work in new ways'.<sup>34</sup> Our research shows that at the grassroots level, although the organizational infrastructure of government and Party remains in place, there has been a transfer of power from local government to local Party institutions in terms of both policy-making and implementation.

Of those applying legal perspectives to the relationship between Party and state, Seppänen argues that the Party maintains a special status above state organs in order to 'lead' the state.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the Party is seen not merely as another site for rule application, but a privileged sphere that stands beyond the rule of law – a conception which echoes the Schmittian relationship between politics and law, in which 'the legal order is dependent on the sovereign's decision'.<sup>36</sup> This perspective dovetails with work on constitutionalism in China, which debates the appropriate relationship between Party and government in China's broader governing norms.<sup>37</sup>

The third perspective is rooted in Sociology, and draws on the work of Max Weber. In particular, Xuegang Zhou uses Weber's ideal types of authority to explore the differences between Party and State.<sup>38</sup> On this view, the state is organized through its legal-rational authority, based on 'rational grounds – resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules'.<sup>39</sup> Central to this mode of authority are equally applied rules and rule-following behaviours. By contrast, the Party is organized through a charismatic form of authority 'resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person'.<sup>40</sup> It captures the mechanism of power wielded by the 'great, glorious and correct' (伟大, 光荣, 正确, *weida, guangrong, zhengque*) CCP, with its irreplaceable endogenous leadership, overall planning capability and self-correction ability. With these well-publicized extraordinary endowments, the CCP attains the symbolic meaning of charisma and becomes its embodiment, while charisma survives the process of modernization by remaining as the CCP's organizational basis – an example of the 'charisma of office'.<sup>41</sup> This privileged position echoes the 'arbitrary power' in Kuhn's

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<sup>32</sup> Thornton 2013: 3.

<sup>33</sup> Shen *et al.* 2020: 73.

<sup>34</sup> Snape and Wang 2020: 491; see also Peck 2010: 23.

<sup>35</sup> Seppänen 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Zheng 2015: 41.

<sup>37</sup> Backer 2009; He 2012; He 2017; Guo 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Zhou 2012, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Weber 1968: 215.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>41</sup> Eisenstadt 1968.

description of Chinese emperors in Qing dynasty, in contrast to the routine power of the bureaucratic system under its leadership.<sup>42</sup> To maintain this arbitrary power, the emperor must struggle unceasingly to avoid its own bureaucratization. Zhou argues that this power structure has not fundamentally changed, since the Party shares the characteristics of the emperors and maintains the power to disrupt the bureaucracy at any moment.<sup>43</sup>

Zhou's framework reveals potential conflicts between the Party and the state in their functional logic and basis of legitimation: the bureaucratic model of legal-rational authority is oriented towards efficiency, rationality and the rule of law, while the charismatic authority of the Party presupposes a close, intensive leadership with absolute power between the charisma and its followers.<sup>44</sup> In the Maoist period, in order to maintain this extra-bureaucratic position and maintain national power, the CCP launched a series of campaigns to mobilize the masses in support of Party leadership.<sup>45</sup> These campaigns disrupted and suspended the bureaucratic system, with destructive consequences for regular government bodies unable to follow a stable set of organizational rules. In contemporary China, campaigns have transitioned from unconventional, short-term agitations to institutionalized, problem-solving tools with the aim of delivering policy goals.<sup>46</sup> This brings us to our second cluster of literature: the campaign literature.

Mao-era campaigns had two main purposes: they could serve as a means for nationwide governance and policy implementation, for example, the anti-pest campaigns in the 1950s<sup>47</sup>; more often they were used to purge the Party, for example, the Campaign to Suppress Counter-Revolutionaries in 1950-53,<sup>48</sup> and to smash the bureaucratic system, for example, the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.<sup>49</sup> As Zeng argues, these campaigns were characterized by intensive ideological indoctrination and revolutionary fervour, as well as mass mobilisation.<sup>50</sup> In the reform era, Maoist revolutionaries were gradually succeeded by younger, technocratic reformers and Maoist-style campaigns largely vanished, to be replaced with discourses emphasizing efficiency, expertise and professionalism. Perry and Zhou understand this change as an adaptation of the mass campaign in response to the process of bureaucratic modernization.<sup>51</sup> As Perry indicates, 'the legacy of mass campaigns has remained an integral- and underappreciated-instrument of rule in post-Mao China'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kuhn 1990.

<sup>43</sup> Zhou 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Zhou 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Kelkar 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Perry 2011; Wang 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Straus 2006. In her article, Straus identifies 4 types of campaign in Maoist China, three of which relate to elements of bureaucracy and governance.

