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Drivers of state legislative actions restricting foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land

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ABSTRACT

Foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land have raised national and food security concerns. These concerns have been reflected in the significant amount of state legislative actions that seek to restrict foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land in recent years. While there has not been clear evidence of the negative impacts of such foreign holdings, these restrictive legislations could deprive immigrants' residential rights or lead to unintended economic consequences. This naturally leads to the question: what are the factors driving these controversial state legislative actions? This study informs this important issue by investigating factors predicting state legislators' bill proposals and voting behavior. We then conduct an analysis at the state level, accounting for the sequential nature of state-level activity, which allows us to further capture the impacts of state agricultural and China-related characteristics. Results suggest that while protecting state agricultural assets is part of the consideration, these state legislative actions are also responding to national security concerns raised by China-related incidents in recent years.

1. Introduction

The rise in foreign holdings of agricultural land in the United States (U.S.) has sparked significant interest across both public and private sectors in recent years (Pittman, 2023). Foreign holdings in U.S. agriculture have been viewed as a threat to food and national security, and concerns have also been raised regarding their impact on American farmers' livelihoods (Ortega, 2023). This issue has become particularly contentious due to recent acquisitions by Chinese investors near sensitive military installations (Brown, 2023a). As a result, a hearing addressing foreign ownership in U.S. agriculture, highlighting the People's Republic of China (hereafter China), was held in the U.S. Senate's Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee in September 2023.[1]

The growing food and national security concerns have also been reflected in the significant amount of state legislative activity that seeks to restrict foreign interests in private agricultural land or even property[2] (Gordon, 2023; Kindy, 2023). From 2015 to 2020, only a few states proposed such bills, but the number increased to approximately thirty-four in 2023, with many bills specifically targeting countries like China. In the same year, more than ten of these thirty-four states passed a bill, and currently, twenty-four states have certain restrictions on foreign holdings of agricultural land within the state (National Agricultural Law Center (NALC), 2024).

Despite the broad interest in restricting foreign interest in U.S. agricultural land, there is no clear evidence demonstrating how such foreign holdings negatively affect the U.S. agri-food system (U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2024). For example, one concern over foreign investment points to the potential of U.S. farmers' inability to acquire agricultural land due to rising land prices as a result of increased demand from foreign buyers (Ortega, 2023). However, limited consistent trends have been observed regarding changes in agricultural land values or rental rates between counties with or without foreign investment in agricultural land, or counties that lost or gained foreign investment in agricultural land (USDA, 2024).

On the other hand, restricting foreign investment could forgo potential benefits such as enhancing the economic prosperity of domestic agricultural landowners or stimulating economic growth in local communities (USDA, 2023). For example, in 2022, the Chinese company

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[1] The hearing on "Foreign Ownership in U.S. Agriculture" in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in September 2023 is available at https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/hearings/foreign-ownership-in-us-agriculture.

[2] The definition of property differs by state laws. For example, while it is simply defined as "immovable property" in Louisiana's law (Act No.464, Louisiana, 2023), it is defined in more details as "land, buildings, fixtures, and all other improvements to land" in Alabama's law (H.B. 379, Alabama, 2023).

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Fufeng proposed constructing a corn mill in Grand Forks, North Dakota, a project that would have created over 1,200 jobs in the local community (Smith, 2022). In addition, approximately 28% of foreign-held U.S. agricultural land is owned by companies with "wind," "solar," or "renewable" in their names, highlighting potential opportunities to align land use with national climate policy goals through increased renewable energy production (USDA, 2023). State regulations aimed at restricting foreign ownership of agricultural land have sparked controversy, with critics arguing that such measures could have unintended economic consequences or may even be unconstitutional (American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 2024; House Bill (H.B.) 33, Ohio, 2023). These debates naturally raise a critical question: What factors are driving state legislation to restrict foreign interest in agricultural land?

