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ABSTRACT

Can frontier innovation be sustained under autocracy? We argue that innovation and autocracy can be mutually reinforcing when: (i) the new technology bolsters the autocrat's power; and (ii) the autocrat's demand for the technology stimulates further innovation in applications beyond those benefiting it directly. We test for such a mutually reinforcing relationship in the context of facial recognition AI in China. To do so, we gather comprehensive data on AI firms and government procurement contracts, as well as on social unrest across China during the last decade. We first show that autocrats benefit from AI: local unrest leads to greater government procurement of facial recognition AI, and increased AI procurement suppresses subsequent unrest. We then show that AI innovation benefits from autocrats' suppression of unrest: the contracted AI firms innovate more both for the government and commercial markets. Taken together, these results suggest the possibility of sustained AI innovation under the Chinese regime: AI innovation entrenches the regime, and the regime's investment in AI for political control stimulates further frontier innovation.

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1 Introduction

Autocratic institutions have long been viewed as fundamentally misaligned with frontier innovation: autocrats' political and economic rents are eroded by technological change and economic growth; and incentives to innovate are stifled by threats and acts of expropriation under autocracy.[1] Nonetheless, there have been prominent episodes of frontier innovation under non-democratic regimes, including the development of aerospace technology in the USSR, chemical engineering innovation in Imperial Germany, and, recently, the rise of China as a leading innovator in Artificial Intelligence (AI). How can innovation be sustained under autocracy despite the tensions identified in the literature?

In this paper, we argue that innovation in frontier technologies can be sustained under autocracy when they mutually reinforce each other. Consider a new technology that bolsters the autocrat's power — for example, by enhancing repressive capacity, military strength, or political legitimacy. Suppose that the technology has applications beyond those directly benefiting the autocrat, and that the autocrat's demand for the technology fosters innovation in such applications — for example, through spillovers arising from economies of scale or scope, the production of intangible assets, and externalities. To the extent that these mutually reinforcing forces overcome traditional political economy tensions, innovation can entrench autocracies and be promoted by them in a sustained manner.

Recent research suggests that AI technologies have characteristics that could result in a mutually reinforcing relationship between AI innovation and a modern autocracy — a so-called *AI-tocracy*. As a technology of prediction (Agrawal et al., 2019), AI may be particularly effective at enhancing autocrats' social and political control (Zuboff, 2019; Tirole, 2020; Acemoglu, 2021). Furthermore, because government data is an input into developing AI prediction algorithms and can be shared across multiple purposes (Beraja et al., 2021), autocracies' collection and processing of data for purposes of political control may directly stimulate AI innovation for the commercial market, far beyond government applications. More general forms of spillovers may also be at work, as in Moretti et al. (2019). Up to now, however, these possibilities remain untested empirically.

In the context of facial recognition AI in China, we present evidence that frontier in-

[1] The effects of economic growth on political institutions have been studied by Lipset (1959), Barro (1996), and Glaeser et al. (2007) (see Treisman, 2020 for a recent review). The effects of political institutions on economic growth and frontier innovation have been studied by, among others, North and Weingast (1989), Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), Aghion et al. (2007), North et al. (2009), and Acemoglu and Robinson (2012). Autocracies may also exhibit reduced innovation due to corruption and the misallocation of talent (Murphy et al., 1989; Shleifer and Vishny, 2002).

novation and an autocratic regime can indeed be mutually reinforcing. This context is particularly suitable for studying innovation under autocracy. Maintaining political control is a paramount objective of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (see, among others, Shirk, 2007). All citizens, even China's most successful entrepreneurs, are threatened by an unconstrained autocrat's ability to violate their property rights — and at times civil rights.[2] Moreover, facial recognition is one of the most important fields of AI technology,[3] and China is among the world's leading producers of commercial AI innovation.

To conduct our empirical analyses, we combine data on: *(i)* episodes of local political unrest in China from the GDELT project; *(ii)* local public security agencies' procurement of facial recognition AI (and the deployment of complementary surveillance technology) primarily from China's Ministry of Finance; and *(iii)* China's facial recognition AI firms' software innovation from China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, classified into government or commercial intended uses using machine learning (as in Beraja et al., 2021). Linking datasets *(i)* and *(ii)* allows us to test whether autocracies procure facial recognition AI for purposes of political control, whether facial recognition AI is effective in suppressing unrest, and whether AI procurement is associated with complementary changes in the technology of political control (such as the procurement of surveillance cameras). Then, linking these two datasets to *(iii)* enables us to test the extent to which *commercial* facial recognition AI innovation (our indicator of frontier innovation in AI beyond political uses) benefits from politically motivated procurement.

We begin by examining the first direction in a mutually reinforcing relationship: whether AI technology can effectively enhance autocrats' political control. We first test whether the Chinese regime, acting in a decentralized manner, responds to political unrest by procuring facial recognition AI technology. Using a difference-in-differences strategy, we find that indeed they do: locations experiencing episodes of political unrest increase their public security procurement of facial recognition AI. Importantly, these same locations do *not* increase their procurement of facial recognition AI for non-public security purposes, indicating that the occurrence of political unrest neither induces nor coincides with a general adoption of AI technology in the public sector. One might still wonder whether the procurement of public security AI was already on a different trend in locations experiencing political unrest (e.g., because of different rates of economic growth). However, we find no evidence that AI procurement is greater preceding episodes of political unrest. One might also wonder whether time and space varying shocks are correlated

[2]For example, Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, was detained for months upon arousing the ire of the Chinese Communist Party. See, for example, from the *Wall Street Journal*, `https://on.wsj.com/3rhtD0l`.

[3]For example, in 2020, computer vision was the second largest field of study in AI by publications on arXiv, accounting for 31.7% of the total publications (Zhang et al., 2021).

with the occurrence of political unrest and with public security AI procurement. To address this concern, we implement an IV strategy exploiting variation in the occurrence of political unrest arising from local weather conditions, and we find qualitatively and quantitatively similar results. In addition to increased procurement of AI technology for public security, we also find that locations experiencing political unrest purchase more high resolution video cameras which provide the crucial data input for facial recognition technology. Moreover, public security agencies that have procured more facial recognition AI technologies not only reduce their subsequent hiring of police staff, but also shift the composition of the police force towards higher skilled desk jobs that complement the deployment of AI technology.

Local governments' purchases of AI technology for public security purposes in response to the occurrence of political unrest suggest at least a belief in the effectiveness of such technology in curbing future unrest. We next study whether the increased public security AI procurement does indeed enhance autocrats' political control. Precisely because AI is procured endogenously in locations susceptible to political unrest, rather than examining the relationship between AI procurement and subsequent local protests, we examine how past investment in public security AI mitigates the impact of exogenous shocks that tend to instigate political unrest. Following a Bartik-style empirical strategy, we find that weather conditions conducive to protests have smaller effects on contemporaneous unrest in prefectures that have previously invested in public security AI. Conducting a placebo exercise, we find that such a relationship is *not* observed in response to past AI procurement for non-public security purposes, suggesting that our results are driven by the deployment of public security AI *per se*, rather than by differing socioeconomic conditions in politically sensitive contexts. Importantly, our results are not due to the time-varying effects of past protests that are associated with public security AI investment: local experience of past protest is not associated with differential unrest arising from current weather conditions. We also find that the geographic spread of political unrest across prefectures is limited by the past procurement of public security AI.

Having established that AI *does* strengthen autocrats' political control, we then examine the second direction in a mutually reinforcing relationship: whether politically motivated AI procurement stimulates commercial AI innovation. We study the effects of AI procurement contracts issued by local governments that experienced above median levels of political unrest in the preceding quarter. We compare the effects of public security contracts issued in this politically sensitive environment — these contracts are most plausibly politically motivated — to the effects of non-public security contracts issued in the same environment. This allows us to isolate the effects of politically motivated contracts beyond the consequences arising from generic contracts issued in a politically sensitive environment. Using a triple-differences empirical strategy, we find that receipt of a politically motivated public security contract is associated with significantly greater innovation of commercial (as well as government) software, relative to the receipt of a contract with a non-public security arm of the government. We find no evidence of differential pre-contract trends in software innovation, supporting a causal interpretation of our findings. To address the concern that political unrest is more likely to occur in economically dynamic locations where commercial AI innovation is also greater, we instead identify politically sensitive environments and classify politically motivated procurement contracts using *predicted* political unrest based on weather conditions, and the results are qualitatively unchanged. In other words, plausibly exogenous episodes of political unrest promote commercial AI innovation through increased local public security demand for AI.

Finally, we investigate whether autocrats' politically motivated AI demands distort the trajectory of innovation. We find that the effects of politically motivated public security contracts on commercial AI innovation are not smaller than other, politically neutral, public security contracts (if anything, we find the effects are larger), suggesting that the political motivation does not diminish the value of a procurement contract for AI firms. Moreover, we find no increase in surveillance oriented commercial software development after the receipt of politically motivated public security contracts. The absence of evidence of significant distortions suggests the possibility of sustained commercial AI innovation arising from politically motivated AI procurement.

Taken together, these results imply that China's autocratic political regime and the rapid innovation in its AI sector are not in conflict, but mutually reinforce each other. We do not interpret our findings as indicating that China's political stability is primarily achieved through AI technology (yet), nor that China's AI innovation is primarily rooted in political repression. Rather, our findings suggest that a component of China's coercive capacity is derived from the application of AI technology, and China's political repression in turn contributes to AI innovation and (potentially) economic growth. More generally, our analysis sheds lights on historical episodes — such as frontier innovation in the USSR and Imperial Germany — that are difficult to be accounted for by the large literature that highlights forces that limit innovation and growth in non-democratic contexts.[4]

[4]In addition to works cited above, a large empirical literature identifies negative effects of extractive institutions on long-run development (e.g., Acemoglu et al., 2002, Nunn, 2008, Dell, 2010, Lowes and Montero, 2020). There has been, however, a small strand of the literature that documents the positive economic consequences of colonial investments, particularly in transportation infrastructure and human capital (e.g., Hullery, 2009, Cagé and Rueda, 2016, Donaldson, 2018, Valencia Caicedo, 2019).

Our work relates to several additional strands of the literature. We contribute to a recent literature that emphasizes the importance of state capacity for development (e.g., Besley and Persson, 2009). The mutually reinforcing relationship we observe between a regime and frontier innovation can also be observed in settings beyond autocracies where the state exercises its fiscal capacity to support frontier technology (e.g., DARPA in the US). We highlight the possibility of sustained innovation arising from an autocrat's exertion of state capacity for political control. Thus, we contribute to a recent literature allowing for the possibility of growth under extractive institutions (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson, 2020, Dell and Olken, 2020). Beraja et al. (2021) find that Chinese government contracts stimulate AI innovation, but do not determine whether such contracts strengthen the autocrats, and whether politically motivated contracts in particular can foster commercial innovation. In this paper, we demonstrate that frontier innovation *can* be sustained in autocracy as a result of their mutually reinforcing relationship. In fact, this implies a different political economy trajectory: the Chinese case suggests a stable equilibrium exhibiting sustained frontier innovation and further entrenched autocracy.[5]

Moreover, we contribute to a growing literature on the socioeconomic consequences of AI technology. Much of the literature focuses on the economic consequences of AI; from its impact on the labor market (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2018, 2019) and how governments should respond to it (Beraja and Zorzi, 2021), to how it affects socioeconomic inequality (Korinek and Stiglitz, 2017) and economic growth (Aghion et al., 2017). Some recent research has considered the social consequences of AI, in particular, discrimination arising from the potential biases in its algorithms (Kleinberg et al., 2018; Cowgill and Tucker, 2020). Our paper provides direct evidence on the political consequences of AI technology: it can produce more effective political control, potentially entrenching autocratic governments.

We also add to a large literature on the relationship between technology and political mobilization. Recent papers find that advances in information and communication technologies, and the diffusion of social media, have supported protest movements and populist parties in a broad range of settings (Campante et al., 2018; Enikolopov et al., 2020; Qin et al., 2020; Guriev et al., 2020). We, on the other hand, contribute to a literature that documents how technological change can *repress* political unrest, thus strengthening autocracies and incumbents more generally. This literature describes the evolution of repressive technology: from Autocracy 1.0 — the state as a monopolist of violence using the threat of brute force to produce compliance out of fear (Olson Jr., 1993); to Autocracy

[5]It is important to note this political economy equilibrium is not inevitable, because the mutually reinforcing relationship may be offset by autocratic distortions (e.g., risks of expropriation).

2.0 — the state as manipulator of information using propaganda and censorship to produce compliance out of persuasion (Cantoni et al., 2017; Roberts, 2018; Chen and Yang, 2019; Guriev and Treisman, 2019); and finally, to Autocracy 3.0 — the state (and its AI) as monitor, predictor, and manipulator of behaviors to to produce compliance using targeted behavioral incentives (Tirole, 2020).[6]

Finally, we contribute to the literature on the political economy of growth in China. While much work emphasizes factors that promote China's growth *despite* its autocratic politics (Lau et al., 2000; Brandt and Rawski, 2008; Song et al., 2011), we join an emerging strand of the literature that highlights the autocratic institutional features that facilitate growth (Bai et al., 2020; Beraja et al., 2021). Importantly, we demonstrate that China's stimulus of facial recognition AI innovation is not due to marginal improvements in institutional features such as protection of property rights and rule of law, nor to the enhancement of infrastructure or state capacity more generally; but rather, AI innovation is spurred directly by the application of political repression itself.

Layout. In what follows, in Section 2, we describe prominent historical episodes of frontier innovation under non-democratic regimes, and we present the case of AI technology that guides our empirical inquiry. In Section 3, we describe the data sources we use. In Section 4, we present evidence of the effects of AI technology on autocratic political control. In Section 5, we present the evidence on the effects of politically motivated procurement of AI on innovation. Finally, in Section 6, we conclude by discussing the implications of our findings.

2 A mutually reinforcing relationship between frontier innovation and autocracy

2.1 Historical episodes

We first consider the success of scientific innovation in the Soviet Union, which was world leading in areas such as physics, mathematics, and aerospace and nuclear engineering. A striking feature of Soviet politics is the role of scientific advancement in legitimizing the Communist regime.[7] Science served as an effective propaganda tool, both internally and

[6] Our findings of AI technology being deployed in response to political unrest also contribute to a growing literature that studies authoritarian responsiveness to citizens' political grievances (e.g., Tsai, 2007, Chen et al., 2016, Campante et al., 2021).

[7] The importance of science to Communist ideology is seen in the Soviet government's "official view that science and Soviet socialism are mutually supportive" (Graham, 1989; see also Ings, 2017 and Slezkine,

externally, to enhance the prestige and legitimacy of the regime. For example, following the launch of Sputnik (the first satellite), *Pravda* celebrated "how the freed and conscientious labor of the people of the new socialist society makes the most daring dreams of mankind a reality" (Pravda, 1957). Scientific advancement also generated military technology that strengthened the regime against both internal and external threats: from nuclear warheads to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles to fighter jets. The Soviet state's financial and institutional support of science produced the world's largest community of scientists and engineers (Graham, 1989).[8] It also produced remarkable technological achievements, most famously in the space program, which launched the first satellite, sent the first human into space, constructed the first space station, and captured the first image of the far side of the moon, among other accomplishments.

A second case of frontier innovation under a non-democratic regime is the Second German Empire, which emerged as a powerhouse of science, industrialization, and innovation in the late 19th century.[9] Scientific and engineering innovation in many sectors were considered critical to ensure that Germany had a leading position among the imperial powers of Europe, not least because such innovation directly strengthened German military and naval capacity. For example, when describing the aim of the soon-to-be-established Imperial Institute of Physics, an imperial official stated that "there can be no doubt that our navy, telegraph system, survey organization, army and even the railways will [...] to a considerable degree be dependent on the results of the research for which this Imperial Institute of Physics is intended." Such imperial research institutes combined the expertise of German scientists with large amounts of state funding, producing not only military technology, but also general (even Nobel Prize-winning) scientific and industrial innovations. The eminent industrialist Von Siemens credited these institutes with Germany's industrial development, writing, "we have only the high quality of scientific education in Germany to thank for the fact that German industry, despite unfavorable circumstances, has somehow managed to retain its prominent position."

Apart from these two prominent episodes, one observes other instances of frontier innovation taking place in non-democratic regimes. In some cases, frontier technology enhances the legitimacy of the state, as in the Soviet example described above. For example, in Socialist Cuba, the remarkable success of the health care sector (e.g., developing vaccines and cancer treatments) served to bolster the regime's claim of political legitimacy (Geloso et al., 2020). In other cases, frontier innovation strengthens the regime through

2017).

[8] We do not claim that the Soviet's support of science and innovation was without distortion. Ings (2017) describes costly political distortions to science under Stalin.

[9] We rely on Pfetsch (1970) throughout this case study.

stimulating the economy and developing military technologies, as in the German example described above. Much like Germany, Imperial Japan post-Meiji Restoration heavily invested in frontier innovation in order to industrialize and strengthen its military capacity (Morris-Suzuki 1994). Singapore has since its independence actively supported export-oriented industrial innovation, the success of which fueled its growth miracle and helped entrench its one-party rule (Yue, 2005).

The two directions of the mutually reinforcing relationship between frontier innovation and autocracy appear to be shared across these episodes. First, the non-democratic regimes appear to derive political power from frontier innovation. Second, recognizing the political benefits of innovation, the regimes provide financial and institutional support that may be instrumental to technical development.[10]

2.2 AI-tocracy

AI technologies are fundamentally about prediction, as highlighted by Agrawal et al. (2018). Predictions are extraordinarily valuable for an autocrat trying to maintain social and political control. They can serve to enhance monitoring (e.g., using prediction algorithms to identify and track individuals), to project human behaviors (e.g., identifying individuals who are more likely to engage in political unrest), and to shape behaviors (e.g., providing targeted sticks and carrots, as studied by Zuboff, 2019 and Tirole, 2020). These political applications of AI technology to suppress and prevent political instability thus contribute to the first direction of a mutually reinforcing relationship.

At the same time, autocratic governments' procurement of AI technologies for purposes of political control can stimulate AI innovation beyond mere political purposes. This can occur through particular channels related to AI innovation being data-intensive: firms providing AI services to the state may gain access to valuable government data; and to the extent that such government data or algorithms trained with it are shareable within the firm, they can be used to develop AI products for commercial markets (Beraja et al., 2021). Moreover, government procurement may increase private data collection, which can then be shared across firms due its non-rivalry (Aghion et al., 2017; Jones and Tonetti, 2018). Procurement of AI technologies could also stimulate innovation through traditional "crowding-in" channels, including the production of non-tangible assets (e.g., ideas) and technological spillovers across government and commercial applications, both

[10]One also observes examples of mutually reinforcing relationships between democratic regimes and frontier innovation. One prominent case is the military innovation developed by DARPA in the US, and its well-known commercial innovation consequences (e.g., the internet). We do not argue that innovation *only* supports autocratic regimes; but rather, that such a regime-enhancing effect of technology may be particularly relevant in non-democracies due to their otherwise unfavorable environment for innovation.

within a firm and between firms.[11] Public procurement also provides resources to firms that may allow them to cover fixed costs of innovation and overcome financial constraints. These economic consequences of government procurement of AI technology (in particular, by an autocrat) thus contribute to the second direction of a mutually reinforcing relationship.

When such mutually reinforcing relationship is sufficiently strong to overcome distortions in autocracies that discourage innovation (e.g., risk of expropriation), it could support an equilibrium where an autocratic regime is entrenched, and frontier AI innovation is sustained — a so-called *AI-tocracy*. It does so by generating a perpetuating cycle in which autocrats are strengthened by AI innovation, and their procurement of this innovation stimulates further innovation, which in turn further strengthens the autocrats.

3 Empirical context and data

We test for the two directions of the mutually reinforcing relationship in the context of facial recognition AI technology in China. The key causal links that we empirically test for are indicated in Figure 1.

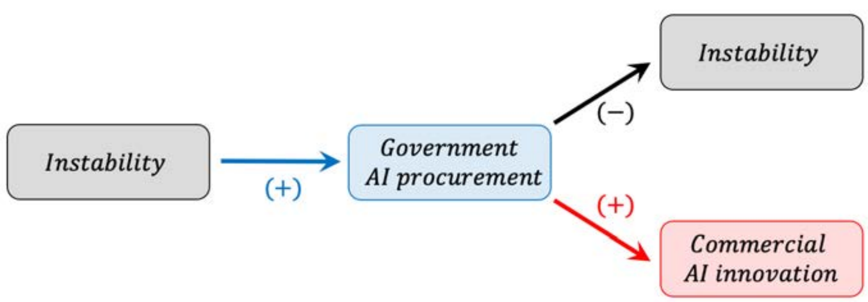

Figure 1: AI-tocracy

To test whether frontier AI innovation enhances autocratic political control (the first direction of the mutually reinforcing relationship), we first test for AI procurement that is motivated by the regime's desire for political control. The Chinese regime is particularly concerned with protests and unrest (Shirk, 2007; King et al., 2013). It thus may procure facial recognition AI technology in response to unrest (blue arrow in the figure), which could allow the Chinese government to identify, crack down on, and deter the participants to the unrest. Moreover, we test whether procurement of AI technology does in

[11] These channels have been shown to be important in the context of space exploration (Alic et al., 1992; Azoulay et al., 2018), the internet (Greenstein, 2015), and military technology (Moretti et al., 2019; Gross and Sampat, 2020).

fact enhance the regime's political control by reducing unrest (black arrow in the figure). Finally, we test the second direction of the mutually reinforcing relationship: whether politically motivated procurement of AI technology stimulates further frontier AI innovation (red arrow).

To conduct our empirical analyses, we combine data on: *(i)* episodes of local political unrest in China; *(ii)* local governments' procurement of facial recognition AI technology; and *(iii)* facial recognition AI firms' software innovation.[12] We describe, in addition, auxiliary data sources used for various empirical exercises in Appendix A.

3.1 Political unrest

We collect data on political unrest from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) Project. The GDELT project records instances of events based on articles from a global, comprehensive set of news feeds.[13] We restrict our analysis to events taking place in China between 2014 to 2020.[14] In sum, we find 9,267 events indicating political unrest, corresponding to three broad categories: protests, demands, and threats.[15] Figure 2, Panel A, presents the spatial distribution of the political unrest that occurred during the period of 2014 to 2020 in prefectures with AI contracts that we study; and Table 1, Panel A, presents basic summary statistics of these political unrest events.