<sup>48</sup> Yang 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Heberer 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Zeng 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Perry 2011; Zhou 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Perry 2011: 31-32.



This process has been accompanied by a significant shift to modernized governance in China. Since 1990s, the notion of ‘governance’ has begun to appear in Chinese official and scholarly texts.<sup>53</sup> As Sigley has observed, this indicates a shift in the functions of government from highly centralised planning (*jihua*) and administration (*xingzheng*) to the management (*guanli*) of more autonomous state agencies.<sup>54</sup> This framework has been used to explain the emergence of ‘managed campaigns’ as a mode of technocratic governance in contemporary China. For instance, Wang argues that recent campaigns have transformed the revolutionary technique of mass mobilization into a problem-solving tool for good governance.<sup>55</sup> Kennedy and Chen explore how central and provincial leaders use ‘policy pushes’, namely, ‘a relatively short, focused and intense administrative burst’ sharing elements of managed campaign, to address uneven policy implementation and improve administrative capacity.<sup>56</sup> Zeng analyses the bureaucratic features of managed campaigns from a Weberian perspective, arguing that although functional differentiation and strict adherence to stable rules are not observed in managed campaigns, the commitments to procedural integrity and top-down hierarchy render campaigns partially bureaucratized.<sup>57</sup>

These exploration of the use of campaigns in the Chinese policy process reveal a process of transformation towards modern governance. They suggest that the political priority of the Maoist period has given way to the more pragmatic considerations and technocratic policy implementation processes of the contemporary bureaucracy. However, our fieldwork suggests that, when it comes to COVID-19 containment, this is not entirely the case. We argue that although sharing elements of modern bureaucratic governance, the managed campaign of pandemic management and control, although it shares elements of modern bureaucratic governance, is created and sustained by a strong Party with a highly centralized and hierarchical structure. We examine campaign governance by separating out Party organisations from the wider bureaucracy at the grassroots level, arguing that without this perspective, we cannot fully understand the contemporary iterations of campaign governance, particularly in the case of COVID-19 management. For example, when the research discussed above shows improved policy implementation through managed campaigns, is it driven by the government’s pursuit of managerialism or by pressure from CCP to accomplish a political task? Does it indicate an apolitical bureaucratization, characteristic of the Hu-Wen administration, or does it show a process of re-politicization following Xi’s accession to power? In other words, how has the boosting of the CCP under Xi affected the outcomes of campaign governance? Just as the concept ‘party-state’ is problematic, we suggest that the concept ‘managed campaign’ is insufficient, for it does not allow us to explore the critical role of the CCP in policy implementation through campaigns.

We propose a framework that combines these two sets of literature in order to distinguish the practices enacted by the Party in government agencies and in society at the grassroots level during the campaign to manage COVID-19. This framework provides evidence for the Party’s

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<sup>53</sup> Sigley 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Sigley 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Wang 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Kennedy and Chen 2018: 394.

<sup>57</sup> Zeng 2020.

overarching position in the governance process, as well as the use of campaigns compared to everyday governance, and is summarised in the table below. First, we use ‘Party-in-State’ and ‘Party-in-Society’ to respectively delineate the practices deployed by the Party towards the government bureaucracy and towards the wider public. Second, we divide these practices into ‘routine governance’ and ‘campaign governance’ in order to distinguish everyday governance from short-term and high-profile campaign to implement COVID policy. Our synthesis reveals nine practices deployed by the CCP to respond to the pandemic across government and in society during routine governance and campaign governance. It illustrates local CCP units’ central role as implementers of COVID policy at the grassroots level. The remainder of this article discusses each practice, illustrating them with evidence gathered during fieldwork in Shanghai.

	Party-in-State	Party-in-Society
Routine governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Party system leads government agencies</li> <li>• Grid-style management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Party-building among Party members</li> <li>• Party-building in society (Grid-style Party-building, co-construction, Party-mass services)</li> </ul>
Campaign governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politicization of administrative tasks</li> <li>• Government officials ‘sinking downwards’</li> <li>• Establishing a temporary Party branch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilising volunteers</li> <li>• Mobilising businesses</li> </ul>

### 3. Routine Governance:

Routine governance, as defined above, refers to the everyday practices of governance within Party and state agencies. While campaign governance is intermittent, stopping and starting in response to specific implementation requirements, routine governance operates in a stable and continuous fashion. For example, each of the four practices identified as ‘routine governance’ in our table above are constantly enacted within the Party-state system. In contrast, the five practices listed in the category of campaign governance remain in standby and are only activated in circumstances requiring widespread policy implementation, and are usually enacted in

concert with one another.<sup>58</sup> Routine governance forms the foundations of the emergence of campaign governance in two ways: first, it creates the preconditions and provides organizational basis for the campaign to happen; second, it ensures the ‘managed’, or technocratic, nature of the campaign. Indeed, the success of campaign governance depends on the reliable and robust routine governance by local administration. In this section, we show how the CCP leads the operation of routine governance, both within the state and within society.