We inform this important topic by investigating the factors predicting restrictive state legislative actions. Specifically, we examine how legislator and legislative district characteristics are associated with legislators' bill-proposing and voting behavior. While previous studies on legislator behavior have mainly focused solely on voting outcomes (e.g., Grier et al., 2023; Schaffner, 2022; Conconi et al., 2020; Schaffner et al., 2018; Conconi et al., 2014; Facchini & Steinhardt, 2011), this study also examines bill proposing behavior. Focusing on bill-proposing behavior is important because it is the prerequisite of having a bill that could be put to a vote and eventually passed. Given that legislator and legislative district characteristics are limited in explaining legislators' voting behavior, we further conduct an analysis at the state level that allows us to examine how state agricultural, political, and trade characteristics affect state bill proposals and passage that seek to restrict foreign holdings of agricultural land within a state.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the history and recent trends of foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land and related legislations, as well as how the China-related events match with state legislative actions. Section 3 presents the data and summary statistics. The estimation strategy is then introduced in section 4, followed by the empirical results presented and discussed in

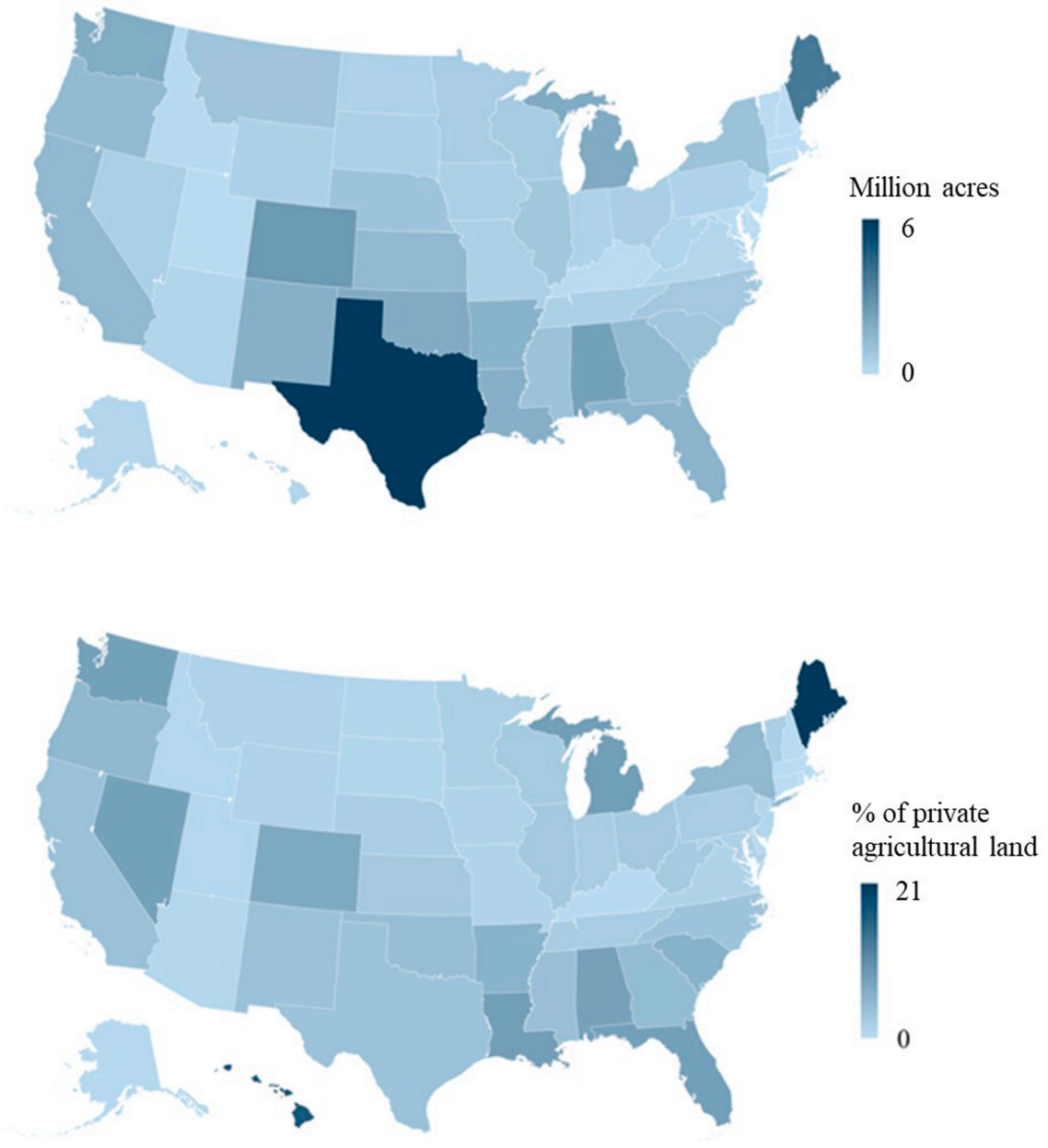

Fig. 1. Foreign holdings of state agricultural land as of 2023.
Data source: USDA (2024).