Given the state control of Chinese media sources, it is important to consider the possible impact of censorship on the quality of the GDELT data. We believe that the GDELT data is well-suited for our purposes for several reasons. First, the local unrest that we focus on has generally *not* been targeted for censorship by the Chinese authorities (Qin et al., 2017); some have even argued that media reporting on local unrest is particularly helpful to resolve the information asymmetry between the central and local government

[12]Several of these datasets are used and also described in detail in our prior work Beraja et al. (2021).

[13]Text analysis and machine learning methods are applied to the contents of these articles to identify salient characteristics, such as event location (which we geocode at the prefecture level), date of the event, and the nature of these events. See `https://www.gdeltproject.org` for a detailed description of the GDELT Project and its methodology.

[14]The GDELT Project greatly expanded their scope of sources and text analysis capabilities in 2014, making coverage before 2014 less complete and reliable. From 2014 to 2020, there are over one hundred news sources that provide coverage on China. When multiple news sources cover the same event, GDELT records only one event.

[15]Each event is classified under the Conflict and Mediation Events Observations (CAMEO) event and actor codebook, in which protests (e.g., demonstrations, hunger strikes for leadership change), demands (e.g. demands for material aid, leadership change, or policy change), and threats (e.g., threats to boycott, political dissent) are three of twenty top-level "verbs" that an event can be classified under, with the latter being relatively less politically threatening. We exclude a small number of events that occur at a national or international level. We are able to cross-check the protest data against similar event counts from alternative sources, such as Radio Free Asia (Qin et al., 2020), and find very similar levels.

(Lorentzen, 2013). Moreover, the GDELT data includes a range of unrest events that differ in their political sensitivity, allowing us to examine whether the patterns we observe vary with political sensitivity.

Local weather conditions used to construct instruments for political unrest We use historical weather data originally collected by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and hosted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Data is reported at the weather station-day level. These weather stations provide a wide variety of data at the daily level, including mean temperature, amount of precipitation, presence of fog or hail or thunder, maximum windspeed recorded, and visibility.[16] We assign data to prefectures using the closest weather station to the given prefecture. For the 344 prefectures in our dataset, this results in 260 unique weather stations whose data we use.

3.2 Procurement of AI and the technology of political control

In order to observe the Chinese government's demand for AI technology, we extract information on 2,997,105 procurement contracts issued by all levels of the Chinese government between 2013 and 2019 from the Chinese Government Procurement Database, maintained by China's Ministry of Finance.[17] The contract database contains information on the good or service procured, the date of the contract, the monetary size of the contract, the winning bid, as well as, for a subset of the contracts, information on bids that did not win the contract.

To narrow our focus on the subset of contracts that procure facial recognition AI technology such as data processing services or platform solutions, we match the contracts with a list of facial recognition AI firms. We identify (close to) all active firms based in China producing facial recognition AI using information from *Tianyancha*, a comprehensive database on Chinese firms licensed by China's central bank.[18] We extract firms that are categorized as facial recognition AI producers by the database, and we validate the

[16]This weather data ranges from 2012 to 2020. There are a small number of observations for which weather data is missing (less than 1% of the total). For these, we impute data from the geographically nearest weather station, or in the one instance when all stations are missing data on a given day, we take data from the following day and the same station instead.

[17]See Appendix Figure A.1 for an example contract.

[18]A primary source of firms' information compiled by Tianyancha is the National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System, maintained by China's State Administration for Industry and Commerce. See Appendix Figure A.2 for an example entry. We complement the *Tianyancha* database with information from *Pitchbook*, a database owned by Morningstar on firms and private capital markets around the world. See Appendix Figure A.3 for an example entry.

categorization by manually coding firms based on their descriptions and product lists. We collect an array of firm level characteristics such as founding year, capitalization, major external financing sources, as well as subsidiary and mother firm information. Overall, we identify 7,837 Chinese facial recognition AI firms.[19]

Our empirical exercises in particular concern the AI procurement contracts awarded by public security agencies of the Chinese government. As an example from our dataset, consider a contract signed between an AI firm and a municipal police department in Heilongjiang Province to "increase the capacity of its identity information collection system" on August 29th, 2018. The contract specifies that the AI firm shall provide a facial recognition system that should cover at least *30 million* individuals, suggesting the large scale of data collection and processing that are required. In total, we identify 28,023 public security related procurement contracts on AI technology.[20] They include the following four types of public security contracts from the Chinese Government Procurement Database: *(i)* all contracts for China's flagship surveillance/monitoring projects — *Skynet Project*, *Peaceful City Project*, and *Bright Transparency Project*; *(ii)* all contracts with local police departments; *(iii)* all contracts with the border control and national security units; and, *(iv)* all contracts with the administrative units for domestic security and stability maintenance, the government's political and legal affairs commission, and various "smart city" and digital urban management units of the government. Importantly, each of these contracts is linked to a specific prefectural government buyer, and for the baseline analysis, we exclude those signed with the central or provincial government. Many firms receive multiple public security contracts; overall, 1,095 facial recognition AI firms in our dataset receive at least one contract. Figure 2, Panel B, presents the spatial distribution of the facial recognition AI contracts issued by public security units of the prefectural government; and Table 1, Panel B, presents basic summary statistics of the facial recognition AI procurement contracts.[21]

Parts of our empirical strategy compare public security procurement contracts of AI to those awarded by non-public security units in the public sector, such as (public) banks, hospitals, and schools. There are a total of 6,557 non-public security related procurement

[19]These firms fall into 3 categories: *(i)* firms specialized in facial recognition AI (e.g., Yitu); *(ii)* hardware firms that devote substantial resources to develop AI software (e.g., Hik-Vision); and *(iii)* a small number of distinct AI units within large tech conglomerates (e.g., Baidu AI).

[20]We present the cumulative number of AI procurement contracts in Appendix Figure A.4 (top panel), as well as the flow of new contracts signed in each month (bottom panel). Both public security and non-public security AI contracts have steadily increased since 2013.

[21]Some public security AI contracts are issued at the provincial level: for example, almost 40% of the public security AI contracts in Xinjiang are issued by the provincial government. Appendix Figure A.5 plots the spatial distribution of public security AI contracts issued by either provincial or prefectural governments.

contracts of AI technology.

3.3 Innovation of AI firms

We collect all software registration records for our facial recognition AI firms from China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, with which Chinese firms are required to register new software releases and major upgrades. We are able to validate our measure of software releases (using a single large firm), by cross-checking our data against the IPO Prospectus of MegVii, the world's first facial recognition AI company to file for an IPO.[22] We find that our records' coverage is comprehensive (at least in the case of MegVii): MegVii's IPO Prospectus contains 103 software releases, all of which are included in our dataset.

The count of new software releases (and major upgrades) represents *product innovation*.[23] Reflecting the economic value of such innovation, we observe that facial recognition AI firms that develop more software have significantly and substantially higher market capitalization (see Appendix Figure A.6).

We use a Recurrent Neural Network (RNN) model with tensorflow — a frontier method for analyzing text using machine learning — to categorize software products according to their intended customers and (independently) by their function. Our categorization by customer distinguishes between software products developed for the government (e.g., "smart city — real time monitoring system on main traffic routes") and software products developed for commercial applications (e.g., "visual recognition system for smart retail"). We allow for a residual category of general application software whose description does not clearly specify the intended user (e.g., "a synchronization method for multi-view cameras based on FPGA chips"). By coding as "commercial" only those products that are specifically linked to commercial applications, and excluding products with ambiguous use, we aim to be conservative in our measure of commercial software products.

Our categorization by function first identifies software products that are directly related to AI (e.g., "a method for pedestrian counting at crossroads based on multi-view cameras system in complicated situations"). Within the category of AI software, we also separately identify a subcategory of software that involve components related to surveillance (e.g., "tool that allows parents to locate and track lost children"). Moreover, we identify a separate category of non-AI software products that are data-complementary,

[22] Source: Hong Kong Stock Exchange, `https://go.aws/37GbAZG`.

[23] The National Science Foundation defines product innovation as "the market introduction of a new or significantly improved good or service with respect to its capabilities, user-friendliness, components, or subsystems" in its Business Enterprise Research and Development Survey (see `https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvyberd`). See also Bloom et al. (2020).

involving data storage, data transmission, or data management (e.g., "a computer cluster for webcam monitoring data storage").

To implement the two dimensions of categorization using the RNN model, we manually label 13,000 software products to produce a training corpus. We then use word-embedding to convert sentences in the software descriptions into vectors based on word frequencies, where we use words from the full dataset as the dictionary. We use a Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) algorithm, configured with 2 layers of 32 nodes. We use 90% of the data for algorithm training, while 10% is retained for validation. We run 10,000 training cycles for gradient descent on the accuracy loss function. The categorizations perform well in general: we are able to achieve 72% median accuracy in categorizing software customer and 98% median accuracy in categorizing software function as AI or data-complementary in the validation data. Appendix Figure A.7 shows the summary statistics of the categorization output by customers and by function; and, Appendix Figure A.8 presents the confusion matrix (Type-I and Type-II errors) of the predictions relative to categorization done by humans.[24] Table 1, Panel C, presents basic summary statistics of the software innovation of the AI firms.

4 The role of AI in autocrats' political control

4.1 The effect of political unrest on AI procurement and the technology of political control

Our empirical analyses begin by examining whether AI technology can effectively entrench autocrats. We first test whether local public security agencies (e.g., local police forces) respond to episodes of local political unrest by procuring more facial recognition AI. We estimate the following baseline model:

$$AI_{i,t+1} = \beta Unrest_{it} + \alpha_t + \gamma_i + \delta_t X_i + \epsilon_{it}, \tag{1}$$

where the explanatory variable of interest is $Unrest_{i,t}$, the local political unrest in prefecture i in quarter t, and $AI_{i,t+1}$ is the public security facial recognition AI procurement per capita of prefecture i in the subsequent quarter (the lag reflects the time needed to issue a

[24]Appendix Table A.1 presents the top words (in terms of frequency) used for the categorization. Appendix Figure A.9 presents the density plots of the algorithm's category predictions. The algorithm is very accurate in categorizing software for government purposes. The algorithm is relatively conservative in categorizing software products for commercial customers, and relatively aggressive in categorizing them as general purpose. In setting our categorization threshold for commercial software we again aim to be conservative in our measure of commercial software products.

contract in response to an event). The baseline model controls for time period and prefecture fixed effects, as well as time-varying effects of prefecture economic characteristics.

We present the results in Table 2, Panel A. To account for changing local economic and political conditions that may be related to both unrest occurrence and facial recognition AI procurement, we control for the prefecture GDP interacted with a full set of (quarterly) time fixed effects (column 1), the prefecture's population interacted with a full set of time fixed effects (column 2), the prefectural government's tax revenue interacted with a full set of time fixed effects (column 3), or all of these controls (column 4). One can see that across specifications, political unrest in a prefecture in one quarter is followed by a significantly greater amount of AI procurement in the following quarter. The results remain qualitatively and quantitatively very similar throughout. Appendix Table A.2 shows results on political unrest in the separate subcategories of protests, public demands, and threats, with results remaining qualitatively the same. To the extent that reporting of these event types is subject to different degrees of censorship (e.g., due to differences in political sensitivity), these qualitatively similar patterns suggest that differential censorship of local unrest is unlikely to explain the baseline result.

We next consider a falsification exercise, testing whether AI procurement may already have been increasing in locations with political unrest *prior* to the unrest itself. We thus estimate a modified version of the baseline model, but now examining the relationship between unrest in period t and AI procurement in periods $t-1$ and $t-2$. Figure 3 plots the estimated coefficient on unrest from separate regressions for each lead and lagged period. As one can see, political unrest is not associated with preceding levels of AI procurement, indicating that AI procurement did not anticipate but rather responded to the unrest, consistent with a causal effect of unrest on subsequent AI procurement. In Figure 3, we further plot the effect of unrest on AI procurement in the same period t, as well as in future periods ($t+1$, $t+2$, and $t+3$). The series of coefficients follows a sensible pattern: unrest has small same-quarter effects, with a much larger effect in the following quarter, and fading effects thereafter.

As an alternative empirical strategy, we implement an IV specification that exploits variation in political unrest arising from daily local weather variation (similar in spirit to Madestam et al., 2013 and Larreboure and Gonzalez, 2021).[25] Implementing a weather-based IV strategy in our setting requires overcoming three challenges. The first challenge is high-dimensionality: in a country as vast as China, one must consider a wide range of

[25]Government officials may respond to occurrences of unrest even when they arise out of idiosyncratic weather shocks. This may be because officials are unable to distinguish between root causes of unrest, or because it is important to respond to any occurrence given the possibility of path dependence of unrest (Bursztyn et al., 2021).

potentially relevant and interacting weather conditions. To address this, we implement a LASSO regression to select predictors of unrest events among 30 weather variables and their interactions (e.g., temperature, precipitation, and windspeed). The second challenge is the need to consider both the extensive and intensive margins of political unrest. Over a relatively long period of time, there are many days on which no unrest takes place (presumably because of the absence of mobilized political demands on those days), implying no elasticity between weather conditions and unrest occurrence. On certain days, unrest occurs across multiple prefectures, and local weather conditions plausibly would influence the likelihood of unrest occurrence in a specific location. To address this challenge, we allow for the LASSO-selected weather predictors to affect the probability of unrest occurrence heterogeneously depending on whether unrest occurs in at least one prefecture on a given day. A final challenge is the need to aggregate unrest occurrence to match the time frame over which AI procurement decisions are made (several months, which we operationalize as quarterly observations). To resolve this challenge, we follow the literature on 2SLS with different aggregation across stages (Angrist and Krueger, 1992; Inoue and Solon, 2010), and aggregate our first stage estimates to the quarterly level, adjusting accordingly for the statistical inference in the aggregated second stage.

In Appendix Table A.3, we present the first stage estimates using the weather-based LASSO instrument to predict unrest occurrence.[26] In Table 2, Panel B, and Appendix Figure A.11, we replicate our previous analyses using the LASSO instrument and find very similar results. Weather-induced variation in political unrest causes an increase in AI procurement in the following quarter, and the results are robust to controlling for time-varying effects of local economic conditions. Consistent with the exogeneity of the instrument, weather-induced unrest is not statistically significantly associated with AI procurement in previous quarters.

To the extent that one may be worried that the increased procurement of AI technology by public security units of the government may reflect a general shift in policies toward AI technology, potentially even triggered by the occurrence of political unrest, we can examine whether political unrest leads to AI technology procurement by *non*-public security units in the public sector, such as schools, hospitals, and banks. In Table 2, columns 5 to 8, we present the results replicating our previous analyses, but instead examining the

[26]To provide a transparent depiction of the operation of the LASSO first stage, we present, in Appendix Table A.4, the weights assigned by LASSO to each of the selected weather predictors. In Appendix Table A.5, we present similar (but less precise) first stage results using an indicator for fine weather (low precipitation and temperature between 0 and 97 Fahrenheit), which significantly, positively predicts unrest on days having at least one episode of unrest take place in China. All results presented in the paper are robust to using a simpler definition of fine weather based on precipitation and temperature alone (see Appendix Figure A.10, and Tables A.6-A.8).

effects of political unrest on non-public security AI procurement. We find no evidence that political unrest leads to increased demand for AI technology beyond the public security sector, indicating that the occurrence of political unrest neither induces nor coincides with a general adoption of AI technology in the public sector.[27]

Upgraded technology of political control Our interpretation of AI procurement as a government response to political unrest suggests that firms receiving public security contracts issued following periods of political unrest should produce AI software for the government oriented towards surveillance. Indeed, we find a significant increase in the production of AI software intended for the government with surveillance functions (see Appendix Figure A.13 for details; the full empirical specification is outlined under Section 5).

Moreover, one would also expect that the local government should invest in complementary technology such as high resolution surveillance cameras. In Appendix Table A.9 and Appendix Figure A.14, we replicate the exercises in Table 2 and Figure 3, but instead examining the local public security procurement of surveillance cameras. We find that following the occurrence of political unrest, the local public security units also increase their procurement of high resolution surveillance cameras, which complement the increased deployment of AI technology by increasing the government's ability to collect greater amount of data. Consistent with a causal interpretation, we do not observe increased procurement of surveillance cameras leading up to the occurrence of political unrest.

A final question is whether the increase in AI procurement is associated with changes in other elements of the political control apparatus — in particular, the labor component. It has been argued by Acemoglu and Restrepo (2019) and Agrawal et al. (2019) that AI technology is one that is often labor-saving and likely to be skill-biased. Consistent with this literature, we find that local police hiring is significantly lower one year after the corresponding police department procures AI technology, and the share of desk (as opposed to street) police significantly increases among the new hires (see Appendix Table A.10 for details). This suggests the facial recognition AI deployed in public security replaces labor, in particular the low skilled type.

Taken together, these results suggest that the autocrat views AI technology as poten-

[27] As a final exercise, we consider an alternative proxy for the underlying (perceived) risks of political unrest — variation in the minority Uyghur population share, who have been the focus of CCP's repeated expressions of concerns due to separatist and occasionally violent political actions. We present, in Appendix Figure A.12, a binned scatter plot, showing the cross-sectional relationship between the total public security AI procurement by prefecture and the share of the local population that belongs to the Uyghur ethnicity. One observes a strongly positive, significant relationship, consistent with the interpretation that public security AI procurement is motivated by desire to maintain political control.

tially useful and actively procures AI as an advanced method for political control. Moreover, as we demonstrate, the increased procurement of AI represents a component of a coherent technological bundle along with high resolution surveillance cameras and skilled labor in the police force which could complement AI and help the autocrat to maintain political control in the face of unrest.

4.2 The effect of AI procurement on suppressing unrest

We next examine whether greater AI procurement by the local governments' public security agencies effectively suppresses political unrest. Anecdotally, local governments appear to deploy facial recognition AI to reduce unrest through means such as identifying new faces in a protest, tracking suspicious persons in their daily life, or through simple deterrence.[28]

Importantly, having just demonstrated that AI procurement is endogenous to political unrest, we *cannot* directly estimate the impact of such endogenous AI procurement on subsequent political unrest. Estimating such a relationship is further challenged by the strong autocorrelation over time in local political unrest.

To evaluate the impact of public security AI procurement on autocrats' political control, we thus examine how past public security AI procurement shapes the effects of external shocks on local political unrest. We estimate a Bartik-style model in which exogenous time-varying shocks — specifically, the fine weather shocks identified as drivers of local protests in the first stage of our LASSO specification — may have heterogeneous effects depending on the *ex ante* local AI capacity. We expect that fine weather will increase the likelihood of local political unrest, but past AI procurement in a prefecture may temper this relationship.

To determine whether past public security AI procurement affects the relationship between local weather conditions and local political unrest, we estimate:

$$Unrest_{it} = \beta_1 AI_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 FineWeather_{it} + \beta_3 FineWeather_{it} \times AI_{i,t-1} + \alpha_t + \gamma_i + \delta_t X_i + \epsilon_{it}. \tag{2}$$

We estimate the effects of contemporaneous weather shocks (as captured by the LASSO first stage described above) in prefecture i at time t on local political unrest, allowing this effect to vary depending on the stock of local public security procurement of AI up to period $t-1$, controlling for prefecture and time period (quarter) fixed effects. Table 3, columns 1-4, present the results, gradually adding time-varying controls to account for changes in local socioeconomic conditions. As can be seen, the estimated effect of fine

[28] For example, see "the Panopticon is Already Here" from the *Atlantic*, source: `https://bit.ly/3aWC1gB`.

weather is consistently positive, indicating that fine weather is conducive to political unrest (as we have seen in the previous section). However, the estimated effect of fine weather interacted with past public security AI procurement is negative: AI procurement significantly weakens the positive relationship between fine weather and unrest occurrence, suggesting a role of AI in maintaining political control. A one standard deviation increase in the stock of past public security AI procurement halves the effect of fine weather on local political unrest.[29]

We next conduct a placebo test: does past local AI procurement outside the public security agencies shape the relationship between local weather conditions and unrest occurrence? One might worry that past AI procurement for any purpose reflects local governments embracing new technology and more broadly the quality of local governance, which may in turn dampen political unrest. Crucially, the effect of past AI procurement only appears for the contracts issued by public security agencies. Local AI procurement by non-public security agencies does *not* mitigate the effects of fine weather on political unrest, as shown in Table 3, columns 5-8.

It is also important to note that the cross-prefecture variation in previous AI procurement is not exogenous to sequences of political unrest, in particular to the past unrest occurrence as we demonstrated in the previous section. If the past unrest is associated with heterogeneity in the locality's responses to weather shocks, this could confound the interpretation that our estimates in Table 4 capture the effects of public security AI procurement. To assess this possibility, we examine whether exogenous weather shocks have heterogeneous effects on contemporaneous unrest occurrence depending on past unrest in the locality. Specifically, we estimate specifications analogous to those described above, replacing $AI_{i,t-1}$ with $unrest_{i,t-1}$ or $unrest_{i,t-2}$. As shown in Appendix Table A.12, Panels A and B, we do not find a noticeable pattern of heterogeneous effects of fine weather depending on past unrest in the locality. Relatedly, one may also be concerned that deployment of facial recognition AI in response to unrest captures local politicians' strong career incentives, which could be associated with a range of other policies also aimed at suppressing subsequent unrest.[30] To assess this possibility, we examine whether exogenous weather shocks have heterogeneous effects on contemporaneous unrest occurrence depending on local politicians' career incentives. We follow Wang et al. (2020) and es-

[29]We again find qualitatively similar results for each sub-category of the unrest events (protests, public demands, and threats); see Appendix Table A.14. To the extent that these distinct event types are subject to different degrees of censorship in reporting of local unrest, this suggests that the results we find are unlikely to be explained by confounding factors that are correlated with both local governments' procurement of facial recognition AI technology and its use of censorship.