## **Party-in-state**

### *Party system leads government agencies*

According to the Western literature, the government performs the everyday administrative tasks that make up routine governance, but in China these are actually coordinated by the Party. There are two sets of leadership in all levels of public administration (province, city, street, etc.), one belonging to government (provincial governor, mayor, street director), and the other belonging to the Party Committee (secretaries at all levels). Taking the lowest administrative level, the RC,<sup>59</sup> as an example, an RC director told us, ‘even when I’m in charge of a certain area of work, I need to report to the Party secretary and listen to his advice. We say that the secretary is the number one power holder, and he also shoulders the number one responsibility.’<sup>60</sup> An RC Party Secretary explained this difference: ‘If a director asks for leave, I can do all of his work. But he will not be able to do all of my work if I ask for leave.’<sup>61</sup>

As discussed above, this division of labour between government leaders and Party secretaries (and the power dynamic it reveals) has not remained unchanged throughout the reform period. Xi’s arrival in office in 2012 has strengthened politics vis-à-vis the state bureaucracy: formal changes in the legislation and informal changes in its implementation have been initiated in order to reinforce the power of the Party, with complex consequences experienced by our interviewees at the grassroots level. An RC Party secretary described this change: ‘it wasn’t like this before... but now every single task, no matter from which department, is assigned from the top to us secretaries first, and we then assign them to our department cadres... about 10 years before, a lot of work was assigned from upper departments to lower departments directly within the government, no need to go through our secretaries.’<sup>62</sup> This change reinforces the Party’s power to interrupt the bureaucratic system and forces secretaries to intervene in government agencies’ routine work. However, not everyone agrees with this change: several RC secretaries

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<sup>58</sup> In some cities in China, ‘sinking downwards’ officials are used routinely, but in Shanghai this only happens sporadically, for instance, for politically significant tasks requiring the mobilization of resources in and out of the government system.

<sup>59</sup> Officially, RCs are autonomous organizations, but in practice they are inextricably linked to the structure of government.

<sup>60</sup> 1RC1

<sup>61</sup> 2RC1

<sup>62</sup> 3RC1

described it as ‘unnecessary to some extent’<sup>63</sup> or ‘confusing’<sup>64</sup>. Regarding the reason for this change, a secretary explained that it is all about ‘top-level design’<sup>65</sup> and that ‘there are also controversies within the Party, the extreme Leftists and the moderate ones.’<sup>66</sup>

Despite these controversies, the guidelines stipulating that ‘Party agency takes overall leadership’ improves the overall capacity to mobilize administrative resources during policy emergencies with ‘high political priority’, such as COVID-19. The Party’s elevated status above state organs enables it to decide the political importance of administrative tasks and demand that the bureaucratic system respond in a highly centralized way. This politicization of administrative tasks transforms routine governance into campaign governance, discussed below.

### *Grid-style management*

Under the CCP’s leadership, ‘grid-style management’ plays a key role in pandemic control. As the name indicates, grid-style management divides each community into parallel grids, with each grid equipped with several grid controllers. Developed before the pandemic, the grid-style system is originally conceived as a social stability mechanism. Controllers in each grid cell ‘conduct patrols, site visits, gauge public sentiment, write reports and then upload them into a database’,<sup>67</sup> with their objective encapsulated by the following slogan: ‘minor conflicts stop within grids, large conflicts stop within community’ (小事不出网格, 大事不出社区, *xiaoshi bu chu wang ge, dashi bu chu shequ*). During the pandemic, this mechanism formed an unprecedented system of COVID-19 control and prevention, enabling the state to carry out its strict ‘zero-COVID policy’. Grid workers know the residents best, and have established close networks that can be activated to implement policies. This principle of ‘surveillance plus service’ accords with the logic of China’s pandemic management: the grid workers are now deployed to trace contacts of confirmed cases and enforce quarantine, and when a city or an district is in lockdown, they are responsible for the distribution of food and medical resources to those in isolation.<sup>68</sup>

## **Party-in-society**

This section illustrates how Party organs bypass government institutions to enact routine governance directly towards society. Although the Party is always present in governmental interactions with the public, the Party engages directly and autonomously with the public through its network of Party members and its own physical infrastructure.