section 5. Finally, section 6 concludes with policy implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

2. Background

2.1. Foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land

The 1978 Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land to be reported to the USDA (Brown, 2023a). Agricultural land, as defined by AFIDA, includes land that has been used within the past five years for farming, ranching, forestry, or timber production that exceeds ten acres in the aggregate, or has annual gross receipts above a thousand U.S. dollars from the sale of the farm, ranch, or timber products (7C.F.R. § 781.2(b), 1993). Holdings refer to ownership or other types of interest, which mainly consist of long-term leases (Taylor et al., 2023).

As of 2023, foreign holdings of agricultural land account for 45 million, or 3.5%, of the 1.3 billion acres of privately held agricultural land in the U.S., spanning across all 50 U.S. states (USDA, 2024). Forest land consists of the largest category of all foreign-held agricultural land (48.9%), followed by cropland (29.4%), pastureland (17.2%), and other agricultural land (4.5%) (USDA, 2024). The three states with the largest acreage of foreign-held agricultural land are Texas, Maine, and Colorado (Fig. 1). Except for Maine, foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land are concentrated in the western and southern parts of the U.S. (USDA, 2023).

From 2013 to 2017, foreign holdings of agricultural land increased modestly by an average of 0.6 million acres per year. Since 2017, the number has risen to an average of 2.6 million acres per year (USDA, 2024). Over the ten years, while an increase in foreign holdings is observed in all categories of agricultural land, the most significant change is the 146% increase in foreign-held cropland, with the change mainly attributable to transactions of foreign-owned wind companies on a large amount of land (USDA, 2024). Some of the biggest foreign investors of U.S. agricultural land are from Canada and European countries such as the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Fig. 2). Together, they contribute to more than half of the total foreign-held agricultural land (USDA, 2024). Canadian investors alone account for about 34% of the total foreign-held U.S. agricultural land, with 52% of the land they hold being forest land, and 37% being cropland (USDA, 2024).

While China has been a country of focus in the recent foreign ownership discussions, Chinese investors hold less than 1% of all foreign-held U.S. agricultural land (USDA, 2024). As of 2023, Chinese holdings of agricultural land have been reported in 27 states (Fig. 3), with most of these landholdings concentrated in Texas, North Carolina, Missouri, and Utah (USDA, 2024). The Chinese government, like most foreign governments, has not directly filed any landholdings in the U.S. Instead, big companies like Brazos Highland Properties LP and Murphy Brown LLC (Smithfield Foods) are the top Chinese investors of U.S. land, where together they account for about 66% of the total filed Chinese agricultural landholdings (USDA, 2024).

2.2. History of legislative restrictions

The most recent resurgence of legislative interest in restricting foreign holdings of agricultural land occurred in 2021, when numerous bills were proposed in both federal and state legislatures. Prior to this uptick in interest, there have been several waves of state law development to restrict foreign holdings of state agricultural land throughout U.S. history, with the earliest wave dating back to the period when the Declaration of Independence was signed (NALC, 2024). Federal law development, on the other hand, has been relatively stagnant. The first instance of Congress specifically addressing foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land was the enactment of AFIDA in 1978. Approximately half a century later AFIDA was amended to request data collecting and reporting efforts from USDA (Pittman, 2023). While a bill that seeks to restrict investment in American agricultural land from the "Big Four", namely, China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, has been passed by the Senate in 2023 (Brown, 2023b), currently, laws restricting foreign investment in agricultural land have not been enacted in Congress, but only in state legislatures.