[30]Career concerns might also affect the degree of censorship of local unrest, which could in turn affect our estimates. As noted above, we do not believe that out findings are affected by local censorship.

timate an index capturing each prefectural city leader's *ex ante* likelihood of promotion in each year, as a flexible function of their age (relative to retirement), tenure and official rank in the bureaucratic system (capturing the potential for upward mobility). As shown in Appendix Table A.12, Panel C, we do not find a noticeable pattern of heterogeneous effects of fine weather depending on local politicians' career incentives. These results suggest that the pattern of heterogeneity we observe is likely due to public security AI procurement, rather than other mechanisms arising from past unrest or local politicians' incentives.

As an alternative approach to studying the effects of public security AI procurement on suppressing subsequent unrest, we consider the effects of nearby protests *outside* a particular prefecture which tend to spread geographically. Specifically, we examine the effects of contemporaneous nearby protests as well as the interaction of nearby protests and prefectures' past accumulation of public security AI capacity. The results are presented in Appendix Table A.11. Reinforcing our previous findings, we observe that while contemporaneous nearby unrest tends to spread, past AI procurement significantly tempers such spread.

5 The role of autocratic political control in AI innovation

We now turn to the question of whether politically motivated procurement of AI stimulates AI innovation. Specifically, we focus on AI procurement contracts issued by public security agencies in prefectures that experienced above median levels of political unrest in the quarter prior to the contracts' issuance. As shown in the previous section, these contracts are plausibly issued for purposes of political control.

We use a triple differences design to identify the effects of procurement contracts issued for purposes of political control on the subsequent product development and innovation among the facial recognition AI firms that are awarded the contracts.[31] The empirical strategy exploits variation across time and across firms in the receipt of a government contract, and across types of government contracts that firms receive.

As in an event study design, we compare firms' outcomes — their software releases — before and after they receive their first government contracts, controlling for firm and time period fixed effects.[32] To distinguish the effects of politically motivated contracts from

[31] We cannot evaluate the effects of local unrest on firms' innovation directly: since AI firms awarded the procurement contracts are generally *not* local firms, procurement contracts are key links that connect local unrest with public security responses in specific localities, as well as the innovation of AI firms receiving contracts in those localities.

[32] We only examine firms' first contracts because subsequent contracts could be endogenous to firms'

the effects of generic procurement contracts issued in a politically sensitive environment (defined as municipalities with above median political unrest in the previous quarter), we compare the effects of public security contracts with those of non-public security contracts issued in the same environment.[33]

Specifically, among firms receiving their first government contracts in a prefecture that recently experienced political unrest, we estimate the following specification:

$$y_{it} = \sum_{T} \beta_{1T} T_{it} + \sum_{T} \beta_{2T} T_{it} \times PublicSecurity_i + \alpha_t + \gamma_i + \delta_t X_i + \epsilon_{it}, \tag{3}$$

where T_{it} equals 1 if, at time t, T quarters have passed before/since firm i received its first contract; $PublicSecurity_i$ is an indicator that the firm's first government contract is issued by a public security agency; α_t are a full set of quarter fixed effects; and γ_i are a full set of firm fixed effects. The coefficients β_{1T} describe software production of a firm around the time when it receives its first government contract when this contract is issued by a non-public security agency; the sums of coefficients $\beta_{1T} + \beta_{2T}$ describe software production around the time when a firm receives its first government contract when this contract is issued by a public security agency; and the sequence of coefficients β_{2T} thus captures the differential software production before and after a firm receives a public security contract in a politically sensitive environment.

In Figure 4, we plot the series of β_{2T} coefficients, considering different categories of software output. In Panel A, one can see that firms receiving a public security contract issued following episodes of political unrest develop approximately 1.5 additional government software products over the subsequent 2 years, compared to firms receiving a non-public security contract issued in the same local political environment. We present the full set of event study coefficients in Table 4, column 1, and present coefficients from a weighted event study specification, following Borusyak et al. (2017), in column 2. One naturally wonders whether firms receiving the public security contract were already following a different trend of software production before the receipt of the contracts. However, we do not observe differential pre-contract software production levels or trends among firms that would go on to receive a public security procurement contract.

In Panel B, one observes that firms receiving public security procurement contracts following episodes of political unrest also differentially increase their *commercial* software

performance in the initial contracts.

[33]For example, firms receiving *any* government contract in a context of political sensitivity (i.e., following local unrest) may be specifically selected for their potential post-contract productivity and innovation capacity. We define politically motivated contracts as contracts issued in times of above-median unrest. Public security contracts may or may not be politically motivated contracts — the classification of a public security contract is only dependent on the agency issuing the contract.

development, compared to firms receiving non-public security contracts in the same local political environment. Differential increase in commercial software development totals around 2.5 additional software products over the course of 2 years after the contract receipt. We present the full set of event study coefficients, using baseline and the weighted specification, in Table 4, columns 5 and 6. Our findings indicate the role of politically motivated government procurement of frontier technology in stimulating commercial innovation. Again we observe no differential commercial software production level or trend prior to the receipt of the public security contracts, suggesting a causal interpretation.[34]

One concern with this analysis is that our definition of politically motivated contracts relies on the endogenous occurrence of political unrest. Factors that shape political unrest may be associated with production of AI software specifically among firms that select into public security contracts. To address this concern, we alternatively define a politically motivated contract as a public security contract issued just after a period with above median *predicted* level of political unrest, using our weather-based LASSO instruments as described in Section 5. Again we difference out the effects of non-public security contracts in the same political environment. The estimated coefficients from this alternative definition of politically motivated contracts are plotted in darker-shaded dots in Figure 4, and presented in Table 4, columns 3-4 and 7-8. One can see the differential effects of public security contracts in politically sensitive environments on software innovation for both the government and commercial sectors are very similar following episodes of plausibly exogenous political unrest.

As an auxiliary test of the role of access to large quantities of government data collected out of political motivation, we examine whether firms receiving public security contracts in a politically sensitive environment develop data-complementary tools (e.g., software supporting data storage) to manage the large quantities of data that they receive access to. Importantly, these data-complementary software products are distinct from the AI software studied above. Again, we compare the effects of public security contracts issued following political unrest to non-public security contracts issued in the same local political environment. In Appendix Figure A.16, we present estimates from the same specification as in Figure 4, but now considering the outcome of data-complementary software products. One can see that data-complementary software production differ-

[34]One may wonder what are the overall effects of government contracts that underly the differential effects in Figure 4. In Appendix Figure A.15, we plot the coefficient β_{1T}, describing software production around the time when a non-public security contract was received, and the sum of the coefficient, $\beta_{1T} + \beta_{2T}$, describing software production around the time when a public security contract was received a politically sensitive environment. We find that government software and commercial software both significantly increase after receipt of both non-public security and public security contracts, with effects being significantly greater in the latter.

entially increases after the receipt of a public security contract in a politically sensitive environment, relative to the receipt of a non-public security contract.

Robustness and ruling out alternative hypotheses The results presented thus far do not appear to be the result of differential selection by firms into politically motivated public security procurement contracts. We find no evidence of pre-contract differences in software production levels or trends, which one would expect if firms selected into these contracts as a function of their underlying productivity. As an additional check, we flexibly control for the time-varying effects of firms' age and pre-contract software production, in order to address concerns about firms selecting into contracts as a function of their potential production growth (see Appendix Table A.13, Panels A.2 and A.3). Moreover, by flexibly controlling for the time-varying effects of firms' pre-contract capitalization as well as the dollar value of the contracts, we also account for selection into these contracts on firms' potential benefit from the capital that the contracts provide (see Panels A.4 and A.5). The results are qualitatively and quantitatively similar across these alternative specifications.

We next assess the robustness of our results to variation in specifying our outcome of interest — measures of software innovation. We restrict attention only to firms' new software releases (i.e., version 1.0) and major upgrades with a change in the first digit of the release number (i.e., versions 2.0, 3.0, etc.). Our baseline estimates remain largely unchanged, indicating that our results are not driven by minor software updates (see Panel B).

Given the complex process of constructing our dataset, it is important to note that our findings are robust to varying several salient dimensions of our analysis (see Appendix Table A.13). First, our results are robust to adjusting our classification of public security contracts to exclude any government agencies ambiguously related to public security (e.g., contracts with the government headquarters, and smart city management and administrative bureaux could be meant to provide security services just for the government office building; see Panel C). Second, the results are robust to adjustments of the parameters of the machine learning algorithm used to classify software — timestep, embedding, and nodes of the RNN LSTM model (see Panel D). Third, our results are robust to considering a balanced panel of firms within a narrow window, and to expanding the window of time around the receipt of the first contract that we study (see Panel E).

Our results are also maintained under specifications that help us address a range of alternative hypotheses. One concern is that contracts with the public security agencies within the powerful, high-surveillance local governments of Beijing or Shanghai may offer a range of political and economic opportunities that go beyond access to data. To rule out the possibility that our findings are distorted by contracts with these two local governments, we estimate our baseline specification, but add fixed effects for contracts from Beijing and Shanghai governments interacted with a full set of quarter to/from contract fixed effects (see Panel F.1). Results are also robust to dropping contracts from the arguably unrepresentative province of Xinjiang (see Panel F.2). We additionally account for a firm's home prefecture/province government potentially giving the firm a commercial advantage beyond the effects of data by estimating the baseline model excluding contracts signed between firms and any government in their home prefecture/province (see Panels F.3 and F.4). Moreover, to address a broader set of concerns about time and space varying shocks that may drive firms' commercial activities, we control for province by quarter fixed effects and show that results are qualitatively similar (see Panel G). Finally, to address the concern that the differential increase in commercial software production is due to more precise customer targeting by the firms, we include the un-categorized general AI software products to the commercial software counts, and we find qualitatively similar and quantitatively even larger effects (see Panel H).

Distortions due to politically motivated contracts? To the extent that politically motivated public security contracts may be accompanied by additional, non-commercial demands from the local government, or may be associated with greater specialization, such contracts could differentially crowd out firms' commercial activities relative to the non-politically motivated contracts that provide access to similar resources (e.g., data, capital, and political connections).[35] As discussed in Beraja et al. (2021), the greater the effects of politically motivated contracts on software production for the more general commercial market, the greater the impact these contracts would have on the trajectory of innovation in the AI sector.

To evaluate whether politically motivated contracts are associated with differential crowding out of commercial innovation, we compare the effects of politically motivated public security contracts to the effects of non-politically motivated public security contracts. This analysis is analogous to the exercise conducted in Figure 4 and Table 4, except for the types of procurement contracts whose effects we compare.

We now limit our analysis only to public security contracts, and compare those granted out of political motivation with those that are politically neutral. We define politically motivated contracts as those issued following a quarter with above median political unrest

[35]This could arise from fixed costs associated with developing products specifically for politically sensitive and demanding environments.

(as we did above), and politically neutral contracts as those issued following a quarter with below median political unrest. We estimate the following triple differences specification:

$$y_{it} = \sum_T \beta_{1T} T_{it} + \sum_T \beta_{2T} T_{it} \times PoliticallyMotivated_i + \alpha_t + \gamma_i + \epsilon_{it}, \tag{4}$$

where T_{it} equals 1 if, at time t, T quarters have passed before/since firm i received its first public security contract; $PoliticallyMotivated_i$ is an indicator that the firm's first public security contract is preceded by above median level of political unrest; α_t are a full set of quarter fixed effects; and γ_i are a full set of firm fixed effects. The coefficients β_{1T} describe commercial software production of a firm around the time when it receives its first public security contract when this contract is preceded by below median level of political unrest; and the sums of coefficients $\beta_{1T} + \beta_{2T}$ describe commercial software production around the time when the firm receives its first government contract when this contract is preceded by above median level of political unrest. If there exists differential crowding out due to the public security contracts' underlying political motivation, one would see negative β_{2T} coefficients following contract receipt.

Figure 5, Panel A, presents the coefficient indicating the differential effect of politically motivated public security contracts (β_{2T}) for the AI firms' commercial software production. We do not observe noticeable crowd-out of politically motivated contracts. In fact, if anything, one sees that politically motivated contracts tend to induce firms to produce more commercial software especially towards the later periods of the sampling frame.

Another potential margin of distortion is the function of the commercial software produced following politically motivated public security contracts. To explore this margin, we examine the production of commercial software products containing surveillance components such as monitoring and tracking (identified from the registered software descriptions).[36] In Figure 5, Panel B, we present estimates from the same specification as in Panel A, but now considering the outcome of commercial software products containing surveillance components. We find no increase in surveillance oriented commercial software development after the receipt of politically motivated public security contracts.

While these tests are not absolutely conclusive, the absence of evidence of significant distortions as a result of autocrats' politically-motivated procurement of AI technology imply a higher likelihood that commercial AI innovation could be continuously sustained.

[36]Commercial applications of surveillance include parental monitoring of children's location and activities.

6 Concluding thoughts: the implications of AI-tocracy

We document a mutually reinforcing relationship between facial recognition AI innovation and China's autocratic regime. This relationship has direct implications both for China's economic and political trajectories. First, China's autocratic politics may not constrain its ability to continue to push out the technological frontier in AI: rather, frontier innovation in AI may be stimulated precisely because of China's autocratic politics. Second, continued frontier innovation and economic development in China may not be associated with more inclusive political institutions: rather, such innovation may further entrench the autocratic regime.

It is important to consider the extent to which our results generalize. While many technologies would not exhibit forces that generate mutually reinforcing relationships between autocracy and frontier innovation, the key forces that we highlight could shed light on prominent historical episodes of frontier innovation in, for example, the USSR and Imperial Germany. More generally, the evidence also speaks to how state-sponsored innovation is supported in democracies, including innovation supported by DARPA in the US, the high-tech sector supported by the military in Israel, and nuclear engineering programs led by the French state.

Looking ahead, a mutually reinforcing relationship between AI and autocracy may become relevant in other contexts. Russia, in particular, has already deployed facial recognition AI for purposes of political control, and (not coincidentally) alongside China is among the world's leading producers of frontier facial recognition AI technology.[37] Moreover, autocrats in other countries well inside the technological frontier may import Chinese AI technology for purposes of political control. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that China's surveillance AI technology has already been exported to other autocracies.[38] One thus naturally worries that autocrat-supporting AI may beget more autocracies. The implications of China's AI innovation for the global political and economic landscape are worthy of further, rigorous investigation.

[37] Appendix Figure A.17 presents the global ranking of the companies who have the top 10 facial recognition algorithms in terms of prediction accuracy, as ranked by the Face Recognition Vendor Test (FRVT), organized by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST, an agency of the US Department of Commerce) and considered as one of the most authoritative AI industry competitions. Chinese firms occupy all of the top 5 positions; 8 out of the top 10 positions are occupied by Chinese and Russian firms. Regarding Russia's use of facial recognition for political control, see, for example, "In Moscow, Big Brother Is Watching and Recognizing Protesters" by Bloomberg, source: `https://bloom.bg/3tmtsSG`.

[38] For example, according to an Atlantic article, "Xi Jinping is using artificial intelligence to enhance his government's totalitarian control — and he's exporting this technology to regimes around the globe [...] China is already developing powerful new surveillance tools, and exporting them to dozens of the world's actual and would-be autocracies." Source: `https://bit.ly/3ujqj7g`.

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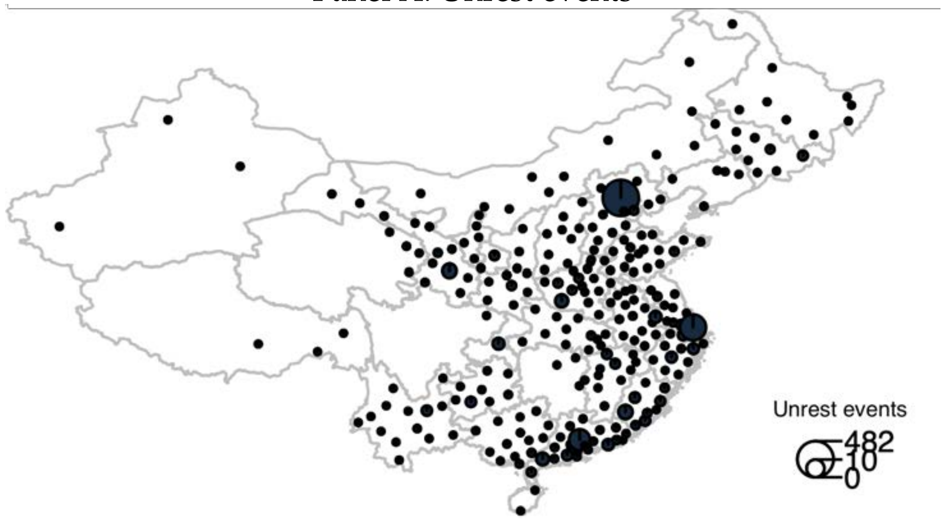
Panel A: Unrest events



Panel B: Public security AI contracts

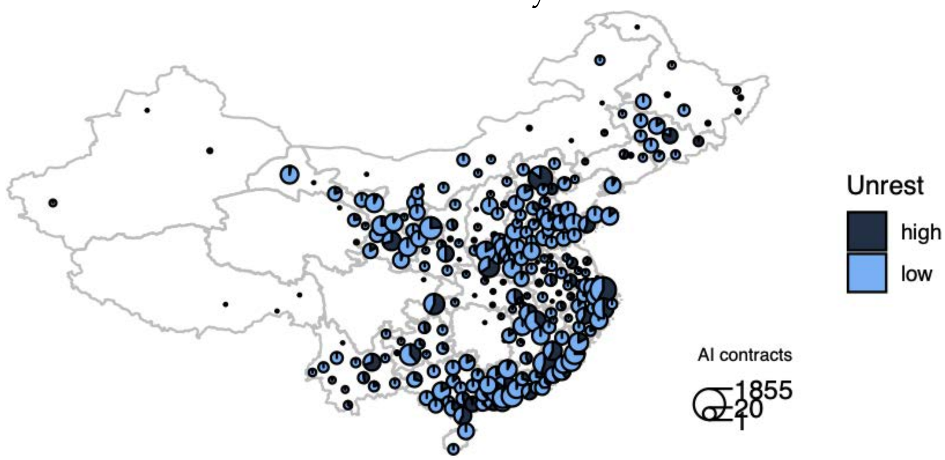


Figure 2: Each circle represents a prefecture in our dataset that has at least one public security AI contract that is an AI firm's first government contract. In Panel A, circle size indicates the number of unrest events in a prefecture, while in Panel B, circle size indicates the number of public security AI contracts awarded in the prefecture (larger circles indicate more, log scale). Circle shading in Panel B indicates the fraction of first AI contracts that were procured during high or low unrest periods, where the within-prefecture variation comes from changes in the number of unrest events in a prefecture over time (a larger fraction of dark shading indicates a larger fraction of prefecture contracts procured during high unrest periods).

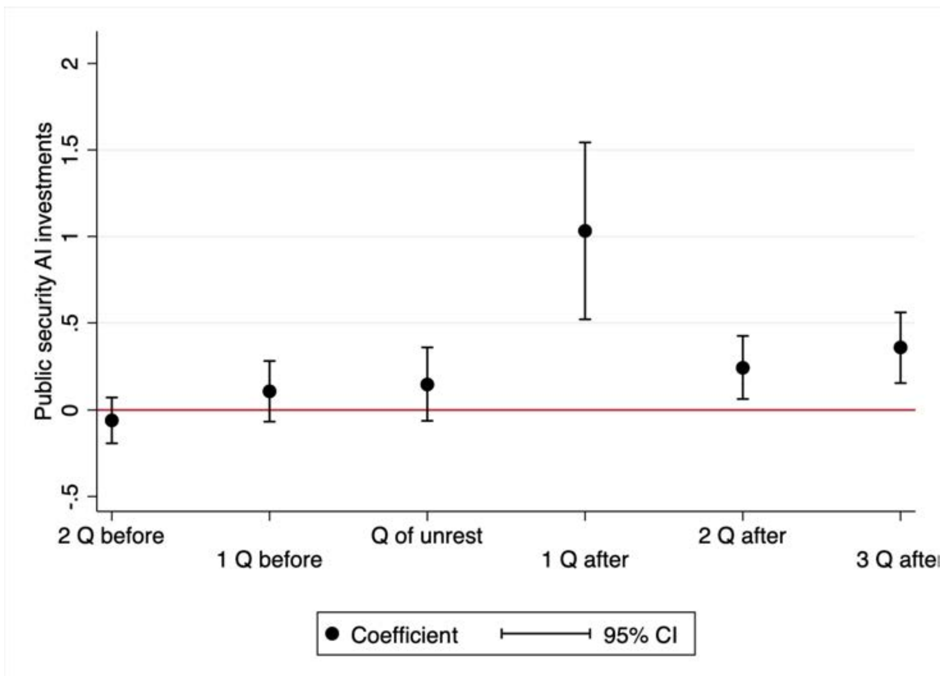
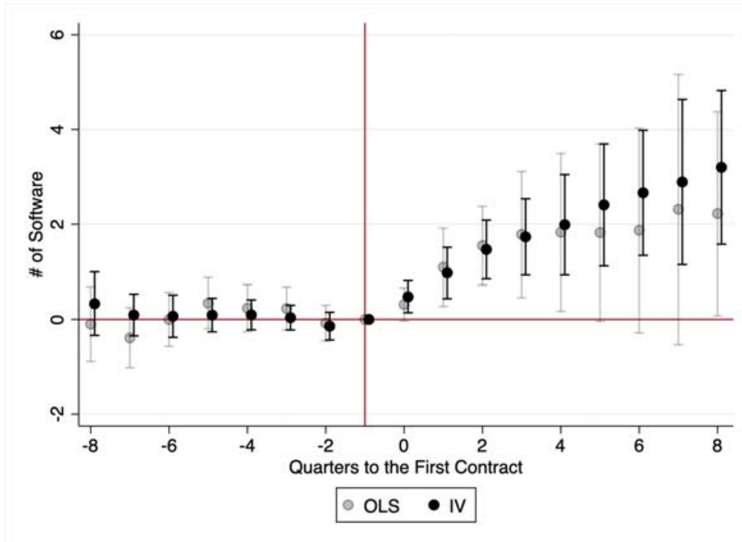


Figure 3: Public security AI investments relative to the quarter of political unrest. Coefficients and confidence intervals displayed are from separate regressions following the specification in Table 2, Panel A, column 4 (all controls), but varying the time lags between the quarter of unrest and the quarter of AI procurement. Public security AI investments are per million residents.