### *Party-building among Party members*

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<sup>63</sup> 3RC1

<sup>64</sup> S2

<sup>65</sup> S2

<sup>66</sup> S2

<sup>67</sup> Mittelstaedt 2021: 8.

<sup>68</sup> Zhang, Luo and Zhu 2021; Ullah et al. 2022.

Broadly speaking, the formal and informal activities, rituals and events connecting the Party with its members are collectively known as ‘Party-building’ (党建, *dangjian*). Secretaries described Party-building as ‘delivering care from the Centre to every Party member’<sup>69</sup>, ‘letting the members know that the Party does not forget about them’<sup>70</sup>, ‘protecting the image of the Party’<sup>71</sup>, etc. These activities are manifold, and include routine Party branch meetings, group study of Party documents, ‘red tours’ to sites of historical interest to the Party, as well as lively innovations such as ‘yoga and salsa-dancing classes’, ‘poker tournaments’ and ‘tug-of-war competitions’.<sup>72</sup> There are currently over 90 million Party members, dispersed throughout all walks of life, many of whom are in a state of inertia regarding their political identity; Party-building aims to strengthen their connection to the Party and stimulate their political engagement.

*Party-building in society (grid-style Party-building, co-construction, Party-mass services)*

Corresponding to grid-style management in routine governance, there also exists grid-style Party-building. It is built upon regional Party-building (区域化党建, *quyu hua dangjian*), which connects Party branches in the same region for cooperation. Using the grid as the basic unit, the more elaborate grid-style Party-building aims to integrate social resources from including state-owned enterprises and private businesses, public institutions, social organizations and NGOs in order to realize ‘co-construction’ (共建, *gongjian*) and ‘joint action’ (共同行动, *gongtong xingdong*). One RC secretary told us about their ‘co-construction’ with a local business, ‘if we organize activities, we will invite them to come...in most cases, we are the host and they cooperate with us’<sup>73</sup>. Another regarded grid-style Party-building and co-construction activities as a means for businesses to fulfil a social obligation: ‘we need corporations in the grid to shoulder social responsibilities and make a contribution to their local communities.’<sup>74</sup> Thanks to Party members’ shared political identity, the Party is able to penetrate different domains of society, generating a unique governance mechanism that cannot be achieved by the government.

However, the maintenance and expansion of the Party system relies not only on a common belief in Party ideology, but also on incentives, such as resources, preferential policies or merely a guarantee for an organisation’s continued operation.<sup>75</sup> In recent years, increasing numbers of corporations and social organizations have joined the wave of Party branch establishment in order to obtain these benefits in return for political compliance. This provides a formal means for corporations and social organisations to access political resources and become part of the political system themselves: they cannot join the government, but joining the Party provides them with political identities and material resources, increases their political capital and expands their networks.<sup>76</sup> On the side of the Party, administrative resources from the

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<sup>69</sup> 2RC1

<sup>70</sup> 2RC1

<sup>71</sup> 2RC1

<sup>72</sup> Thornton 2018.

<sup>73</sup> 2RC1

<sup>74</sup> S1

<sup>75</sup> Jeong & Yoon 2020; Nie and Wu 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Li 2018; Song 2022.

government can be used to achieve social co-optation. As one interviewee told us, ‘employees of businesses, especially those without a local *hukou* (户口), will have needs in the application for residence permit, medical insurance and kindergarten enrolment of their children, and these are what we can help with.’<sup>77</sup> In sum, political beliefs and material interests are woven into a complex web via the Party that penetrates the whole society.

At the same time, Party-building processes also target non-Party members. Most public services and facilities provided by the Party are open to the wider public. Numerous Party – Mass Service Centres can be found in cities and counties, and comprise libraries, TV rooms, tea rooms and various activity rooms. Introducing her Service Centre to us, a guide explained, ‘lots of people come here, including residents, National People’s Congress representatives, retired soldiers, and so on. This place is open to the public, they can do all kinds of activities here.’<sup>78</sup> Alongside Service Centres, other types of Party-Building infrastructure have sprung up: ‘White-collar Stations’ are Party-building facilities located in shopping complexes and office buildings. They provides high-quality services (yoga lessons, gym rooms, parent-child activities, child-care services) at low prices in the name of the Party that can appeal to white-collar workers, regardless of their Party membership status. Party-building seeks to involve these supposedly atomised individuals into organized ways of living, and ‘transfers the ideological demands of the Party to their own values.’<sup>79</sup>

The Party system provides a unique form of governance that regards citizens not only as passive targets of management and mobilization but also as actors with the potential to bolster the Party’s broader image in society. As the Party-in-state’s routine governance facilitates the mobilization of administrative resources, the routine practices of Party-in-society enhances the mobilization of social resources. It is these routine practices that precede the transition to campaign governance.