State bills and laws can differ in scope. Not all states apply AFIDA's definition of agricultural land so definitions can vary across states. For example, Minnesota's foreign ownership law excludes land used for timber production from its definition of agricultural land (Minnesota Statutes § 500.24, subd. 2(a)). State bills and laws can also differ in the types of foreign investors or interests under restriction, as well as the acreage of land foreigners are allowed to purchase, among other characteristics (NALC, 2024). While some states have a law in place before this most recent wave of legislative activity, some laws are considered ineffective or outdated and new bills are proposed to impose further restrictions. For example, Wisconsin's Statutes set the limit acreage amount of land a foreign person could own at 640 acres in the 1980s (Wisconsin Statutes § 710.02 (1)). In 2023, Wisconsin's Senate Bill (S.B.) 348 seeks to cut the limit down to 50 acres (S.B. 348, Wisconsin, 2023).

Depending on the scope of these state bills and laws, some of them can be quite controversial. For example, S.B. 1084 in California and H.B. 33 in Ohio were passed by both chambers but vetoed by the respective governors (H.B. 33, Ohio, 2023; S.B. 1084, California, 2022). Specifically, Ohio H.B. 33 seeks to prohibit foreign adversaries from owning agricultural land and real property in the state. The governor's veto message addresses concerns about the unintended economic consequences that could occur with the inclusion of non-agricultural property in the bill (H.B. 33, Ohio, 2023). Besides conflict of interest within state legislatures, there can also be legal challenges associated with these state bills and laws. For example, a federal lawsuit was filed in 2023 to challenge Florida's S.B. 264, a bill newly enacted into law that prohibits people from "foreign country of concern" from owning agricultural land and certain real property in the state (S.B. 264, Florida, 2023). While the state law remains in effect, the U.S. Court of Appeals has decided to temporarily halt the enforcement of the law (ACLU, 2024). These instances demonstrate that underlying these restrictive state bills and laws are conflicting interests and considerations beyond protecting state agricultural land from further foreign holdings.

The interest in both federal- and state-level legislative options to address foreign holdings of American agricultural land is expected to continue in the near future. Besides new bills having been filed in several states, at the beginning of 2024, the governor of Missouri issued an executive order to ban foreign adversaries from owning agricultural land near the military facility in the state (Executive Order No. 24–01, Missouri, 2024). In Congress, a bill to amend AFIDA that will reinforce the reporting of foreign investment in U.S. agricultural land was also introduced by a bipartisan group of senators (AFIDA Improvements Act of 2024, 2024).

2.3. Timeline of China-related events and state legislative actions

Recent acquisitions of U.S. entities by investors from China contributed to the resurgence of interest in foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land (Brown, 2023a). In 2021, a Chinese company's purchase of more than a hundred thousand acres of land near an Air Force base in Texas gained media attention. Similarly, in 2022, the Chinese firm Fufeng Group acquired agricultural land near an Air Force base in North Dakota, intending to construct a corn mill (NALC, 2024). More recently was the incident of the alleged Chinese spy balloon that flew across the U.S. in February 2023 (Tester, 2023). Fig. 4 presents how these China-related events match with the state legislative actions from 2011 to 2023.