Panel A: Government



Panel B: Commercial

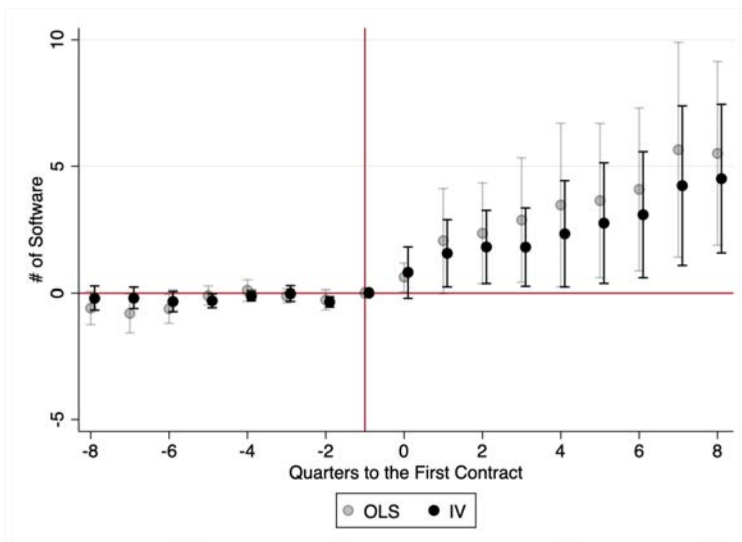
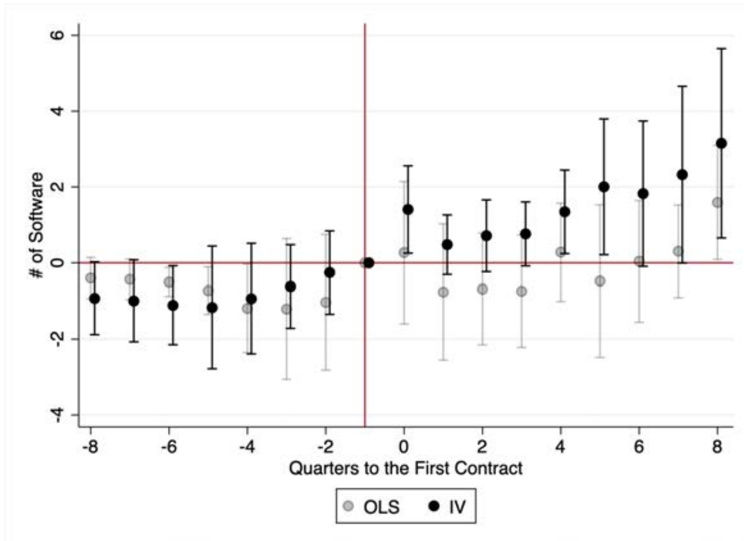


Figure 4: Differential software development by firms that receive public security contracts versus non-public security ones, relative to the time of receiving the initial contract. All panels restrict firms to those that receive contracts in prefectures experiencing above-median political unrest (or predicted unrest) in the previous quarter, and control for firm and time period fixed effects. The IV uses LASSO selected weather variables to instrument for unrest. Panel A shows software intended for government uses, and Panel B for commercial uses. Dark lines/markers use weather to instrument for unrest.

Panel A: Commercial



Panel B: Commercial surveillance

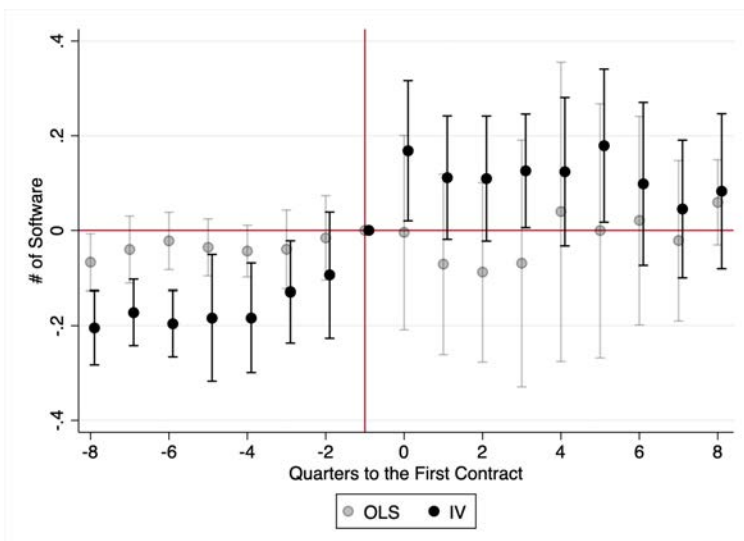


Figure 5: Differential software development by firms that receive politically motivated public security contracts (issued in prefectures with above median unrest) versus politically neutral public security ones (issued in prefectures with below median unrest), relative to the time of receiving the initial contract. All panels control for firm and time period fixed effects. Panel A shows software intended for commercial uses, and Panel B for commercial surveillance. Dark lines/markers use weather to instrument for unrest.

Table 1: Summary statistics

	Mean	S.D.
	(1)	(2)
Panel A: Political unrest		
All events (per prefecture-quarter)	2.419	18.490
Protests	0.607	4.603
Demands	0.720	5.009
Threats	1.092	9.479
Panel B: Procurement of AI and the technology of political control		
All AI contracts (per prefecture-quarter)	3.976	7.818
Non-public security contracts	2.285	5.118
Public security contracts	1.691	3.476
First public security contracts	0.082	0.327
Surveillance cameras (per prefecture-quarter)	2,118	12,684
Police hires (per prefecture-year)	59.278	84.991
Panel C: Innovation of AI firms		
All software (per firm-quarter)	5.756	7.124
Government software	1.724	3.337
Commercial software	2.353	3.675
Data-complementary software	2.273	3.605
Surveillance software	0.588	2.126

Notes: This table presents summary statistics at the prefecture-quarter level (firm-quarter for Panel C) for variables of interest. Column 1 shows the sample mean and column 2 the standard deviation. Panel A presents counts of unrest events, Panel B presents counts of local government-procured facial recognition AI contracts and other technologies of political control, and Panel C presents counts of software produced by facial recognition AI firms. For Panels A and B, $N = 8,167$ (Panel B police hires, $N = 2,672$). For Panel C, N = 23,697.

Table 2: Effect of unrest events on facial recognition AI procurement

	Public security AI procurement				*Non-public security AI procurement*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: OLS								
Unrest events	0.971**	0.962**	0.969**	0.972**	0.034	0.031	0.034	0.034
	(0.337)	(0.341)	(0.338)	(0.336)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Panel B: IV								
Unrest events	0.743*	0.733*	0.739*	0.703*	-0.102	-0.111	-0.105	-0.106
	(0.325)	(0.300)	(0.318)	(0.327)	(0.067)	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.070)
N	8418	8392	8418	8392	8418	8392	8418	8392
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. The outcome is the number of facial recognition AI contracts procured by the local government per capita, scaled up by 1,000,000. In columns 1 - 4, these are public security contracts, while in columns 5 - 8, these are non-public security contracts. There is a one quarter lag between the quarter of unrest events occurring and the number of public security AI contracts procured by the local government. Columns 1 and 5 control for prefecture GDP × quarter effects, columns 2 and 6 control for prefecture population × quarter effects, columns 3 and 7 control for prefecture government tax revenue × quarter effects, and columns 4 and 8 include all controls. Panel B uses weather variables as selected by LASSO to instrument for unrest events. These variables are: max. temperature over 97 dummy X hail, thunder X hail, hail X max. gust speed, thunder X max. gust speed, min. temperature between 64-97 X hail, and max. wind speed X max. gust speed, each interacted with a dummy for whether an unrest event occurred somewhere in China on the day. All specifications include prefecture and quarter fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province × year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table 3: Effect of AI procurement on suppressing unrest

	Standardized number of unrest events							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Fine weather	0.9871***	0.9922***	0.9877***	0.9923***	1.0304***	1.0383***	1.0314***	1.0361***
	(0.1818)	(0.1892)	(0.1825)	(0.1813)	(0.1981)	(0.2069)	(0.1988)	(0.1980)
Public security AI_{t-1}	-0.0127	-0.0080	-0.0133	-0.0130				
	(0.0222)	(0.0240)	(0.0229)	(0.0250)				
Fine weather × public security AI_{t-1}	-0.4976*	-0.5230*	-0.4995*	-0.5096*				
	(0.2791)	(0.2988)	(0.2816)	(0.2882)				
Non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.0046	-0.0059	-0.0048	-0.0053
					(0.0058)	(0.0064)	(0.0061)	(0.0056)
Fine weather × non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.0969	-0.1051	-0.1000	-0.0907
					(0.0671)	(0.0737)	(0.0702)	(0.0626)
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. The dependent variable is the standardized number of events in the prefecture. Fine weather is the standardized number of predicted events from the fine weather LASSO variables interacted with whether there was an event elsewhere somewhere in China. AI (public security AI contracts per capita in columns 1 - 4, non-public security in columns 5 - 8) is also standardized. Prefecture and quarter fixed effects are always included. Columns 1 and 5 control for prefecture GDP × quarter fixed effects, columns 2 and 6 control for prefecture population × quarter fixed effects, columns 3 and 7 control for prefectural government tax revenue × quarter fixed effects, and columns 4 and 8 include all prior controls. Standard errors are clustered by province × year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table 4: Effect of politically-motivated public security contracts on software production

	Government software				Commercial software			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
8 quarters before contract	1.690	0.621	0.320	-0.238	2.103	0.806	0.912	0.219
	(1.062)	(0.704)	(0.414)	(0.351)	(1.380)	(0.742)	(0.690)	(0.333)
7 quarters before contract	1.386	0.470	0.230	-0.250	1.743	0.659	0.703	0.117
	(0.983)	(0.665)	(0.352)	(0.283)	(1.158)	(0.633)	(0.519)	(0.229)
6 quarters before contract	1.075	0.342	0.229	-0.177	1.419	0.550	0.622	0.140
	(0.881)	(0.635)	(0.298)	(0.223)	(0.963)	(0.561)	(0.418)	(0.176)
5 quarters before contract	0.342	-0.248	0.072	-0.262	0.611	-0.090	0.518	0.125
	(0.394)	(0.245)	(0.269)	(0.233)	(0.480)	(0.201)	(0.342)	(0.160)
4 quarters before contract	0.185	-0.248	-0.057	-0.307	0.310	-0.178	0.217	-0.088
	(0.309)	(0.189)	(0.233)	(0.198)	(0.331)	(0.141)	(0.290)	(0.151)
3 quarters before contract	0.189	-0.092	-0.082	-0.243	0.151	-0.145*	-0.015	-0.200*
	(0.179)	(0.083)	(0.181)	(0.171)	(0.169)	(0.083)	(0.186)	(0.113)
2 quarters before contract	-0.209*	-0.336***	-0.148	-0.232*	-0.140	-0.239**	0.017	-0.068
	(0.114)	(0.090)	(0.141)	(0.136)	(0.096)	(0.098)	(0.098)	(0.071)
Receiving 1st contract	0.166	0.247	-0.026	0.033	-0.896	-0.808	0.051	0.114
	(0.178)	(0.172)	(0.109)	(0.097)	(0.776)	(0.711)	(0.138)	(0.102)
1 quarter after contract	0.064	0.336	-0.180	-0.024	-0.981	-0.659	-0.575	-0.401
	(0.342)	(0.323)	(0.231)	(0.197)	(0.941)	(0.779)	(0.654)	(0.551)
2 quarters after contract	-0.172	0.252	-0.286	-0.048	-1.184	-0.612	-0.542	-0.225
	(0.383)	(0.338)	(0.298)	(0.245)	(1.119)	(0.860)	(0.791)	(0.642)
3 quarters after contract	-0.057	0.424	-0.285	-0.007	-1.426	-0.817	-0.534	-0.203
	(0.594)	(0.507)	(0.342)	(0.270)	(1.311)	(0.972)	(0.875)	(0.694)
4 quarters after contract	0.241	0.858	-0.250	0.120	-1.354	-0.603	-0.646	-0.217
	(0.702)	(0.609)	(0.388)	(0.299)	(1.461)	(1.033)	(1.003)	(0.778)
5 quarters after contract	0.324	1.160*	-0.315	0.159	-1.480	-0.462	-0.666	-0.094
	(0.783)	(0.656)	(0.450)	(0.345)	(1.473)	(0.925)	(1.127)	(0.842)
6 quarters after contract	0.651	1.676*	-0.167	0.413	-1.427	-0.160	-0.534	0.128
	(1.048)	(0.882)	(0.521)	(0.416)	(1.757)	(1.068)	(1.262)	(0.926)
7 quarters after contract	0.874	2.078**	0.079	0.754	-2.107	-0.612	-0.799	-0.020
	(1.191)	(0.924)	(0.643)	(0.531)	(2.025)	(1.228)	(1.408)	(1.024)
8 quarters after contract	1.290	2.532***	0.152	0.906*	-0.490	1.051***	0.034	0.904*
	(0.768)	(0.734)	(0.533)	(0.480)	(0.892)	(0.342)	(0.810)	(0.489)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.213	-0.241	0.424	0.316	-0.599	-0.664	-0.219	-0.278
	(0.488)	(0.470)	(0.457)	(0.448)	(0.395)	(0.434)	(0.299)	(0.334)
7 quarters before contract × public security	-0.502	-0.449	0.114	0.025	-0.802*	-0.785*	-0.216	-0.249
	(0.423)	(0.372)	(0.272)	(0.261)	(0.461)	(0.464)	(0.260)	(0.279)
6 quarters before contract × public security	-0.304	-0.267	0.075	-0.011	-0.716*	-0.723*	-0.347	-0.379
	(0.436)	(0.415)	(0.269)	(0.274)	(0.389)	(0.408)	(0.257)	(0.268)
5 quarters before contract × public security	0.240	0.285	0.100	0.026	-0.113	-0.125	-0.329**	-0.384**

	(0.275)	(0.296)	(0.211)	(0.214)	(0.220)	(0.208)	(0.164)	(0.179)
4 quarters before contract × public security	0.141	0.206	0.103	0.050	0.119	0.122	-0.111	-0.153
	(0.251)	(0.259)	(0.191)	(0.185)	(0.285)	(0.268)	(0.121)	(0.132)
3 quarters before contract × public security	0.034	0.078	0.043	-0.012	-0.141	-0.135	-0.032	-0.062
	(0.172)	(0.213)	(0.159)	(0.155)	(0.173)	(0.176)	(0.191)	(0.203)
2 quarters before contract × public security	-0.198	-0.192	-0.134	-0.170	-0.223	-0.281	-0.341***	-0.367***
	(0.167)	(0.161)	(0.181)	(0.175)	(0.303)	(0.244)	(0.126)	(0.136)
Receiving 1st contract × public security	0.226	0.154	0.345***	0.329***	1.350	1.281	0.360*	0.349*
	(0.198)	(0.189)	(0.129)	(0.111)	(0.931)	(0.850)	(0.200)	(0.179)
1 quarter after contract × public security	0.992**	0.705*	0.962***	0.902***	2.044	1.728	1.557*	1.481*
	(0.443)	(0.361)	(0.321)	(0.296)	(1.249)	(1.031)	(0.785)	(0.745)
2 quarters after contract × public security	1.418***	1.110***	1.455***	1.403***	2.282*	1.907*	1.782**	1.697**
	(0.435)	(0.341)	(0.361)	(0.343)	(1.230)	(1.037)	(0.860)	(0.837)
3 quarters after contract × public security	1.668**	1.344**	1.735***	1.710***	2.912*	2.551**	1.787*	1.769*
	(0.718)	(0.592)	(0.482)	(0.456)	(1.504)	(1.229)	(0.931)	(0.905)
4 quarters after contract × public security	1.707*	1.391*	1.982***	1.989***	3.445*	3.026*	2.319*	2.313*
	(0.927)	(0.800)	(0.660)	(0.631)	(1.956)	(1.641)	(1.263)	(1.245)
5 quarters after contract × public security	1.739	1.294	2.388***	2.314***	3.618*	3.128**	2.740*	2.665*
	(1.068)	(0.921)	(0.786)	(0.756)	(1.845)	(1.518)	(1.433)	(1.387)
6 quarters after contract × public security	1.852	1.371	2.644***	2.501***	4.063**	3.548**	3.070**	2.956**
	(1.245)	(1.143)	(0.809)	(0.786)	(1.948)	(1.648)	(1.499)	(1.451)
7 quarters after contract × public security	2.258	1.716	2.963***	2.813***	5.631**	5.022**	4.224**	4.081**
	(1.672)	(1.497)	(1.055)	(1.024)	(2.560)	(2.207)	(1.898)	(1.852)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.135*	1.637	3.185***	3.038***	5.540**	4.925**	4.482**	4.294**
	(1.258)	(1.129)	(0.977)	(0.958)	(2.228)	(1.818)	(1.744)	(1.661)
Regression	OLS	OLS	IV	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	IV
Event-study weighting	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: The table presents regression coefficients for facial recognition AI firms that earn contracts from local governments when there is an above median amount of unrest in the quarter prior to the contract. The table shows the difference in software production between firms that earn politically motivated (public security) contracts versus non-politically motivated contracts. In the IV specification (columns 3-4, 7-8), local unrest is instrumented by weather variables selected by LASSO. Columns 1-4 present results for amount of government software produced by the firm, while columns 5-8 present results for commercial software. All columns control for time period fixed effects and firm fixed effects. Columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 weight the control group by 10 times more than the treatment, following Borusyak et al. (2017). Standard errors are clustered at the contract location (prefecture) level. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

ONLINE APPENDIX

Appendix A Auxiliary data sources

In addition to the primary data sources described in Section 3, we also use a number of auxiliary data sources for the empirical analysis.

Uyghur minority share As an auxiliary measurement of (perceived risk of) political unrest, we use the Uyghur minority population present in each prefecture. Uyghurs have been one of the primary targets of Chinese state surveillance and are viewed as a security risk by the central government. See, for example, a recent *Reuter*'s report that states, "Beijing accuses separatists among the Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority there [in Xinjiang] of stirring up tensions with the ethnic Han Chinese majority and plotting attacks elsewhere in China" (source: `https://reut.rs/332IYs9`). Also, a recent article from the *Atlantic* notes that "Uyghurs can travel only a few blocks before encountering a checkpoint outfitted with one of Xinjiang's hundreds of thousands of surveillance cameras. Footage from the cameras is processed by algorithms that match faces with snapshots taken by police at 'health checks' " (source: `https://bit.ly/3aWC1gB`).

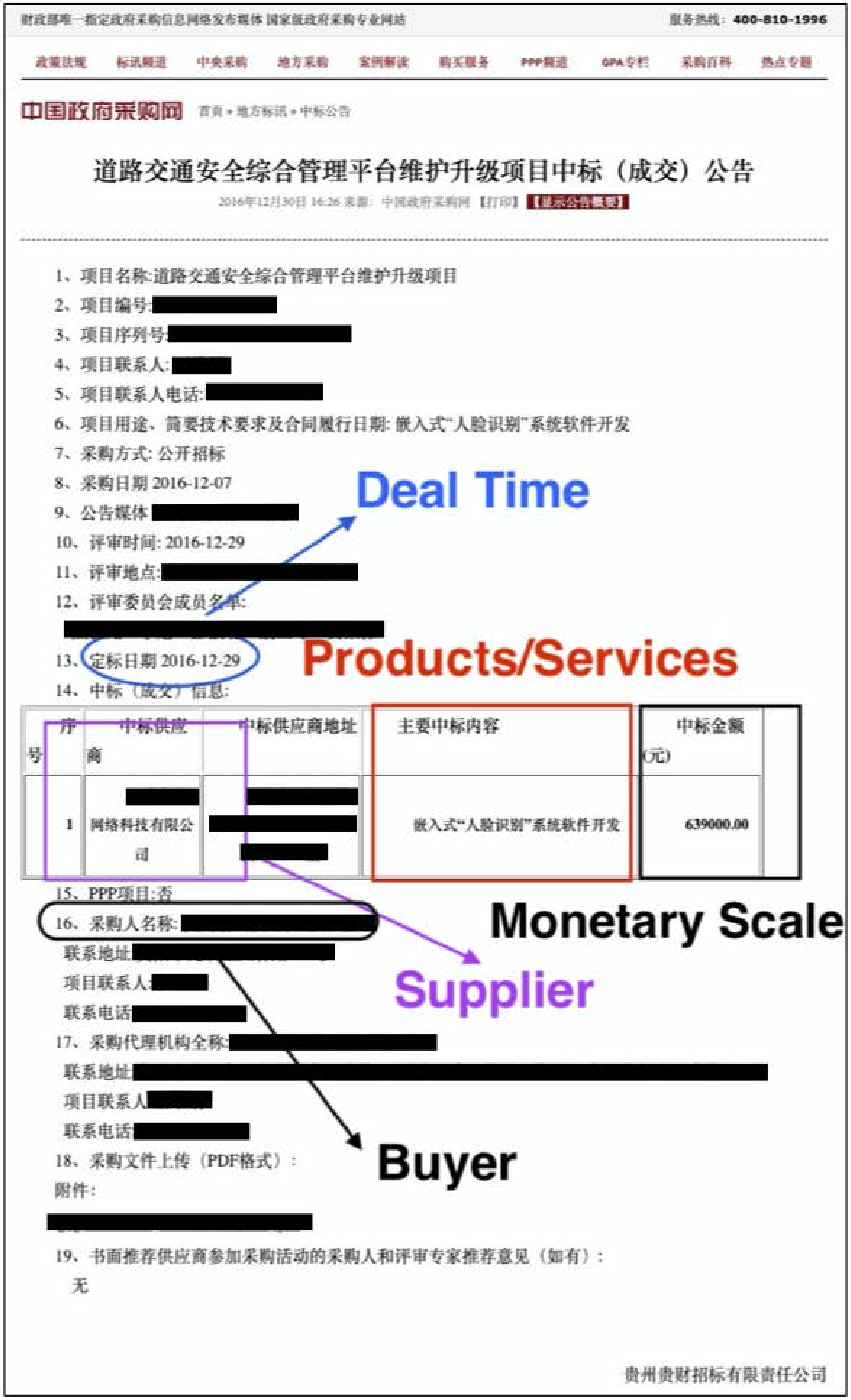
We collect data on the number of Uyghurs and Uyghur men in each prefecture from the Chinese Statistical Yearbooks in the year 2000, and use the fraction of the population that are Uyghur or Uyghur men to proxy for government concern for political unrest.