#### 4. Campaign Governance

Campaign governance refers to the tendency of the Chinese leadership to ‘initiate periodic high profile campaigns as a way to implement important policy objectives under tight time constraint’.<sup>80</sup> It is the primary method for the implementation of flagship policies, and is one of the key distinguishing features of the Chinese policy process vis-à-vis the Western policy process. The campaign governance starts from a ‘moment of politicization’, through which political priority is created and attached to a certain group of tasks.<sup>81</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has been managed in this way and, at the grassroots level, has been driven forward by CCP agencies and individuals, using the pre-existing infrastructure of routine governance. As an RC

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<sup>77</sup> 4RC1

<sup>78</sup> M1

<sup>79</sup> B1

<sup>80</sup> Zeng 2020: 402.

<sup>81</sup> As discussed above, campaign governance requires mobilisation and the deployment of all practices described below; the use of one practice in isolation would not indicate a shift to campaign governance.

Party secretary informed us, ‘We have to mobilize people as well. We can't just rely on ourselves to do the work, we wouldn't be able to do it all, even if we never went home. Like last year, we mobilized our Party members and volunteers, including our property management company, everyone was mobilized.’<sup>82</sup> This section shows how the CCP builds on the broader structures of routine governance, both within the state and within society, in order to enact campaign governance when required.

### **Party-in-state**

Due to its leadership role in routine governance, when a high priority policy comes to be implemented, a network of government officials can be mobilized to perform additional tasks. When this mobilizational capacity is lacking, government officials can set up a temporary Party branch as a hub to coordinate resources and skills, and ensure tight-knit political leadership.

#### *Politicization of administrative tasks*

In February 2020, Qiushi journal published a speech given by Xi to the Politburo Standing Committee, in which he revealed that he had been overseeing the Party's central leadership in COVID-19 management since early January.<sup>83</sup> On 25 January, Xi established and dispatched the Central Leading Group on COVID19 containment (中央应对疫情工作领导小组, *zhongyang yingdui yiqing gongzuo lingdao xiaozu*), and required the State Council's Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism (联防联控, *lianfang liankong*) to provide comprehensive cooperation.<sup>84</sup> This demonstrates the rapid, centralised, politicisation of the Chinese administrative system as the pandemic took hold.

These top-down devices of leading groups and joint mechanisms have a long history in Chinese politics. Most are task-oriented, delivering effective inter-agency coordination among different departments and ensure the central directives being implemented at different levels.<sup>85</sup> Firstly, the establishment of these inter-agency platforms demonstrates the power of the Party to adjust routine bureaucracy in emergencies. Secondly, these platforms not only enable coordination and efficiency, but also send a signal to lower administrative levels that the central authorities are watching closely and that all government agencies should make every effort to engage in ‘battle’. Through this process, routine governance transforms into campaign governance, and administrative tasks become political tasks.

#### *Government officials ‘sinking downwards’*

At the pandemic's height, government officials from various departments were sent to the ‘frontline’, the communities, to assist with grassroots COVID management. These officials were called ‘sinking downwards’ cadres, indicating a blunt top-down hierarchy from state to society. We interviewed two such individuals, usually employed in the Judicial Office (司法所,

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<sup>82</sup> 2RC1

<sup>83</sup> Xi 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Xinhua News Agency 2020.

<sup>85</sup> Qian 2021; Wang 2021.

*sifasuo*), but who were re-deployed by the Street Office to assist the community during the pandemic. In the first phase, these officials were tasked with monitoring the movements of local shopkeepers, purchasing protective equipment for the *xiaoqu* under their jurisdiction, and monitoring lockdown observance. In the second phase, the officials went door-to-door, providing information about the vaccine. This unpaid work was to be completed in addition to their regular work in the Judicial Office, with Party members expected to be the first to volunteer, demonstrating the ‘mobilisational’ nature of ‘sinking’.