Despite the relatively small share of U.S. agricultural land held by

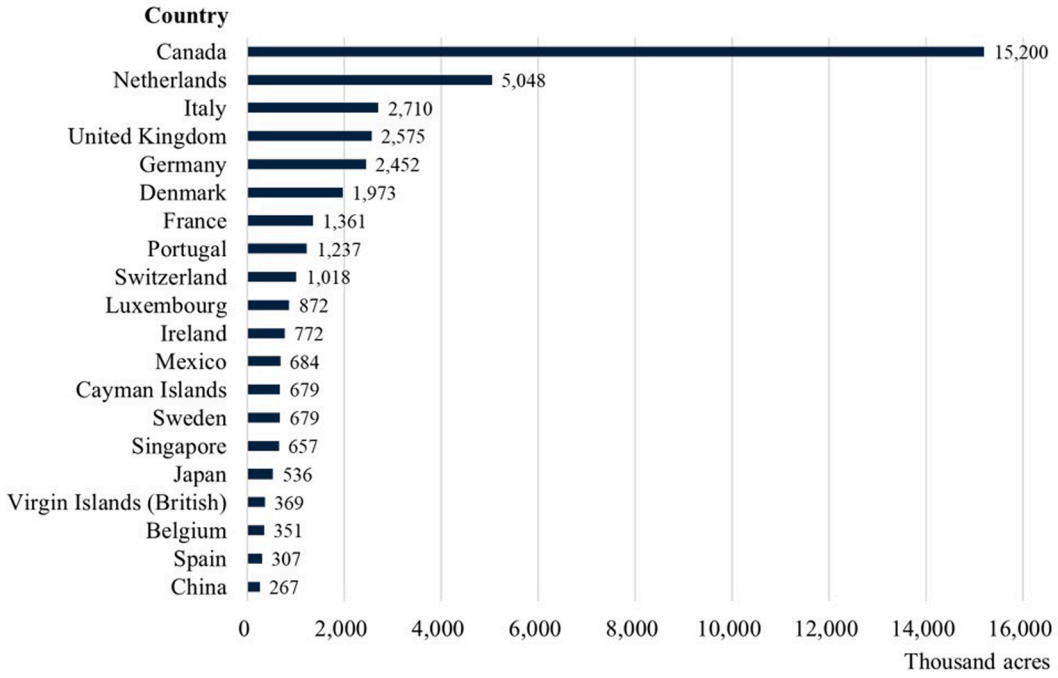

Fig. 2. Top 20 foreign investors of U.S. agricultural land as of 2023.
Data source: USDA (2024).

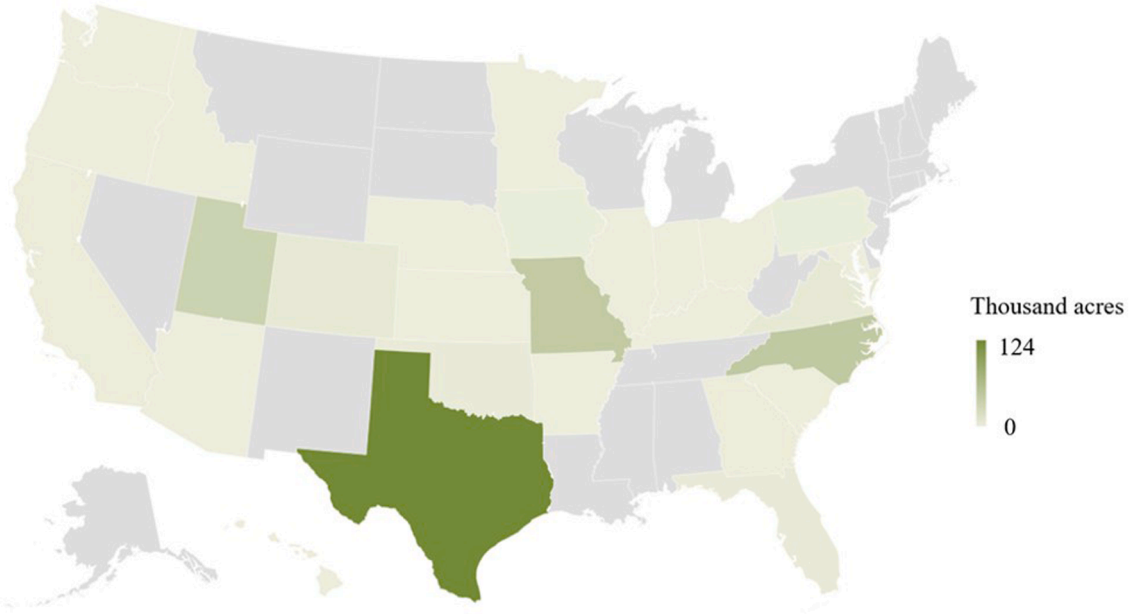

Fig. 3. Chinese holdings of state agricultural land as of 2023.
Data source: USDA (2024).

Chinese investors (USDA, 2024), these incidents have intensified national security concerns, prompting three Senate hearings in 2023. The Defense Appropriations Subcommittee addressed China's high-altitude surveillance efforts in February,[3] while the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee discussed countering China to advance U.S. security and policy in May.[4] Later in September 2023, the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee held a hearing on foreign ownership in U.S. agriculture, with a special focus on Chinese ownership.

[3] The hearing on "The People's Republic of China's High Altitude Surveillance Efforts Against the United States" in the Senate Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations in February 2023 is available at https:///www.appropriations.senate.gov/hearings/oversight-on-chinese-spy-balloon.

[4] The hearing on "Countering China: Advancing U.S. National Security, Economic Security, and Foreign Policy" in the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs in May 2023 is available at https://www.banking.senate.gov/hearings/countering-china-advancing-us-national-security-economic-security-and-foreign-policy.