Local governments' procurement of surveillance cameras In addition to the public security procurement of AI technology, we also observe local governments' investments in two complementary technologies for public security purposes. First, we identify local public security units' procurement of high-resolution surveillance cameras, which are capable of collecting data for any AI control systems that may be in place. We construct a panel of the number of surveillance cameras in a given prefecture at the monthly level; when the number of cameras purchased in a given contract is not disclosed, we use the monetary value of the contract to impute the number of cameras purchased. In total, we identify 17,306 public security procurement contracts for surveillance cameras; during the period between 2013 and 2019, the average prefecture purchased 60,437 surveillance cameras (median = 20,439 and standard deviation = 117,672).

Local governments' police hiring Second, we collect data on personnel hiring by local police departments. From the website of OffCN Education Technology, we collect comprehensive listings of the number of police officers' job openings posted and filled by each department in a given year. OffCN Education Technology is a private firm providing labor market services specializing in the public sector; see `http://sd.offcn.com/` for details.

Using job-specific details, we are able to observe changes in police department hiring composition over time, by classifying police new hires into "field jobs" (e.g., police on the street) that require lower human capital, and "office jobs" (e.g., police working in the office) that require higher human capital. There are approximately 15,500 unique job positions to classify. We manually classify the 2,000 most common jobs as either field or office based on the job's title, description and requirements, and use keyword matching to classify the remainder. During the period of 2013 to 2019, the average local police department makes 32 hires in a year, of which 14 hires are for desk jobs.

Appendix B Additional figures and tables



财政部唯一指定政府采购信息网络发布媒体 国家级政府采购专业网站 服务热线：400-810-1996

政策法规 标讯频道 中央采购 地方采购 案例解读 购买服务 PPP频道 GPA专栏 采购百科 热点专题

中国政府采购网 首页 » 地方标讯 » 中标公告

道路交通安全综合管理平台维护升级项目中标（成交）公告

2016年12月30日 16:26 来源：中国政府采购网 【打印】【显示公告概要】

1、项目名称:道路交通安全综合管理平台维护升级项目
2、项目编号:[redacted]
3、项目序列号:[redacted]
4、项目联系人:[redacted]
5、项目联系人电话:[redacted]
6、项目用途、简要技术要求及合同履行日期: 嵌入式"人脸识别"系统软件开发
7、采购方式: 公开招标
8、采购日期 2016-12-07
9、公告媒体[redacted]
10、评审时间: 2016-12-29
11、评审地点:[redacted]
12、评审委员会成员名单:
[redacted]
13、定标日期 2016-12-29
14、中标（成交）信息:

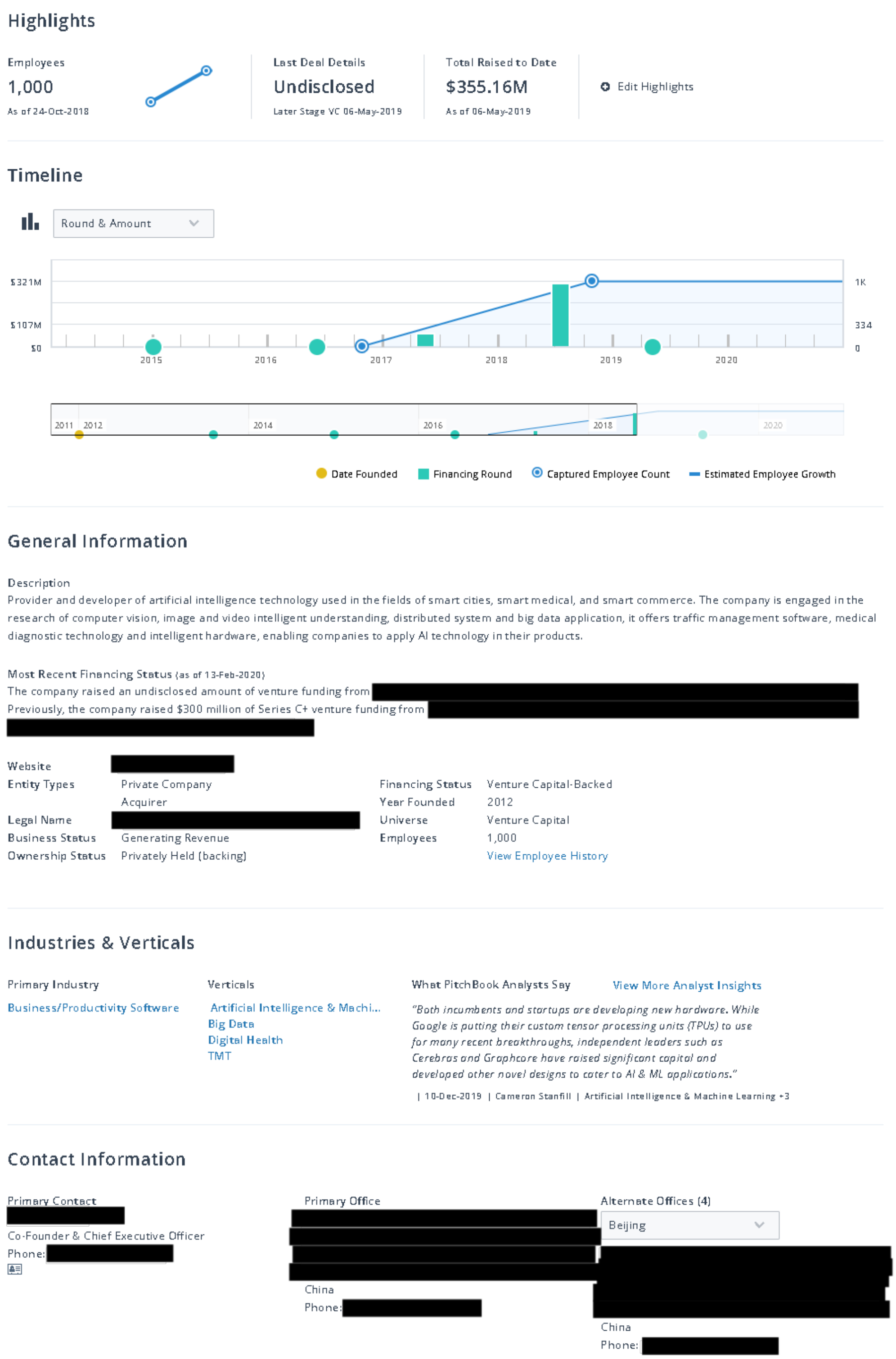
序号	中标供应商	中标供应商地址	主要中标内容	中标金额(元)
1	[redacted]网络科技有限公司	[redacted]	嵌入式"人脸识别"系统软件开发	639000.00

15、PPP项目:否
16、采购人名称:[redacted]
联系地址[redacted]
项目联系人[redacted]
联系电话[redacted]
17、采购代理机构全称:[redacted]
联系地址[redacted]
项目联系人[redacted]
联系电话[redacted]
18、采购文件上传（PDF格式）:
附件:
[redacted]
19、书面推荐供应商参加采购活动的采购人和评审专家推荐意见（如有）:
无

贵州贵财招标有限责任公司

Figure A.1: Example of a procurement contract record; source: Chinese Government Procurement Database.

Figure A.2: Example of AI firm record from *Tianyancha* (excerpt).



Highlights

Employees
1,000
As of 24-Oct-2018

Last Deal Details
Undisclosed
Later Stage VC 06-May-2019

Total Raised to Date
$355.16M
As of 06-May-2019

Edit Highlights

Timeline

Round & Amount

Date Founded | Financing Round | Captured Employee Count | Estimated Employee Growth

General Information

Description
Provider and developer of artificial intelligence technology used in the fields of smart cities, smart medical, and smart commerce. The company is engaged in the research of computer vision, image and video intelligent understanding, distributed system and big data application, it offers traffic management software, medical diagnostic technology and intelligent hardware, enabling companies to apply AI technology in their products.

Most Recent Financing Status (as of 13-Feb-2020)
The company raised an undisclosed amount of venture funding from [redacted]
Previously, the company raised $300 million of Series C+ venture funding from [redacted]

Website	[redacted]		
Entity Types	Private Company Acquirer	Financing Status	Venture Capital-Backed
		Year Founded	2012
Legal Name	[redacted]	Universe	Venture Capital
Business Status	Generating Revenue	Employees	1,000
Ownership Status	Privately Held (backing)		View Employee History

Industries & Verticals

Primary Industry
Business/Productivity Software

Verticals
Artificial Intelligence & Machi...
Big Data
Digital Health
TMT

What PitchBook Analysts Say
View More Analyst Insights
"Both incumbents and startups are developing new hardware. While Google is putting their custom tensor processing units (TPUs) to use for many recent breakthroughs, independent leaders such as Cerebras and Graphcore have raised significant capital and developed other novel designs to cater to AI & ML applications."
| 10-Dec-2019 | Cameron Stanfill | Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning +3

Contact Information

Primary Contact
[redacted]
Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Phone: [redacted]

Primary Office
[redacted]
China
Phone: [redacted]

Alternate Offices (4)
Beijing
[redacted]
China
Phone: [redacted]

Figure A.3: Example of AI firm record from *Pitchbook* (excerpt).

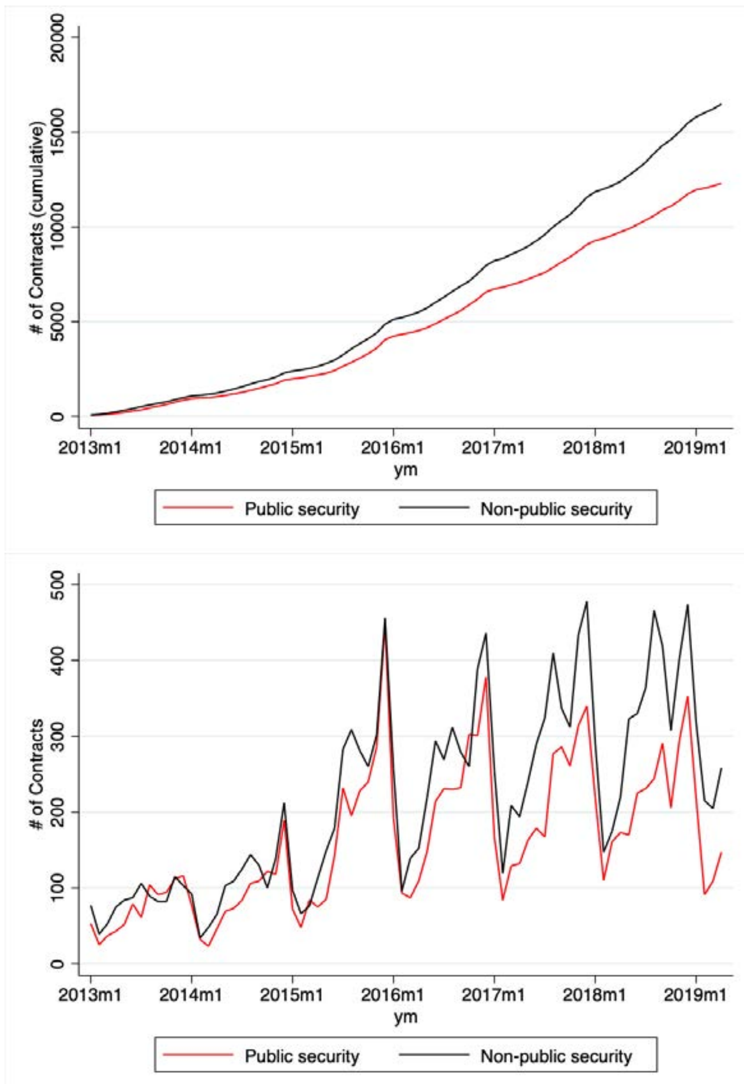


Figure A.4: Cumulative number of public security and non-public security contracts (top panel), and the flow of new contracts signed in each month (bottom panel).

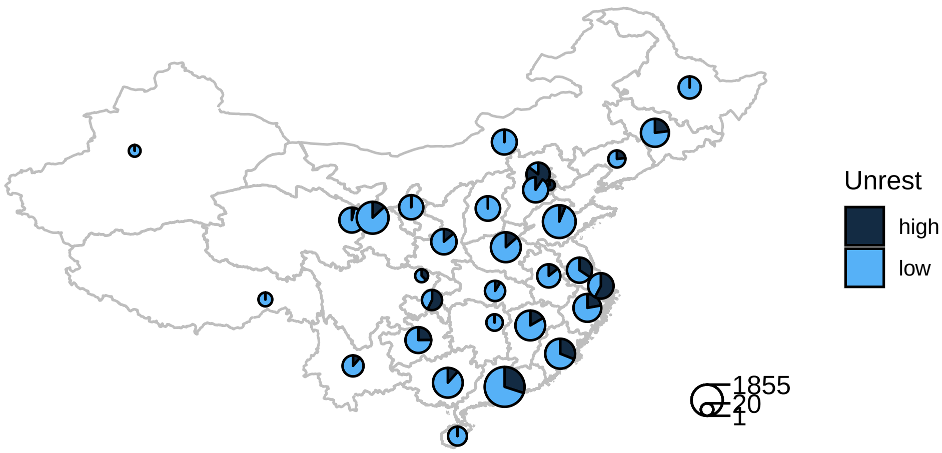


Figure A.5: Each circle represents a province in our dataset that has at least one public security AI contract that is some AI firm's first government contract. Circle size indicates the number of public security AI contracts awarded to a prefecture in the province (larger circles indicate more contracts, log scale), where prefecture-level contracts are weighted by the number of prefectures in the province. Circle shading indicates the fraction of first AI contracts that were procured during high or low unrest periods, where the within-prefecture variation comes from changes in the number of unrest events in a prefecture over time (a larger fraction of dark shading indicates a larger fraction of prefecture contracts procured during high unrest periods).

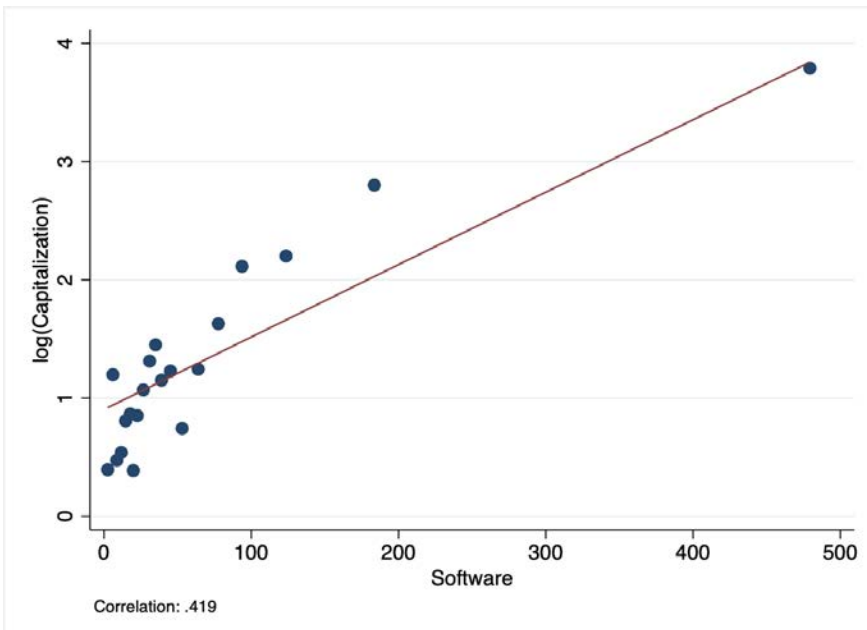
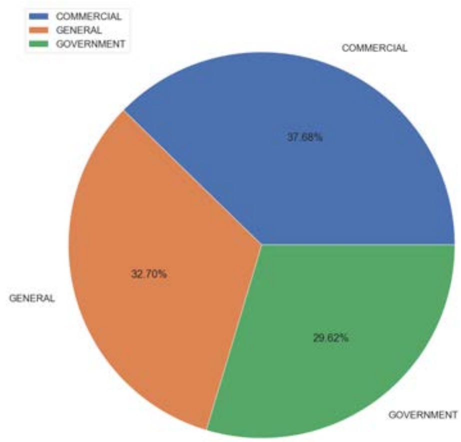
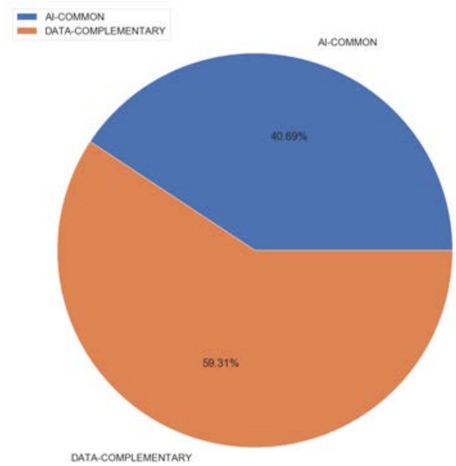


Figure A.6: Binscatter plot at the firm level of log(firm capitalization) and amount of software produced.

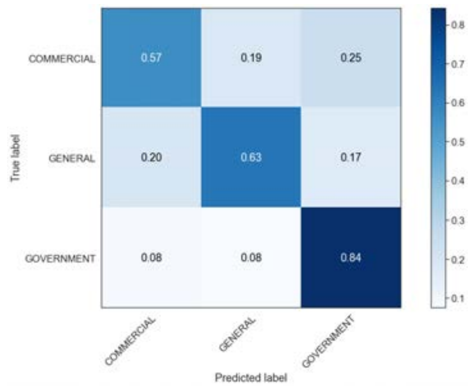


(a) Customers

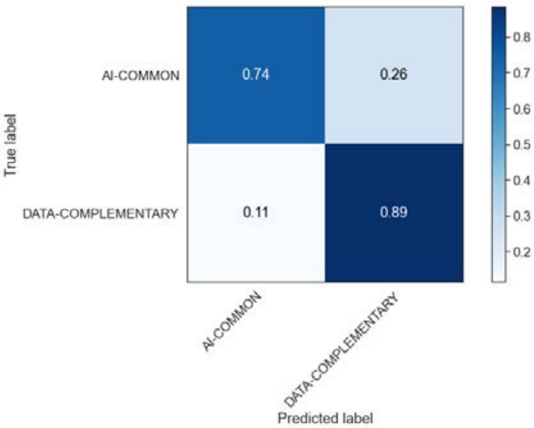


(b) Function

Figure A.7: Summary statistics of categorization outcomes for software categorizations based on Recurrent Neural Network with Long Short-Term Memory algorithm. Left panel shows categorization by customers; right panel shows categorization by function.

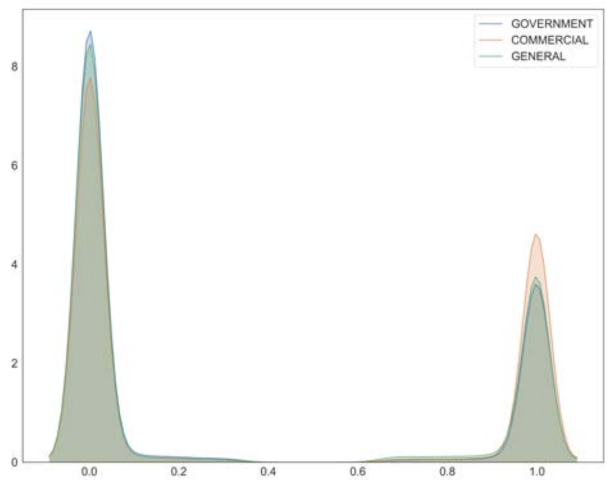


(a) Customers

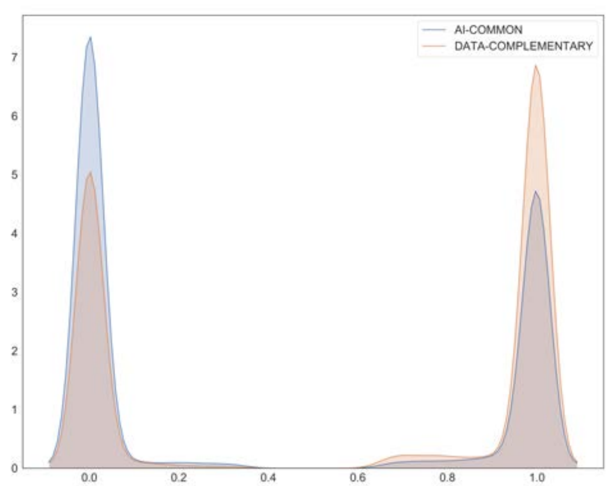


(b) Functions

Figure A.8: Confusion matrix of categorization outcomes for software categorizations. True labels are based on training set constructed by human categozations (performed by two individuals). Predicted labels are outputs based on Recurrent Neural Network with Long Short-Term Memory algorithm. Left panel shows categorization by customers; right panel shows categorization by function.



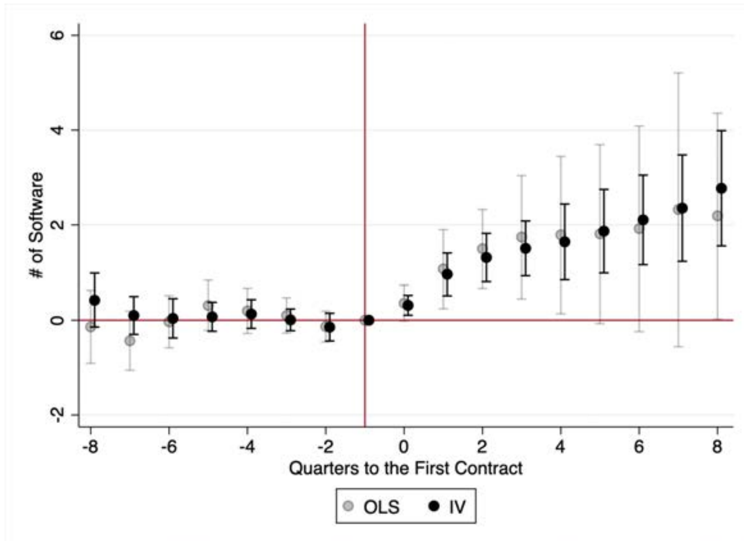
(a) Customers



(b) Function

Figure A.9: Probability density plots of software categorizations based on Recurrent Neural Network with Long Short-Term Memory algorithm. Top panel shows categorization by customers; bottom panel shows categorization by function.