One respondent, a probationary Party member, encouraged to apply for membership by her manager in the Judicial Office, explained the ‘voluntary’ nature of sinking: ‘This work is voluntary, because it's like saying that you started work during Spring Festival, and then didn't take a break. Then, including on weekends, I have to go to the Residents’ Committee to help buy masks... Basically, it's okay. Even though your own job is full-time, you still have to do it, right?’<sup>86</sup> The second official, also a Party member, also described the work as ‘voluntary’, but when we asked if you can choose not to go, she replied, ‘it seems like we cannot.’<sup>87</sup> In fact, these Party-member officials are under double pressure to respond, thanks to their identity as a government official who must respond to the Party’s mobilization through the administrative system, and their identity as a Party member who must respond to the Party’s mobilization. The second official explained, ‘what I understand is that Party members are the priority. If there are still not enough people, then everyone must go. But it must be Party members first.’<sup>88</sup>

#### *Establishing a Temporary Party Branch*

When an outbreak occurred in a *xiaoqu* in November 2020, local officials established a temporary Party branch within the *xiaoqu* to coordinate the logistical, testing and personnel requirements for lockdown management. The director of the Owner’s Committee explained, ‘at that time, the *xiaoqu* was in lockdown. The street-level Secretary took the leadership...the Secretary was outside the *xiaoqu*, responsible for the communication with the upper level...the deputy Secretary went inside the *xiaoqu*, bringing in a group of 40-50 cadres, responsible for the *xiaoqu*’s management during lockdown... and then we established a temporary Party branch inside the *xiaoqu*.’<sup>89</sup> Comprising government officials, *xiaoqu* policemen, RC members, Owners’ Committee, the Property Company, and Party members in various workplaces, the branch was deemed able to perform these functions more effectively than a government department, since it could bring government and society together. ‘We have Party members, policemen, people from government organs, as well as businessmen, corporate bosses, private company managers, we have all sorts of people’, the director explained. ‘The people from the RC, they basically lived here during those 14 days, made beds on the floor, built tents...too many things to do, arranging tests of residents, doing door-to-door examinations, arranging food,

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<sup>86</sup> O1

<sup>87</sup> O2

<sup>88</sup> O2

<sup>89</sup> 5OC1



arranging drinks, things going in and out of the *xiaoqu*, disinfection...'<sup>90</sup> Another member of the temporary Party branch explained, 'At that time, we couldn't leave our estate because of the lockdown, so we set up a temporary Party branch... Because when that outbreak happened, the entire neighborhood committee team was very small. There was lots of work to do inside, there were other jobs outside, and we played a coordinating role inside the community.'<sup>91</sup> Thus, the Party, rather than the government is seen as the key organisation through which emergency COVID management policy is implemented at the grassroots level. When the epidemic was brought under control, the Party branch was disbanded, illustrating that grassroots campaign governance can be stepped up and wound back down as required.

## **Party-in-Society**

### *Mobilising volunteers*

One of the most significant ways in which the Party achieves mobilizational governance is through the activation of volunteers, most of whom are Party members. Party members are expected to put themselves forward for community work, forming an additional, emergency force to ensure grassroots policy implementation. This is why the routine activities of Party-building are essential, since they keep the Party in the minds of its members. One RC secretary explained the order of community mobilization: 'at the time, when the situation of the epidemic was unclear, it had to be Party members taking the lead, so most of the volunteers at that time were Party members.'<sup>92</sup>

On the question of what attributes Party members should possess, our respondents mentioned 'a pioneering and exemplary attitude,'<sup>93</sup> the ability to 'take the lead'<sup>94</sup> and 'a higher ideological consciousness than ordinary people'.<sup>95</sup> However, Party members are not always motivated ideological conviction, but rather by other considerations such as personal advancement. In these cases, mobilization is achieved by appeals to the Party Constitution. One respondent explained, 'when you mobilize Party members, you often do so directly through Party discipline: I expect Party members to take the lead. But for non-Party members, it is more of a 'negotiation'. After all, it is different. For Party members, it's more of an order.'<sup>96</sup> This increasingly pressured workload on Party members sometimes constitutes a moral burden. One RC secretary told us, 'now it seems like the public is forcing Party members onto the moral high ground in all issues. It feels like, if you are a Party member, you have to do this. If you don't, you will be ashamed of your title of Party member.'<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> 5OC1

<sup>91</sup> O2

<sup>92</sup> 3RC1

<sup>93</sup> S1

<sup>94</sup> S1

<sup>95</sup> 3RC1

<sup>96</sup> 1RC1

<sup>97</sup> 3RC1

Our interviews with volunteers among Party members and non-Party members revealed differences between these groups. Party member volunteers often have a higher level of self-confidence and regard themselves as those ‘taking the lead’<sup>98</sup>. They are more likely to use political commitments to explain their motivation for being volunteers, such as ‘to service the people following the Party’<sup>99</sup> and ‘to stay true to your mission (不忘初心, *bu wang chu xin*)’<sup>100</sup>. Party members also contribute to the wider mobilization of *xiaoqu* residents: one explained, ‘they want me to do mobilization. I have two neighbours, and the RC will ask them to be volunteers tomorrow. If they refuse to come, I will do their ideological work’.<sup>101</sup> By contrast, non-Party volunteers explained their reasoning in apolitical terms: ‘We’re retired and just wanted to find something to do. So when I read about the recruitment in our [WeChat] group, I signed up’<sup>102</sup>.

### *Mobilizing businesses*

Building on the relationships forged in co-construction during routine governance, the Party was able to solicit local companies for donations of protective equipment and medical supplies to support *xiaoqu* during lockdowns, acting as a bridge between businesses and local communities. This activity came under the umbrella of routine Party-building, which could be activated when campaign governance was required. One RC secretary explained:

‘Our co-construction company’s Party branch donated pandemic prevention materials to all our 16 *xiaoqu* because these materials were very scarce. In fact, there was only one mask for the whole RC... At first we relied on donations, and later we got a distribution from the government. The government had to make sure that hospitals and medical workers had epidemic prevention supplies. But we also needed them because we were in the frontline too. Donations were all carried out under the system of the general Party branch.’<sup>103</sup>

This shows how the Party’s web, by connecting different areas of society, could ensure that residents’ needs were met while the government focussed on the medical workers. It was thanks to the relationships built up by the Party during routine governance that campaign governance could be activated during the COVID-19 emergency.

## **5. Limitations of Campaign Governance in COVID Management**

Despite its effectiveness in limiting the spread of COVID, the use of campaign governance as a technique to manage and coordinate the pandemic response has at least two crucial limitations. Firstly, as an interruption of the familiar working patterns of routine governance, campaign

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<sup>98</sup> V1

<sup>99</sup> V1

<sup>100</sup> V1

<sup>101</sup> E.g., persuade them to volunteer, V1.

<sup>102</sup> V2

<sup>103</sup> 4RC1

governance usually operates sporadically, diverting human and material resources to urgent programmes; thus it will be costly if it lasts indefinitely. Indeed, COVID management through campaigns might become unsustainable, given that the transmission rate and severity of infection have changed with the evolution of the virus.<sup>104</sup> Secondly, campaign governance articulates a centrally designated political priority, which, as we have shown, distinguishes it from routine governance, and enables it to mobilize resources quickly and effectively.<sup>105</sup> However, this mobilizational ability relies on a hierarchical and rigid administrative chain, which places great pressure on officials lower down who are unable to make policy adjustments based on their encounters on the ground with citizens.

As a result, dramatic changes can be observed in public sentiments towards COVID-19 containment. Before the emergence of the Omicron variant, the CCP's management of COVID-19 had proved hugely popular among the public, leading to a hike in public trust in the authorities.<sup>106</sup> In both government propaganda and wider public discourse, it was another 'miracle' created by the Party. It is through these 'miracles' that the charismatic authority of the Party maintains its legitimacy. But since Spring 2022, after frequent outbreaks of Omicron and the resultant lockdowns, Chinese citizens have become increasingly dissatisfied with the on-going commitment to zero-COVID.<sup>107</sup> During the spring 2022 outbreak in Shanghai, widespread criticism surfaced online, questioning the necessity of the severe lockdown.<sup>108</sup> Although the authorities were able to insist on zero-COVID and ensure citizens' compliance with on-going lockdowns, public discontent continues to the present day.

These two factors – the high costs of resource mobilisation and the hierarchical chain of command – result in intensified workloads and intense pressure on local cadres, leading to grassroots fatigue. One RC secretary explained,

'Now the secretary and the director are under too much pressure. It's just hard work, and the psychological pressure is too great. We have indicators for every job, including vaccination, and every residential area has a ranking every day. I'm too anxious to sleep at night. Because the city has indicators for the district, the district has indicators for the streets, and the streets have indicators for the residential areas, it is very anxiety-inducing.'<sup>109</sup>

Another stated, 'The community work of residents' committee cadres is not so easy to do. I can only say that. It is not so easy to do. We are now recruiting a lot of people, and there are also many people leaving because they are too tired, which is not what they want.'<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> White and Alim 2022.

<sup>105</sup> The rapid construction of specialized COVID-19 hospitals is perhaps the most vivid example of this aspect of campaign governance. See Williams 2020.

<sup>106</sup> Wu 2021.

<sup>107</sup> Sun 2022.

<sup>108</sup> Hu 2022.