Panel A: Government



Panel B: Commercial

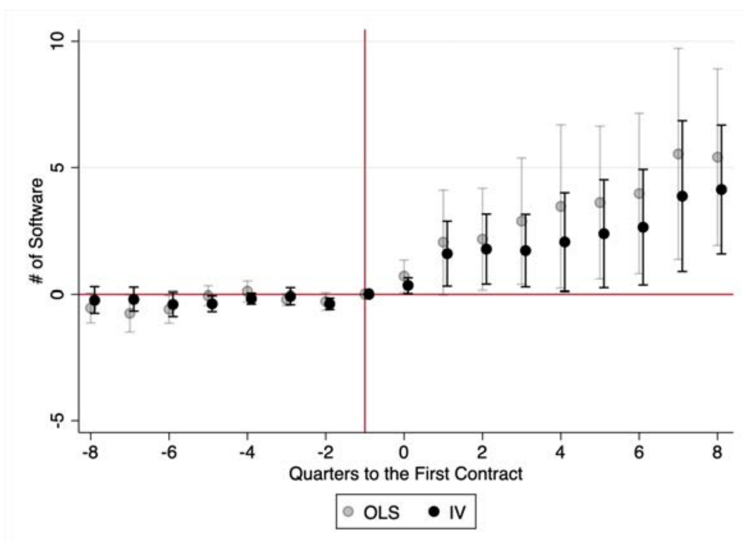


Figure A.10: These figures replicate Figure 5 (differential software development by firms that receive public security contracts versus non-public security ones, relative to the time of receiving the initial contract), but using the parsimonious fine weather IV specification. All panels restrict firms to those that receive above median unrest contracts, and control for firm and time period fixed effects. Panel A shows software intended for government uses, and Panel B for commercial. Dark lines/markers use rain, precipitation, and thunder to instrument for unrest.

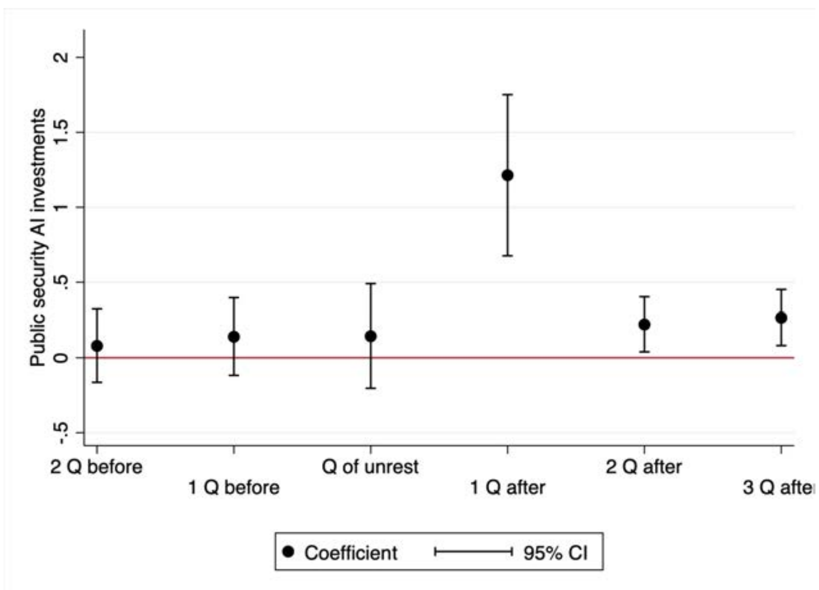


Figure A.11: Public security AI investments relative to the quarter of political unrest. Coefficients and confidence intervals displayed are from a regression following the specification in Table 2, Panel B (LASSO weather IV for unrest), column 4, but varying the time lags between the quarter of unrest and the quarter of AI procurement. Public security AI investments are per million residents.

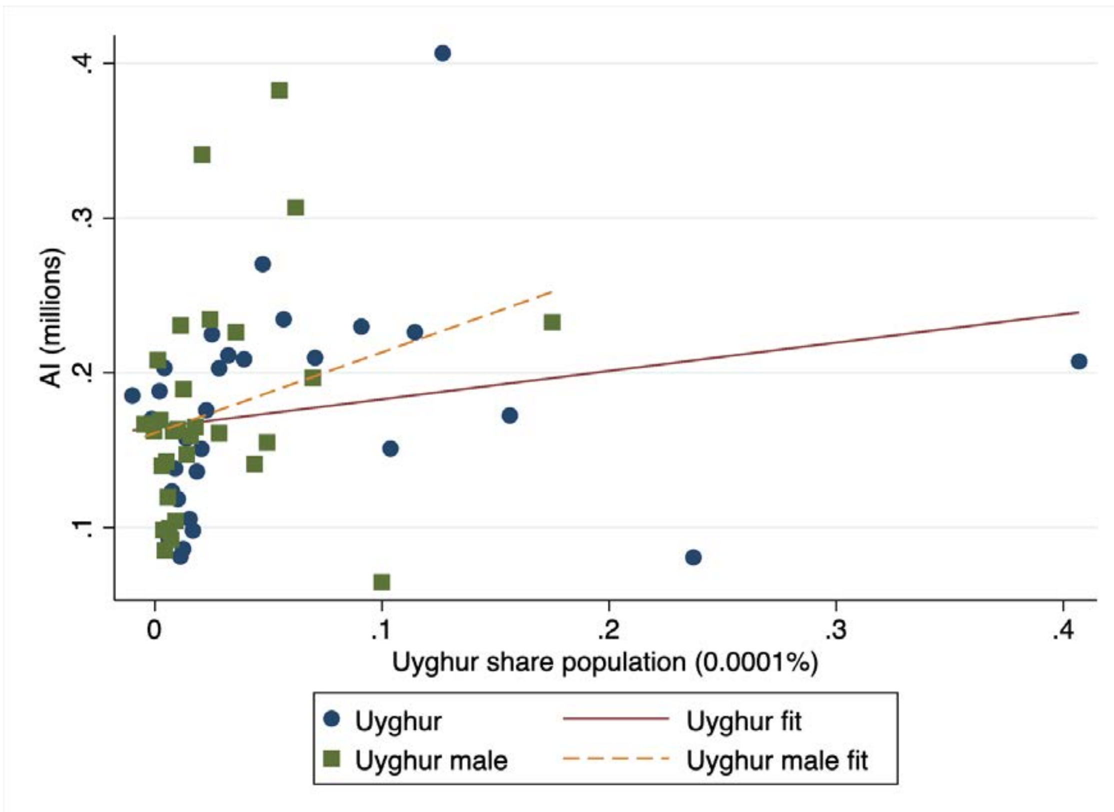


Figure A.12: Binscatter of Uyghur share of population (0.0001%) on millions of AI contracts procured at the prefecture level. Blue circles show the binscatter for the Uyghur population and green squares show the binscatter for Uyghur men. The solid red line shows the linear best fit for the Uyghur population and the dashed orange line shows the linear best fit for Uyghur men.

Government surveillance

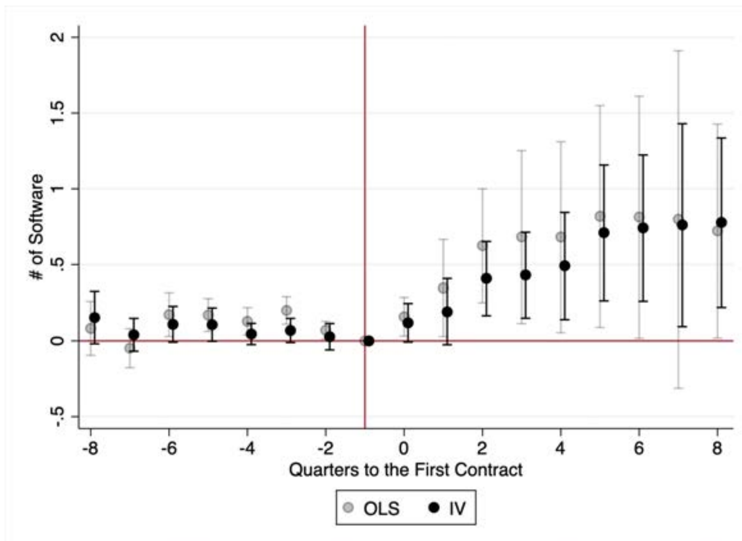


Figure A.13: Differential government surveillance software development by firms that receive public security contracts versus non-public security ones, relative to the time of receiving the initial contract. The figure restricts firms to those that receive above median unrest contracts, and control for firm and time period fixed effects. Dark lines/markers use weather to instrument for unrest.

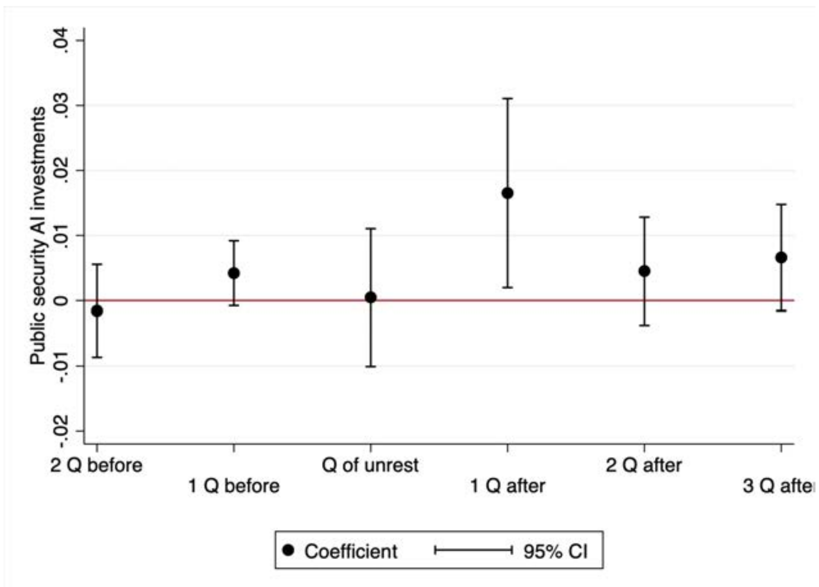
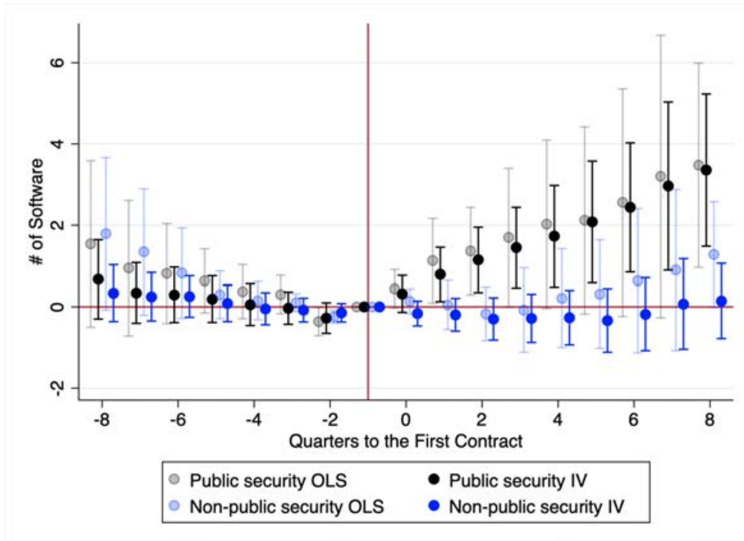


Figure A.14: Surveillance cameras per capita relative to the quarter of political unrest. Coefficients and confidence intervals displayed are from a regression following the specification in Table 2, Panel A column 4, but varying the time lags between the quarter of unrest and the quarter of AI procurement.

Panel A: Government



Panel B: Commercial

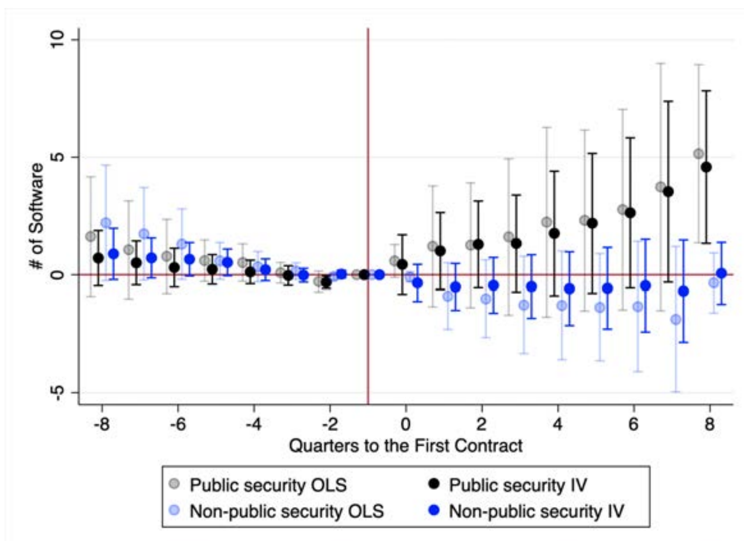


Figure A.15: Software development intended for government (Panel A) and commercial (Panel B) uses relative to the time of receiving initial contract, controlling for firms and time period fixed effects. All subfigures display results for firms with first contracts that are politically motivated and have above median unrest in the year before the contract. Black lines/markers show the total effect over time for firms receiving public security contracts. Blue lines/markers show the total effect over time for firms receiving non-public security contracts. Dark lines/markers use LASSO selected weather variables to instrument for unrest.

Data-complementary

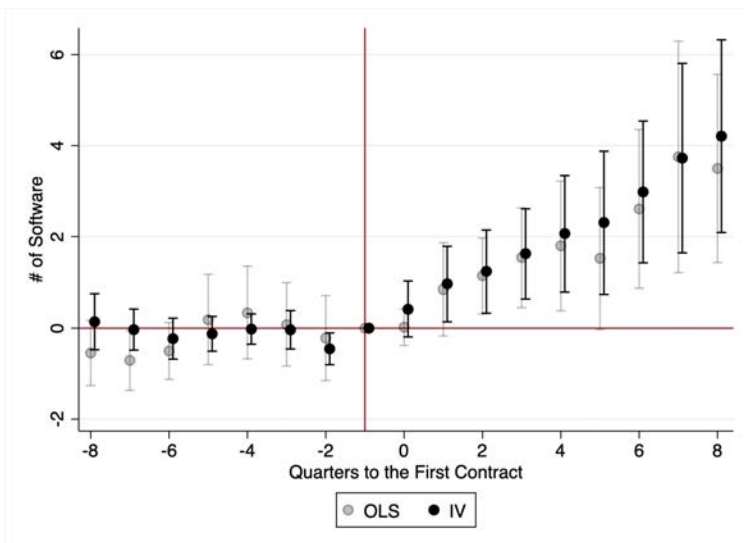
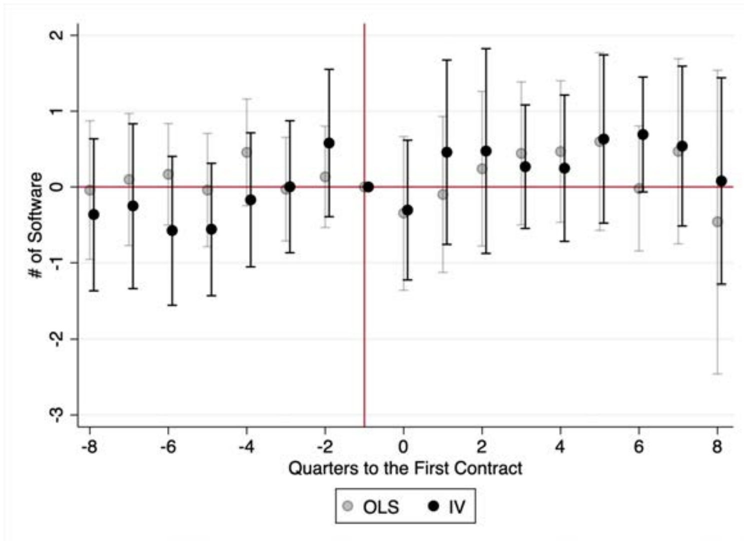


Figure A.16: Differential data-complementary software development by firms that receive public security contracts versus non-public security ones, relative to the time of receiving the initial contract. The figure restricts firms to those that receive above median unrest contracts, and control for firm and time period fixed effects. Dark lines/markers use LASSO selected weather variables to instrument for unrest.

#	Developer	VISA Photos FNMR@ FMR ≤ 0.000001	VISA Photos FNMR@ FMR ≤ 0.0001	MUGSHOT Photos FNMR@ FMR ≤ 0.0001	WILD Photos FNMR@ FMR ≤ 0.00001	CHILD EXP Photos FNMR@ FMR ≤ 0.01	Submission Date
1	yitu-002	0.004^{1}	0.001^{1}	0.013^{7}	0.052^{13}		2018_10_19
2	yitu-001	0.007^{2}	0.003^{7}	0.013^{8}	0.058^{26}	0.579^{13}	2018_06_12
3	sensetime-001	0.009^{3}	0.003^{6}	0.013^{11}	1.000^{76}		2018_10_19
4	sensetime-002	0.010^{4}	0.003^{10}	0.015^{29}	1.000^{77}		2018_10_19
5	siat-002	0.013^{5}	0.004^{15}	0.014^{15}	0.055^{20}	0.428^{3}	2018_06_13
6	ntechlab-004	0.013^{6}	0.003^{4}	0.013^{12}	0.046^{6}	0.420^{2}	2018_06_14
7	ntechlab-005	0.014^{7}	0.002^{2}	0.013^{10}	0.050^{10}		2018_10_19
8	megvii-002	0.014^{8}	0.004^{12}	0.030^{63}	0.071^{35}		2018_10_19
9	vocord-005	0.016^{9}	0.003^{3}	0.015^{32}	0.048^{9}		2018_10_18
10	everai-001	0.016^{10}	0.004^{14}	0.013^{2}	0.031^{2}		2018_10_30

Figure A.17: Face Recognition Vendor Test (FRVT) 2018 ranking of top facial recognition algorithms. Source: *National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)*.

Panel A: Commercial



Panel B: Commercial surveillance

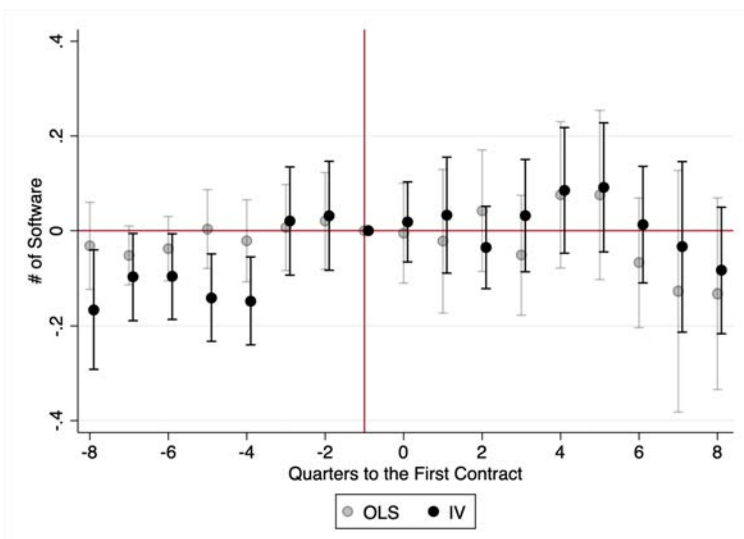


Figure A.18: Differential software development by firms that receive politically motivated contracts (above median unrest) versus non-politically motivated ones, relative to the time of receiving the initial contract. All panels restrict firms that receive contracts in prefectures experiencing above-median unrest in the previous quarter, and control for firm and time period fixed effects. Panel A shows software intended for commercial uses, and Panel B for commercial surveillance. Dark lines/markers use rain, precipitation, and thunder to instrument for unrest.

Table A.1: Top predicted words from LSTM model — non-binary categorization of software

Panel A: Customer type

Government			Commercial			General		
Chinese	English	Freq. (%)	Chinese	English	Freq. (%)	Chinese	English	Freq. (%)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
交通	Traffic	.603	手机	Mobile Phone	.821	视觉	Vision	.474
威视	Prestige	.382	APP	App	.645	学习	Learning	.378
海康	Haikang	.369	IOS	IOS	.438	腾讯	Tencent	.340
平安	Safety	.351	iOS	iOS	.430	三维	3D	.312
海信	Hisense	.318	企业	Enterprise	.331	识别系统	Recognition System	.301
城市	City	.311	金蝶	Kingdee	.327	算法	Algorithm	.270
金融	Finance	.296	电子	Electronics	.307	计算	Computing	.252
安防	Safety	.281	健康	Health	.212	深度	Depth	.225
数字	Numbers	.272	自助	Self-Help	.209	无人机	Drone	.212
中心	Center	.269	手机游戏	Mobile Game	.201	实时	Real-time	.209
公交	Public Transport	.216	助手	Assistance	.196	认证	Certification	.207
社区	Community	.207	支付	Pay	.191	处理	Processing	.196
调度	Scheduling	.200	后台	Backstage	.189	引擎	Engine	.194
中控	Central Control	.191	门禁	Access Control	.176	技术	Technique	.187
人像	Portrait	.163	人工智能	AI	.174	分布式	Distributed	.183
指挥	Command	.161	车载	Vehicle	.174	仿真	Simulation	.179
辅助	Auxilary	.159	智能家居	Smart Appliance	.169	网易	Netease	.173
摄像机	Camera	.158	工业	Industry	.169	工具软件	Tool Software	.172
万达	Wanda	.148	DHC	DHC	.168	程序	Program	.170
高速公路	Highway	.148	营销	Marketing	.161	互动	Interactive	.166

Panel B: Function type

AI-Common			Data-Complementary			AI-Video		
Chinese	English	Freq. (%)	Chinese	English	Freq. (%)	Chinese	English	Freq. (%)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
指纹	Fingerprint	.342	存储	Storage	.206	人脸	Face	1.104
训练	Training	.203	可视化	Visualization	.167	深度	Depth	.321
管家	Housekeeper	.201	一体化	Integration	.164	抓拍	Snapshot	.310
文本	Text	.151	分布式	Distributed	.162	商汤	SenseTime	.287
高速公路	Highway	.150	仿真	Simulation	.157	考勤	Attendance	.258
虹膜	Iris	.147	医学影像	Medical Imaging	.148	科达	Kedacom	.258
汽车	Car	.143	通用	General	.144	跟踪	Track	.249
海尔	Haier	.137	集成	Integrated	.141	全景	Panoramic	.224
WPS	WPS	.134	数据管理	Data Management	.136	广电	Broadcastt	.209
翻译	Translate	.126	宇视	UTV	.136	目标	Target/Objective	.189
推荐	Recommend	.124	管控	Manage	.126	车牌	License Plate	.189
图片	Image	.119	高速	High Speed	.126	特征	Feature	.184
测量	Test	.116	媒体	Media/Medium	.125	铂亚	Platinum	.175
征信	Credit	.111	手机软件	Phone Software	.125	预警	Warning	.166
指纹识别	Fingerprint Recognition	.106	设计	Design	.117	运通	American Express	.163
作业	Operation	.106	接口	Interface	.117	指挥	Command	.158
微信	WeChat	.105	开发	Development	.116	统计	Statistics	.149
评估	Assessment	.105	服务器	Server	.116	安居	Safety	.146
灵云	AIcloud	.102	处理软件	Processing Software	.113	SDK	SDK	.141
活体	Living Body	.098	传输	Transmission	.111	布控	Deploymentt	.141

Table A.2: Effect of different kinds of unrest events on AI procurement

	Public security AI procurement				*Non-public security AI procurement*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A.1: Protests — OLS								
Unrest events	2.996***	2.988***	2.995***	2.996***	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.501)	(0.504)	(0.500)	(0.512)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Panel A.2: Protests — IV								
Unrest events	3.547***	3.550***	3.551***	3.432***	0.005	0.018	0.010	0.004
	(0.774)	(0.715)	(0.720)	(0.800)	(0.022)	(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.018)
Panel B.1: Demands — OLS								
Unrest events	2.150	2.118	2.143	2.150	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001
	(1.159)	(1.163)	(1.161)	(1.163)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Panel B.2: Demands — IV								
Unrest events	2.075*	2.028*	2.057*	1.954*	-0.007	-0.000	-0.004	-0.008
	(0.964)	(0.897)	(0.947)	(0.963)	(0.012)	(0.021)	(0.015)	(0.009)
Panel C.1: Threats — OLS								
Unrest events	1.874**	1.853**	1.869**	1.876**	0.008**	0.007**	0.007**	0.008**
	(0.698)	(0.708)	(0.702)	(0.695)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Panel C.2: Threats — IV								
Unrest events	1.365*	1.342*	1.352*	1.297*	0.001	0.006	0.003	-0.000
	(0.644)	(0.598)	(0.632)	(0.637)	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.008)
GDP $\times$ time	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population $\times$ time	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue $\times$ time	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table follows Table 2 and presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. Panel A restricts unrest events to only protests, Panel B restricts unrest events to only demands, and Panel C restricts unrest events to only threats. The outcome is the number of facial recognition AI contracts procured by the local government per million residents. In columns 1 - 4, these are public security contracts, while in columns 5 - 8, these are non-public security contracts. There is a one quarter lag between the quarter of unrest events occurring and the number of public security AI contracts procured by the local government. Columns 1 and 5 control for prefecture GDP $\times$ quarter effects, columns 2 and 6 control for prefecture population $\times$ quarter effects, columns 3 and 7 control for prefectural government tax revenue $\times$ quarter effects, and columns 4 and 8 include all controls. Panels A.2, B.2, and C.2 use weather variables as selected by LASSO to instrument for unrest events. These variables are: max. temperature over 95 dummy X hail, thunder X hail, hail X max. gust speed, thunder X max. gust speed, min. temperature between 64-97 X hail, and max. wind speed X max. gust speed, each interacted with a dummy for whether an unrest event occurred somewhere in China on the day. All specifications include prefecture and quarter fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province $\times$ year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.3: Weather first stage, LASSO variables

	Number of events			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Max temp over 95 X hail X event elsewhere	-3776.723	-1518.505	-119.334	-3340.037
	(3990.523)	(1375.571)	(1112.869)	(2711.029)
Hail X max gust speed X event elsewhere	130.878***	24.212	46.771***	122.671***
	(42.157)	(16.423)	(12.258)	(27.032)
Thunder X hail X event elsewhere	10862.305***	5304.427***	5983.019***	4589.022***
	(1528.079)	(615.716)	(534.441)	(892.623)
Thunder X gust X event elsewhere	5.087***	2.593***	1.229**	2.517**
	(1.579)	(0.661)	(0.568)	(1.047)
Min temp 64-97 X hail X event elsewhere	-2464.066	1159.755**	-1263.093**	2136.232**
	(2561.897)	(498.959)	(515.662)	(993.467)
Min temp 64-97 X hail	6255.513***	341.642	1366.799***	1176.166
	(2379.870)	(356.547)	(377.585)	(762.900)
Max windspeed X gust X event elsewhere	0.081***	0.015*	0.023***	0.036***
	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.011)
F-stat	28.736	26.573	37.294	22.481
N	8424	8424	8424	8424
Event type	All	Protest	Demand	Threat

Notes: The table contains the first stage of the two sample two stage least squares regression specification. Regressions are at the prefecture-quarter level, where weather variables interacted with a dummy for whether there was an unrest event elsewhere in China on the day are selected by LASSO to predict whether there was an unrest event in a given prefecture. Coefficients are scaled up by 1000x so that the full coefficient can be seen. Prefecture and quarter fixed effects are used throughout. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.4: First stage - LASSO selected variables and weights

Variable	Weight
(1)	(2)
Max temp over 95 X hail X event elsewhere	0.0213
Hail X max gust speed X event elsewhere	1.994
Thunder X hail X event elsewhere	0.054
Thunder X gust X event elsewhere	47.234
Min temp 64-97 X hail X event elsewhere	0.078
Min temp 64-97 X hail	0.083
Max windspeed X gust X event elsewhere	4687.729

Notes: This table displays the weather variables selected by LASSO alongside the weights placed on each variable by the LASSO regression. Temperature is measured in Fahrenheit, hail and thunder are dummies for the presence of hail and thunder respectively, and windspeed and gust are measured in knots.

Table A.5: Parsimonious weather IV first stage

	Number of events			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
No Rain Dummy	-3.940	0.274	0.385	0.772
	(6.738)	(1.786)	(1.751)	(3.624)
Rain × event elsewhere	7.084	1.090	-3.292	2.139
	(10.279)	(4.308)	(3.954)	(6.588)
-Precipitation (Inches)	-40.638**	-5.203	-6.390	-11.430
	(18.868)	(4.247)	(4.562)	(9.392)
Precip × event elsewhere	49.027**	9.700	15.277**	12.718
	(21.917)	(7.547)	(7.146)	(12.841)
Thunder dummy	-266.251***	-47.695***	-42.944***	-101.048***
	(50.661)	(12.564)	(12.990)	(25.371)
Thunder × event elsewhere	340.533***	102.345***	76.546***	153.407***
	(54.913)	(20.067)	(18.639)	(32.806)
F-stat	11.490	7.460	8.812	6.057
N	8424	8424	8424	8424
Event	All	Protest	Demand	Threat

Notes: This table displays an alternative first stage at the prefecture-quarter level, where a rain dummy, negative precipitation (so that positive coefficients signal better weather), and thunder dummy is interacted with a dummy for whether there was an unrest event elsewhere in China on the day to predict whether there was an unrest event in a given prefecture. Coefficients are scaled up by 1000x so that the full coefficient can be seen. Prefecture and quarter fixed effects are included. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.6: Effect of unrest events on facial recognition AI procurement — parsimonious IV

	Public security AI procurement				*Non-public security AI procurement*			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Unrest events	0.849*	0.809*	0.811*	0.900*	-0.089	-0.121	-0.107	-0.081
	(0.392)	(0.400)	(0.412)	(0.405)	(0.132)	(0.140)	(0.142)	(0.121)
N	8418	8392	8418	8392	8418	8392	8418	8392
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. The outcome is the number of facial recognition AI contracts procured by the local government per million residents. In columns 1 - 4, these are public security contracts, while in columns 5 - 8, these are non-public security contracts. There is a one quarter lag between the quarter of unrest events occurring and the number of public security AI contracts procured by the local government. Columns 1 and 5 control for prefecture GDP × quarter effects, columns 2 and 6 control for prefecture population × quarter effects, columns 3 and 7 control for prefecture government tax revenue × quarter effects, and columns 4 and 8 include all controls. The table uses a rain dummy, precipitation, and thunder dummy to instrument for unrest events, interacted with a dummy for whether an unrest event occurred on the day. All specifications include province and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered by province × year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.7: Effect of AI procurement on suppressing unrest — parsimonious IV

	Standardized number of unrest events							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Fine weather	0.0639***	0.0643***	0.0639***	0.0642***	0.0662***	0.0667***	0.0662***	0.0665***
	(0.0120)	(0.0125)	(0.0121)	(0.0120)	(0.0129)	(0.0135)	(0.0129)	(0.0128)
Public security AI_{t-1}	0.0377*	0.0412	0.0377*	0.0373				
	(0.0195)	(0.0266)	(0.0200)	(0.0253)				
Fine weather × public security AI_{t-1}	-0.0268*	-0.0277*	-0.0269*	-0.0272*				
	(0.0140)	(0.0148)	(0.0141)	(0.0143)				
Non-public security AI_{t-1}					0.0041	0.0035	0.0042	0.0028
					(0.0026)	(0.0025)	(0.0027)	(0.0021)
Fine weather × non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.0039	-0.0042	-0.0041	-0.0037
					(0.0026)	(0.0028)	(0.0027)	(0.0024)
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. The dependent variable is the standardized number of events in the prefecture. Fine weather is the standardized number of predicted events from rain, precipitation, and thunder interacted with whether there was an event elsewhere in China on the day. AI (public security AI contracts per capita in columns 1 - 4, non-public security in columns 5 - 8) is also standardized. Prefecture and quarter fixed effects are included. Columns 1 and 5 add controls for local GDP by quarter fixed effects, columns 2 and 6 add controls for local population by quarter fixed effects, columns 3 and 7 add controls for prefectural government tax revenue by quarter fixed effects, and columns 4 and 8 add all prior controls. Standard errors are clustered by province × year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.8: Effect of public security contracts on software production in high unrest prefectures — parsimonious IV

	Government software				Commercial software			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
8 quarters before contract	1.674	0.605	0.247	-0.374	2.111	0.814	1.140	0.294
	(1.065)	(0.700)	(0.387)	(0.306)	(1.367)	(0.732)	(0.982)	(0.441)
7 quarters before contract	1.371	0.454	0.221	-0.311	1.747	0.663	0.834	0.113
	(0.984)	(0.660)	(0.319)	(0.241)	(1.149)	(0.627)	(0.731)	(0.284)
6 quarters before contract	0.857	0.119	0.227	-0.219	1.327	0.452	0.776	0.180
	(0.720)	(0.472)	(0.274)	(0.187)	(0.891)	(0.482)	(0.612)	(0.231)
5 quarters before contract	0.329	-0.264	0.088	-0.286	0.618	-0.082	0.654	0.161
	(0.404)	(0.246)	(0.236)	(0.189)	(0.473)	(0.193)	(0.502)	(0.206)
4 quarters before contract	0.171	-0.266	-0.089	-0.369**	0.336	-0.169	0.326	-0.051
	(0.312)	(0.186)	(0.202)	(0.165)	(0.361)	(0.146)	(0.413)	(0.185)
3 quarters before contract	0.176	-0.110	-0.066	-0.247	0.183	-0.124	0.059	-0.170
	(0.184)	(0.083)	(0.165)	(0.151)	(0.178)	(0.081)	(0.261)	(0.129)
2 quarters before contract	-0.225**	-0.348***	-0.149	-0.251**	-0.134	-0.231**	0.076	-0.039
	(0.110)	(0.091)	(0.123)	(0.122)	(0.098)	(0.097)	(0.143)	(0.084)
Receiving 1st contract	0.158	0.232	-0.188	-0.114	-0.894	-0.806	-0.421	-0.334
	(0.178)	(0.174)	(0.183)	(0.162)	(0.775)	(0.709)	(0.567)	(0.503)
1 quarter after contract	0.057	0.320	-0.265	-0.098	-0.975	-0.655	-0.634	-0.426
	(0.339)	(0.325)	(0.248)	(0.208)	(0.939)	(0.776)	(0.722)	(0.583)
2 quarters after contract	-0.185	0.229	-0.247	0.040	-1.168	-0.602	-0.581	-0.220
	(0.385)	(0.345)	(0.322)	(0.261)	(1.125)	(0.862)	(0.893)	(0.675)
3 quarters after contract	-0.065	0.408	-0.199	0.112	-1.423	-0.813	-0.622	-0.191
	(0.589)	(0.509)	(0.369)	(0.294)	(1.313)	(0.971)	(1.004)	(0.730)
4 quarters after contract	0.230	0.840	-0.129	0.284	-1.356	-0.602	-0.641	-0.095
	(0.697)	(0.612)	(0.407)	(0.331)	(1.459)	(1.030)	(1.139)	(0.807)
5 quarters after contract	0.315	1.141*	-0.064	0.458	-1.477	-0.458	-0.611	0.083
	(0.779)	(0.660)	(0.413)	(0.342)	(1.473)	(0.923)	(1.215)	(0.807)
6 quarters after contract	0.648	1.659*	0.153	0.784*	-1.427	-0.159	-0.380	0.437
	(1.041)	(0.884)	(0.503)	(0.447)	(1.751)	(1.063)	(1.366)	(0.887)
7 quarters after contract	0.859	2.047**	0.331	1.064**	-2.091	-0.603	-0.646	0.268
	(1.188)	(0.930)	(0.575)	(0.522)	(2.026)	(1.228)	(1.522)	(0.983)
8 quarters after contract	1.282	2.509***	0.460	1.304**	-0.480	1.057***	0.165	1.207**
	(0.765)	(0.740)	(0.490)	(0.527)	(0.889)	(0.345)	(0.872)	(0.460)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.208	-0.228	0.480	0.390	-0.577	-0.662	-0.286	-0.315
	(0.496)	(0.473)	(0.389)	(0.377)	(0.389)	(0.425)	(0.364)	(0.379)
7 quarters before contract × public security	-0.498	-0.436	0.085	0.018	-0.777*	-0.778*	-0.231	-0.225
	(0.434)	(0.375)	(0.244)	(0.228)	(0.449)	(0.457)	(0.295)	(0.295)
6 quarters before contract × public security	-0.097	-0.047	0.042	-0.028	-0.633*	-0.636*	-0.408	-0.410
	(0.351)	(0.335)	(0.251)	(0.250)	(0.347)	(0.349)	(0.292)	(0.287)
5 quarters before contract × public security	0.242	0.297	0.060	0.006	-0.095	-0.123	-0.387*	-0.407**
	(0.268)	(0.294)	(0.188)	(0.183)	(0.234)	(0.213)	(0.200)	(0.199)
4 quarters before contract × public security	0.145	0.219	0.129	0.092	0.121	0.125	-0.174	-0.188
	(0.244)	(0.256)	(0.185)	(0.178)	(0.270)	(0.268)	(0.136)	(0.141)
3 quarters before contract × public security	0.074	0.107	0.006	-0.043	-0.234	-0.184	-0.088	-0.102

	(0.172)	(0.217)	(0.142)	(0.135)	(0.166)	(0.167)	(0.206)	(0.205)
2 quarters before contract × public security	-0.189	-0.184	-0.147	-0.170	-0.196	-0.275	-0.374***	-0.391***
	(0.170)	(0.164)	(0.177)	(0.171)	(0.325)	(0.255)	(0.140)	(0.143)
Receiving 1st contract × public security	0.199	0.146	0.444***	0.445***	1.444	1.348	0.811	0.806
	(0.198)	(0.190)	(0.161)	(0.145)	(0.982)	(0.897)	(0.607)	(0.588)
1 quarter after contract × public security	0.993**	0.714*	0.965***	0.915***	2.079	1.740	1.575**	1.511**
	(0.433)	(0.359)	(0.269)	(0.249)	(1.271)	(1.041)	(0.769)	(0.723)
2 quarters after contract × public security	1.422***	1.123***	1.293***	1.219***	2.306*	1.912*	1.755**	1.672**
	(0.424)	(0.338)	(0.305)	(0.297)	(1.260)	(1.054)	(0.826)	(0.783)
3 quarters after contract × public security	1.684**	1.345**	1.493***	1.463***	2.867*	2.480*	1.717*	1.668**
	(0.716)	(0.594)	(0.352)	(0.338)	(1.535)	(1.246)	(0.866)	(0.812)
4 quarters after contract × public security	1.714*	1.403*	1.638***	1.657***	3.485*	3.041*	2.021*	2.008*
	(0.916)	(0.798)	(0.459)	(0.446)	(1.976)	(1.651)	(1.167)	(1.133)
5 quarters after contract × public security	1.744	1.308	1.875***	1.780***	3.658*	3.142**	2.343*	2.273*
	(1.058)	(0.920)	(0.522)	(0.506)	(1.868)	(1.529)	(1.275)	(1.209)
6 quarters after contract × public security	1.851	1.380	2.079***	1.925***	3.998**	3.486**	2.671*	2.524*
	(1.232)	(1.139)	(0.560)	(0.555)	(1.952)	(1.648)	(1.389)	(1.295)
7 quarters after contract × public security	2.266	1.737	2.451***	2.271***	5.659**	5.028**	3.854**	3.705**
	(1.654)	(1.489)	(0.680)	(0.664)	(2.588)	(2.220)	(1.800)	(1.701)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.148*	1.662	2.773***	2.569***	5.560**	4.925**	4.150***	3.963***
	(1.248)	(1.128)	(0.741)	(0.732)	(2.251)	(1.829)	(1.558)	(1.439)
Regression	OLS	OLS	IV	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	IV
Event-study weighting	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: The table presents regression coefficients for facial recognition AI firms that receive contracts from local governments when there is an above median amount of unrest in the quarter prior to the contract. The table shows the difference in software production between firms that earn politically motivated (public security) contracts versus non-politically motivated contracts. In the IV specification (columns 3-4, 7-8), local unrest is instrumented by rain, precipitation, and thunder interacted with whether there was an event elsewhere in China on the day. Columns 1-4 present results for amount of government software produced by the firm, while columns 5-8 present results for commercial software. All columns control for time period fixed effects and firm fixed effects. Columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 weight the control group by 10 times more than the treatment, following Borusyak et al. (2017). Standard errors are clustered at the contract location (prefecture) level. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.9: Effect of unrest events on surveillance camera procurement

	Surveillance cameras			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: OLS				
Unrest events	2.346**	2.192**	2.335**	2.241**
	(0.797)	(0.833)	(0.804)	(0.803)
Panel B: IV				
Unrest events	3.227**	3.073**	3.128**	2.770**
	(1.109)	(0.910)	(1.045)	(0.961)
D.V. mean	61.497	61.688	61.497	61.688
D.V. sd	230.335	230.666	230.335	230.666
N	8418	8392	8418	8392
GDP $\times$ time	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population $\times$ time	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue $\times$ time	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table follows the specification in Table 2 and presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. There is a one quarter lag between the quarter of unrest events occurring and the number of surveillance cameras procured by the local government. Column 1 controls for local GDP $\times$ quarter fixed effects, column 2 controls for local population $\times$ quarter fixed effects, column 3 controls for local government revenue $\times$ quarter fixed effects, and column 4 adds all prior controls. Panel B uses weather variables as selected by LASSO to instrument for unrest events. Standard errors are clustered by province $\times$ year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.10: Effect of public security AI on police hiring

	Police hires	
	(1)	(2)
Panel A: Police hires		
Public security AI	-0.072*	-0.072*
	(0.039)	(0.039)
Panel B: % office police		
Public security AI	0.047**	0.044**
	(0.020)	(0.020)
FE	Place, Year	Place, Year
Prefecture revenue	Yes	Yes
Prefecture population	No	Yes

Notes: This table presents regressions at the prefecture-year level, with police hiring data one year after AI procurement. The outcome in Panel A is the standardized number of new police hired, the outcome in Panel B is the share of desk jobs among new police hires. In both panels, the explanatory variable of interest is the standardized number of public security AI contracts, topcoded at the 5% threshold. Column 1 controls for local prefecture government revenue in the given year, and column 2 adds the control for prefecture population. All specifications include prefecture and year fixed effects. Standard errors are robust.