<sup>109</sup> 2RC1

<sup>110</sup> 4RC1

Before arrival of the Omicron variant, the public had been strongly in favour of zero-COVID and retained high public trust in the Party.<sup>111</sup> At this time, the CCP's increased legitimacy came at the cost of the huge pressure on the grassroots cadres. This situation intensified following the emergence of Omicron and the hike in public dissatisfaction with the on-going lock-down policies, as it was the grassroots cadres that filtered out public discontents, maximally protecting the Party's overall image. An interviewee explained, 'when seen from a distance, we are the closest to the residents, so we face the conflicts directly.'<sup>112</sup> Another interviewee told us, 'it relies on us to shoulder the negative emotions of the public.'<sup>113</sup>

This illustrates a core tension within China's logic of campaign governance, between the demands from the upper level for compulsory enforcement of policy and the complex realities at the grassroots levels, which necessitate the use of 'discretion' by local cadres. For example, while the higher-level authorities set vaccination targets for grassroots cadres, requiring them to implement this policy in their *xiaoqu*, the national-level Health Commission publicly declared that mandatory vaccination was prohibited, suggesting that citizens could choose to be vaccinated and depriving the grassroots implementers of regulatory legitimacy.<sup>114</sup> This put the grassroots cadres in the impossible position of having to meet rigid targets without the authority to enforce the policy. One secretary illustrated how this paradoxical environment required her to take on the characteristics of a salesperson: 'think about the vaccination rate of 90%, where does it come? It comes from that we grassroots cadres running here and there, street by street, persuading people for vaccination...I asked everyone I know in the *xiaoqu*, my friends, my relatives, even classmates of my daughter, I use all of my personal resources, everything, I exhausted myself.'<sup>115</sup> When we asked about the consequences of not completing the tasks, she answered that 'you need to work overtime... there will be a ranking. If you do not complete the tasks, then the leaders will come and watch you.'<sup>116</sup> This demonstrates that the leeway for street-level bureaucrats to adapt or customise decisions from above during periods of campaign governance is very limited. The tension between the requirement for comprehensive compliance and the basic need for personal freedom is a result of top-level design, but it is experienced and negotiated at the grassroots level.

## 6. Conclusions

Our article has developed and deployed a novel framework to show that the Party has become the leading force in both local government departments and in wider society, a force that has been used extensively in implementing central-level policy during the COVID-19 pandemic in the style of a campaign. The Party's privileged status, situated above the governmental

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<sup>111</sup> Wu 2021.

<sup>112</sup> 3RC1

<sup>113</sup> 2RC1

<sup>114</sup> Guangming 2021.

<sup>115</sup> 2RC1

<sup>116</sup> 2RC1

bureaucracy, enables it to define an emergency, decide on priorities, initiate a campaign and adjust the bureaucracy accordingly. This is advantageous in an emergency, when unilateral sovereign power enables efficient governance, the results of which can be seen in China's very low COVID-19 infection and death rates.

Furthermore, the existence of routine governance as the foundation of campaign governance is a major reason why campaigns, such as COVID-19 management, can occur in a managed and efficient form. Routine governance provides the campaign with ideological norms, orders, formal and informal networks and corresponding constraints, which enables a smooth activation of campaign-style governance. The Party has deployed non-traditional methods to coordinate local COVID management, including the formation of 'temporary party branches', sending Party officials to local bureaucracies ('sinking downwards') and mobilising grassroots volunteers. Thus, campaign governance demonstrates bureaucratic features and is used as a policy implementation tool. The Party's privileged role in government departments, which we termed 'Party-in-State' and comprehensive social network, which we termed 'Party-in-Society' tightly manages both street-level bureaucrats and citizens, applying social pressure to deliver centrally determined results.

However, although China's COVID-19 campaign governance has greatly reduced death rates and has protected the wellbeing of vulnerable people, our article has explored the huge administrative, material and personnel costs it required. Our fieldwork has shown how campaign governance has weakened the activities of participants who must suddenly adapt to new ways of working and has placed great stress on grassroots institutions who act as buffers between disgruntled citizens and the Party's image. Finally, at the time of writing, the questions, first, of whether and how the Party will transition back from campaign governance and restore routine governance, and second, the long-term effects of campaign governance on grassroots institutions, remain to be seen. These are questions for further observation and research.

### **Conflicts of interest**

None.

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Table: Cited Interviews

Code	Location	Description
1RC1	Xiaoqu1	RC member
2RC1	Xiaoqu2	RC member
3RC1	Xiaoqu3	RC member
4RC1	Xiaoqu4	RC member
5OC1	Xiaoqu5	Owners' Committee director
O1	Judicial Office	Official1
O2	Judicial Office	Official2
V1	Activity centre	Volunteer1
V2	Activity centre	Volunteer2
S1	Street-level activity centre	Retired secretary1
S2	Street-level activity centre	Retired secretary2
M1	Party-mass service centre	Centre guide
B1	Party-building service centre	Centre documents