Table A.11: Effect of AI procurement on suppressing unrest spillovers

	Standardized number of unrest events			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: prefectures within 333 KM of each other				
AI	0.181***	0.170***	0.179***	0.178***
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Nearby unrest	0.003***	0.002**	0.003**	0.003***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Nearby unrest × AI	-0.020*	-0.019*	-0.019*	-0.019*
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Panel B: prefectures within 500 KM of each other				
AI	0.241***	0.228***	0.239***	0.237***
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Nearby unrest	0.004***	0.004***	0.004***	0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Nearby unrest × AI	-0.021***	-0.021***	-0.021***	-0.021***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Panel C: prefectures within 1000 KM of each other				
AI	0.232***	0.220***	0.230***	0.229***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Nearby unrest	0.004***	0.004***	0.004***	0.005***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Nearby unrest × AI	-0.021***	-0.021***	-0.021***	-0.021***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table presents regressions at the prefecture-prefecture-quarter level. The dependent variable is the standardized number of events in the prefecture. Nearby ('origin') unrest and its interaction with AI capacity is instrumented by LASSO selected weather variables interacted with an indicator of unrest somewhere in China. AI (public security AI contracts per capita) is also standardized. To address prefectures appearing on both the LHS and RHS of the regression, this specification randomly designates 100 prefectures as destinations only, and removes all observations for which these prefectures are origin. In Panel A, only prefecture pairs that are within 333 KM are kept, in Panel B only prefecture pairs within 500 KM, in Panel C only prefecture pairs within 1000 KM. Origin prefecture, destination prefecture, and quarter fixed effects are included. Column 1 adds controls for prefecture GDP × quarter fixed effects, column 2 adds controls for prefecture population × quarter fixed effects, column 3 adds controls for prefectural government tax revenue × quarter fixed effects, and column 4 adds all prior controls. Standard errors are robust. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.12: Effects of past unrest and local politicians' incentives on current unrest

	Standardized number of events			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: weather shock and local unrest at $t-1$ on local unrest				
Fine weather	1.0435***	1.0516***	1.0444***	1.0504***
	(0.2225)	(0.2272)	(0.2232)	(0.2237)
Past unrest	-0.0317	-0.0314	-0.0286	-0.0314
	(0.0528)	(0.0528)	(0.0514)	(0.0540)
Fine weather × past unrest	-0.0048	-0.0065	-0.0057	-0.0052
	(0.0100)	(0.0082)	(0.0097)	(0.0109)
Panel B: weather shock and local unrest at $t-2$ on local unrest				
Fine weather	1.0567***	1.0666***	1.0579***	1.0643***
	(0.2160)	(0.2219)	(0.2163)	(0.2183)
Past unrest	-0.0002	-0.0052	-0.0004	0.0033
	(0.0500)	(0.0494)	(0.0494)	(0.0526)
Fine weather × past unrest	-0.0824	-0.0916	-0.0842	-0.0888
	(0.1381)	(0.1355)	(0.1353)	(0.1415)
Panel C: weather shock and local politician career incentive on local unrest				
Fine weather	0.4526***	0.4547***	0.4527***	0.4550***
	(0.0143)	(0.0142)	(0.0145)	(0.0142)
Politician incentive	0.0005	0.0006	0.0006	0.0005
	(0.0009)	(0.0010)	(0.0008)	(0.0010)
Fine weather × politician incentive	0.0002	0.0006	0.0003	0.0007
	(0.0074)	(0.0074)	(0.0072)	(0.0073)
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: This table follows the specification in Table 3 columns 1-4, and presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. Fine weather (LASSO) is the standardized number of predicted events from the fine weather LASSO variables interacted with whether there was an event elsewhere in China on the day. Local unrest in prior periods is also standardized; Panel A uses past local unrest in the quarter before and Panel B uses local unrest two quarters before. Panel C constructs an index of the career concerns of the prefecture leader using their age and political hierarchy level, following Wang et al. (2020). Prefecture and quarter fixed effects are included. Column 1 adds controls for prefecture GDP × quarter fixed effects, column 2 adds controls for prefecture population × quarter fixed effects, column 3 adds controls for prefectural government revenue × quarter fixed effects, and column 4 adds all prior controls. Standard errors are clustered by province × year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.13: Effects of politically-motivated AI procurement on commercial innovation: robustness and evaluating alternative hypotheses

	Government		Commercial	
	OLS	IV	OLS	IV
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A.1: Baseline result				
8 quarters before contract	1.823	0.328	2.093	0.916
	(1.187)	(0.425)	(1.386)	(0.681)
8 quarters after contract	1.303*	0.143	-0.324	0.045
	(0.759)	(0.553)	(0.770)	(0.800)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.282	0.319	-0.505	-0.177
	(0.518)	(0.402)	(0.347)	(0.295)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.165*	3.195***	5.454**	4.466**
	(1.267)	(0.979)	(2.127)	(1.750)
Panel A.2: Control for firm age × year to/from contract receipt indicators				
8 quarters before contract	1.668	0.381	2.333	0.900
	(1.098)	(0.424)	(1.663)	(0.666)
8 quarters after contract	1.298*	0.177	-0.257	0.134
	(0.723)	(0.552)	(0.662)	(0.752)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.390	0.228	-0.776	-0.261
	(0.411)	(0.447)	(0.547)	(0.281)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.023	2.980***	5.463**	4.388**
	(1.301)	(0.965)	(2.133)	(1.787)
Panel A.3: Control for pre-contract software production × year to/from contract receipt indicators				
8 quarters before contract	1.560	0.230	2.198	0.867
	(1.031)	(0.419)	(1.605)	(0.697)
8 quarters after contract	1.376	0.174	-0.460	-0.027
	(0.885)	(0.537)	(0.755)	(0.822)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.156	0.435	-0.623	-0.125
	(0.472)	(0.401)	(0.532)	(0.266)
8 quarters after contract × public security	1.904	3.056***	5.499**	4.566**
	(1.352)	(0.917)	(2.171)	(1.799)
Panel A.4: Control for pre-contract firm capitalization × year to/from contract receipt indicators				
8 quarters before contract	1.687***	0.338	2.087*	0.898
	(0.645)	(0.424)	(1.213)	(0.744)
8 quarters after contract	1.279*	0.154	-0.318	0.058
	(0.734)	(0.469)	(1.371)	(0.810)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.217	0.310	-0.538	-0.185
	(0.818)	(0.537)	(1.544)	(0.942)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.137**	3.180***	5.423***	4.483***
	(0.955)	(0.620)	(1.805)	(1.076)
Panel A.5: Control for contract size × year to/from contract receipt indicators				
8 quarters before contract	0.827	-0.128	1.423	0.254
	(0.638)	(0.345)	(0.895)	(0.186)
8 quarters after contract	3.018***	0.891	0.822	0.685

	(1.031)	(0.599)	(0.706)	(0.530)
8 quarters before contract × public security	0.241	0.664	-0.745	-0.146
	(0.536)	(0.463)	(0.490)	(0.308)
8 quarters after contract × public security	-0.009	2.180***	1.970	2.848***
	(1.431)	(0.692)	(1.684)	(0.580)
Panel B: Only major software releases				
8 quarters before contract	1.845	0.327	2.219	0.901
	(1.185)	(0.422)	(1.529)	(0.696)
8 quarters after contract	1.265	0.152	-0.429	0.036
	(0.789)	(0.554)	(0.851)	(0.834)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.332	0.325	-0.652	-0.181
	(0.531)	(0.408)	(0.453)	(0.295)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.162	3.182***	5.432**	4.415**
	(1.307)	(0.986)	(2.184)	(1.746)
Panel C: Drop ambiguous public security agencies				
8 quarters before contract	1.631	0.185	2.334	1.018
	(1.122)	(0.371)	(1.737)	(0.816)
8 quarters after contract	1.913**	0.527	-0.391	-0.030
	(0.721)	(0.518)	(0.838)	(0.840)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.076	0.598	-0.494	-0.167
	(0.538)	(0.502)	(0.508)	(0.345)
8 quarters after contract × public security	1.329	2.695***	5.447**	4.609**
	(1.004)	(0.857)	(2.536)	(2.047)
Panel D.1: LSTM categorization model configuration (vary timestep = 10)				
8 quarters before contract	1.120	0.002	2.004	1.422
	(0.732)	(0.265)	(1.567)	(1.086)
8 quarters after contract	1.393	0.992*	-1.565	-0.802
	(0.897)	(0.596)	(1.724)	(1.262)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.478	0.282	-0.410	0.083
	(0.483)	(0.457)	(0.538)	(0.653)
8 quarters after contract × public security	1.473	1.931**	7.670*	6.186**
	(1.166)	(0.773)	(4.471)	(2.879)
Panel D.2: LSTM categorization model configuration (vary embeddings = 16)				
8 quarters before contract	2.624	0.438	1.553	1.070
	(1.688)	(0.441)	(1.334)	(0.917)
8 quarters after contract	1.756*	0.879	-1.100	-0.642
	(0.920)	(0.766)	(1.450)	(1.040)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-1.160*	-0.113	-0.200	0.261
	(0.657)	(0.400)	(0.440)	(0.563)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.153**	3.405***	6.476*	5.492**
	(0.950)	(1.123)	(3.619)	(2.373)
Panel D.3: LSTM categorization model configuration (vary nodes = 16)				
8 quarters before contract	1.214	0.049	2.256	1.388
	(0.768)	(0.283)	(1.679)	(1.074)
8 quarters after contract	1.731*	1.026*	-1.633	-1.213
	(0.854)	(0.593)	(1.556)	(1.187)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.628	0.044	-0.385	0.156
	(0.573)	(0.482)	(0.602)	(0.617)
8 quarters after contract × public security	1.840	2.920***	6.677	5.377*

	(1.247)	(0.703)	(4.669)	(2.906)
Panel E.1: Time frame (full balanced panel)				
8 quarters before contract	1.795	0.340	2.128	0.911
	(1.138)	(0.436)	(1.424)	(0.671)
8 quarters after contract	1.231	0.131	-0.342	0.042
	(0.797)	(0.564)	(0.759)	(0.788)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.258	0.409	-0.493	-0.151
	(0.531)	(0.446)	(0.340)	(0.283)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.269*	3.254***	5.473**	4.520**
	(1.318)	(0.996)	(2.170)	(1.759)
Panel E.2: Time frame (extended time frame)				
9 quarters before contract	1.658	0.281	2.199	0.809
	(1.380)	(0.492)	(1.855)	(0.781)
18 quarters after contract	3.119	-2.246*	3.094	-2.011
	(2.824)	(1.161)	(2.545)	(1.294)
9 quarters before contract × public security	-0.022	0.546	0.261	-0.037
	(0.585)	(0.399)	(0.247)	(0.327)
18 quarters after contract × public security	7.587***	8.629***	4.890**	8.799***
	(1.852)	(2.512)	(2.104)	(1.790)
Panel F.1: Access to commercial opportunities - control Beijing/Shanghai × year to/from contract receipt indicators				
8 quarters before contract	1.304	0.291	1.640	0.781
	(0.875)	(0.407)	(1.195)	(0.631)
8 quarters after contract	1.420*	0.288	-0.155	0.242
	(0.725)	(0.520)	(0.611)	(0.669)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.043	0.408	-0.494**	-0.142
	(0.400)	(0.425)	(0.236)	(0.188)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.629	3.258***	6.150**	4.685**
	(1.610)	(1.068)	(2.711)	(2.001)
Panel F.2: Access to commercial opportunities - contracts outside of Xinjiang				
8 quarters before contract	1.802	0.329	2.139	0.857
	(1.137)	(0.425)	(1.411)	(0.646)
8 quarters after contract	1.239	0.160	-0.491	0.109
	(0.803)	(0.556)	(0.890)	(0.770)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.279	0.397	-0.551	-0.171
	(0.510)	(0.443)	(0.349)	(0.296)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.201	3.195***	5.560**	4.467**
	(1.317)	(0.977)	(2.258)	(1.755)
Panel F.3: Access to commercial opportunities - firm based outside contract prefecture				
8 quarters before contract	1.673	0.326	2.099	0.914
	(1.069)	(0.419)	(1.418)	(0.689)
8 quarters after contract	1.284	0.168	-0.302	0.025
	(0.764)	(0.558)	(0.769)	(0.834)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.205	0.335	-0.556	-0.224
	(0.490)	(0.405)	(0.369)	(0.300)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.143*	3.192***	5.435**	4.506**
	(1.251)	(0.987)	(2.174)	(1.780)
Panel F.4: Access to commercial opportunities - firm based outside contract province				

8 quarters before contract	1.820	0.331	2.219	0.910
	(1.190)	(0.429)	(1.511)	(0.668)
8 quarters after contract	1.306*	0.121	-0.394	0.062
	(0.758)	(0.561)	(0.796)	(0.780)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.307	0.424	-0.680	-0.173
	(0.536)	(0.459)	(0.482)	(0.284)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.142*	3.217***	5.433**	4.481**
	(1.244)	(0.984)	(2.104)	(1.759)
Panel G: Control for province by quarter fixed effects				
8 quarters before contract	1.529	0.397	1.705	0.856
	(1.113)	(0.426)	(1.254)	(0.677)
8 quarters after contract	1.885**	0.119	0.201	0.477
	(0.694)	(0.503)	(0.445)	(0.660)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.321	0.308	-0.459**	-0.114
	(0.431)	(0.391)	(0.190)	(0.148)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.159	3.394***	5.847**	4.894**
	(1.660)	(1.123)	(2.845)	(2.243)
Panel H: Non-government AI software production				
8 quarters before contract			3.058	1.538
			(2.198)	(0.954)
8 quarters after contract			-0.829	-0.057
			(0.910)	(1.146)
8 quarters before contract × public security			-1.095	0.137
			(0.868)	(0.694)
8 quarters after contract × public security			8.539***	7.430***
			(2.595)	(2.490)

Notes: Specifications include full set of time indicators and interactions with politically motivated (public security) contracts; only selected coefficient estimates are presented. Panel A.1 replicates the baseline specification in Table 4, Panel A.2 adds controls for firm age interacted with time indicators of years to/from contract receipt, Panel A.3 adds controls for pre-contract firm software production interacted with time indicators of years to/from contract receipt, Panel A.4 adds controls for pre-contract firm capitalization interacted with time indicators of years to/from contract receipt, and Panel A.5 adds controls for contract monetary size interacted with time indicators of years to/from contract receipt. Panel B uses only major software releases (version X.0). Panel C drops companies whose first contract is an ambiguous contract, or one that contains the keywords 'local government' ('人民政府') or 'government offices' ('政府办公室') which may be used for either public security or non-public security depending on interpretation. The baseline LSTM specification uses a timestep (phrase length) of 20, embedding size (number of dimensions in a vector to represent a phrase) of 32, and 32 nodes in the model. Panel D.1 presents results for the baseline model trained with a timestep of 10, Panel D.2 presents results for for the baseline model trained with an embedding size of 16, and Panel D.3 presents results for the baseline model trained with 16 nodes. Panel E.1 restricts the sample to firms that have non-missing observations during the entire time frame of 8 quarters before and 8 quarters after the initial contracts; Panel E.2 extends the time frame to 9 quarters before and 18 quarters after the initial contracts.

Panel F.1 includes fixed effects for contracts from Beijing and Shanghai (the two highest capacity prefectures/provinces) interacted with time indicators of years to/from contract receipt, Panel F.2 omits contracts from Xinjiang, Panel F.3 restricts the analysis to firms that have their first contract outside of their home prefecture, and Panel F.4 restricts to firms with first contract outside their home province. Panel G adds fixed effects at the province by quarter level. Panel H uses total non-government AI software production as the outcome with columns 3 and 4 continuing to show OLS and IV. Standard errors are clustered at the contract location (prefecture) level. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.14: Effect of AI procurement on suppressing unrest — by type of unrest

	Standardized number of unrest events							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Protests								
Fine weather	1.8058***	1.8045***	1.8047***	1.8068***	1.8764***	1.8771***	1.8754***	1.8768***
	(0.1950)	(0.1965)	(0.1954)	(0.1942)	(0.2030)	(0.2051)	(0.2038)	(0.2023)
Public security AI_{t-1}	-0.0381	-0.0522	-0.0351	-0.0389				
	(0.0534)	(0.0667)	(0.0517)	(0.0621)				
Fine weather × public security AI_{t-1}	-0.8581*	-0.8815*	-0.8591*	-0.8477*				
	(0.4925)	(0.4952)	(0.4907)	(0.4921)				
Non-public security AI_{t-1}					0.0011	-0.0002	0.0008	0.0006
					(0.0044)	(0.0047)	(0.0044)	(0.0047)
Fine weather × non-public security AI_{t-1}					0.0261	0.0245	0.0219	0.0258
					(0.0710)	(0.0717)	(0.0709)	(0.0695)
Panel B: Demands								
Fine weather	4.0760***	4.1080***	4.0760***	4.0986***	4.1651***	4.2000***	4.1675***	4.1854***
	(0.7369)	(0.7678)	(0.7398)	(0.7333)	(0.7974)	(0.8349)	(0.8004)	(0.7963)
Public security AI_{t-1}	0.0256	-0.0128	0.0233	-0.0350				
	(0.0733)	(0.0536)	(0.0738)	(0.0500)				
Fine weather × public security AI_{t-1}	-0.9841	-0.9909	-0.9971	-0.9790				
	(1.1428)	(1.2109)	(1.1472)	(1.1660)				
Non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.0187	-0.0274	-0.0193	-0.0252
					(0.0227)	(0.0255)	(0.0237)	(0.0218)
Fine weather × non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.3650	-0.3898	-0.3780	-0.3272
					(0.2721)	(0.3001)	(0.2843)	(0.2507)
Panel C: Threats								
Fine weather	7.1411***	7.1782***	7.1497***	7.1857***	7.5520***	7.6210***	7.5647***	7.6073***
	(1.8351)	(1.9023)	(1.8419)	(1.8306)	(2.0014)	(2.0818)	(2.0089)	(2.0007)
Public security AI_{t-1}	-0.1554	-0.0400	-0.1635	-0.0975				
	(0.2266)	(0.2492)	(0.2345)	(0.2620)				
Fine weather × public security AI_{t-1}	-4.7232*	-5.0276*	-4.7340*	-4.8968*				
	(2.7593)	(2.9414)	(2.7856)	(2.8374)				
Non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.0432	-0.0496	-0.0446	-0.0453
					(0.0580)	(0.0630)	(0.0602)	(0.0563)
Fine weather × non-public security AI_{t-1}					-0.9400	-1.0210	-0.9628	-0.8947
					(0.6759)	(0.7349)	(0.7027)	(0.6384)
GDP × time	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Population × time	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Gov. revenue × time	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: Panels A presents regressions at the prefecture-quarter level. The dependent variable is the standardized number of events in the prefecture. Fine weather is the standardized number of predicted events from the good weather LASSO variables interacted with whether there was an event elsewhere in China on the day. AI (public security AI contracts per capita in columns 1 - 4, non-public security in columns 5 - 8) is also standardized. Prefecture and quarter fixed effects are included. Columns 1 and 5 control for prefecture GDP × quarter fixed effects, columns 2 and 6 control for prefecture population × quarter fixed effects, columns 3 and 7 control for prefectural government tax revenue × quarter fixed effects, and columns 4 and 8 add all prior controls. Standard errors are clustered by province × year. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.

Table A.15: Effect of public security contracts on software production in high unrest prefectures — by type of unrest

	Government software				Commercial software			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: Protests								
8 quarters before contract	1.786	0.528	0.368	-0.224	2.596	0.900	0.915	0.215
	(1.358)	(0.889)	(0.429)	(0.350)	(1.765)	(0.964)	(0.696)	(0.325)
8 quarters after contract	1.704*	3.197***	0.111	0.915*	-0.063	1.940***	0.017	0.901*
	(0.844)	(0.765)	(0.567)	(0.498)	(1.222)	(0.321)	(0.842)	(0.491)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.264	-0.272	0.370	0.255	-0.831	-0.846	-0.214	-0.275
	(0.599)	(0.586)	(0.441)	(0.432)	(0.519)	(0.598)	(0.299)	(0.332)
8 quarters after contract × public security	2.658*	2.126	3.192***	3.029***	6.138*	5.215**	4.424**	4.245**
	(1.441)	(1.268)	(0.963)	(0.940)	(2.990)	(2.363)	(1.743)	(1.658)
Panel B: Threats								
8 quarters before contract	0.761	0.166	0.327	-0.247	1.271	0.365	0.924	0.224
	(0.669)	(0.535)	(0.420)	(0.351)	(1.128)	(0.622)	(0.697)	(0.327)
8 quarters after contract	0.574	1.319	0.149	0.929*	-0.704	0.412	-0.003	0.874*
	(1.135)	(1.101)	(0.554)	(0.494)	(1.421)	(0.876)	(0.835)	(0.493)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.360	-0.434	0.323	0.223	-0.627	-0.713	-0.184	-0.249
	(0.564)	(0.555)	(0.409)	(0.402)	(0.542)	(0.621)	(0.306)	(0.342)
8 quarters after contract × public security	3.321	2.861	3.174***	3.024***	7.422*	6.672*	4.503**	4.321**
	(2.047)	(1.917)	(0.972)	(0.957)	(4.056)	(3.529)	(1.761)	(1.675)
Panel C: Demands								
8 quarters before contract	0.806	0.144	0.323	-0.243	1.380	0.354	0.898	0.228
	(0.619)	(0.490)	(0.419)	(0.353)	(1.128)	(0.562)	(0.671)	(0.331)
8 quarters after contract	1.531	2.372*	0.168	0.932*	-0.605	0.606	0.077	0.897*
	(1.414)	(1.390)	(0.545)	(0.494)	(1.417)	(0.851)	(0.784)	(0.492)
8 quarters before contract × public security	-0.323	-0.380	0.341	0.235	-0.606	-0.615	-0.197	-0.260
	(0.523)	(0.529)	(0.406)	(0.398)	(0.580)	(0.604)	(0.270)	(0.305)
8 quarters after contract × public security	1.777	1.323	3.178***	3.030***	6.033	5.336	4.468**	4.305**
	(2.217)	(2.114)	(0.976)	(0.958)	(3.735)	(3.221)	(1.759)	(1.682)
Regression	OLS	OLS	IV	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	IV
Event-study weighting	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: The table presents regression coefficients for facial recognition AI firms that earn contracts from local governments when there is an above median amount of unrest in the quarter prior to the contract. The table shows the difference in software production between firms that earn politically motivated (public security) contracts versus non-politically motivated contracts. In the IV specification (columns 3-4, 7-8), local unrest is instrumented by weather variables selected by LASSO. Columns 1-4 present results for amount of government software produced by the firm, while columns 5-8 present results for commercial software. All columns control for time period fixed effects and firm fixed effects. Columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 weight the control group by 10 times more than the treatment, following Borusyak et al. (2017). Standard errors are clustered at the contract location (prefecture) level. * significant at 10% ** significant at 5% *** significant at 1%.