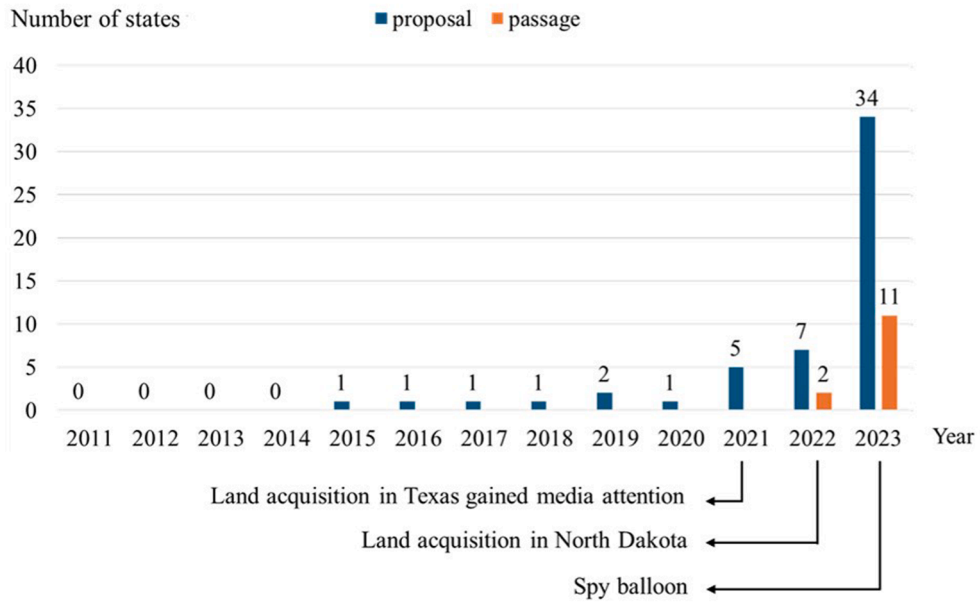

Fig. 4. Number of states with restrictive bill proposal(s) and passage(s) from 2011 to 2023 and China-related events timeline.

3. Data

This study utilizes unique datasets to analyze the factors predicting state legislative actions at both the legislator and state levels. In this section, we first introduce the variables and data sources of the legislator-level analysis, followed by the state-level. Since there is no previous empirical study on this topic, variables are mainly selected based on other related foreign policy research such as trade and immigration policy (Conconi et al., 2020; Conconi et al., 2014; Facchini & Steinhardt, 2011; Mayda & Rodrik, 2005) and studies related to roll call votes on U.S. agricultural policies (Grier et al., 2023; Hopkins et al., 2022). Our study period covers the years 2021 to 2023, a critical timeframe during which foreign land ownership regulations gained considerable legislative attention and China-related events became relevant.

3.1. State legislator level data

We first explore the drivers of legislators' proposing or voting to pass a bill that seeks to restrict foreign ownership of agricultural land within the state. The data unit in the legislator-level analysis is individual legislators. From 2021 to 2023, 143 bills were introduced, and 16 of them passed. Accordingly, the bill-proposal analysis uses data on the 6,707 legislators associated with the 143 introduced bills,[5] and the vote analysis uses data on the 2,167 legislators associated with the 16 passed bills. Legislators in the states with more than one bill passed in the same year would show up repeatedly in our vote-analysis dataset.[6] A list of passed bills is displayed in Table 1, and a list of bills that are introduced but not passed can be found in Appendix A.

The two dependent variables on this level of analysis are whether a legislator proposed a bill, and whether a legislator voted to pass a bill. Both primary sponsors and co-sponsors of a bill are considered as legislators that proposed a bill. The binary bill proposal variable is further included as an independent variable when analyzing legislators' final passage vote.

Table 1
Passed bills considered for the legislator vote analysis.

No.	Year	State	Bill
1	2022	California	S.B. 1084
2	2022	Indiana	S.B. 388
3	2023	Alabama	H.B. 379
4	2023	Arkansas	S.B. 383
5	2023	Florida	S.B. 264
6	2023	Idaho	H.B. 173
7	2023	Louisiana	H.B. 125
8	2023	Louisiana	H.B. 537
9	2023	Montana	S.B. 203
10	2023	North Dakota	H.B. 1135
11	2023	North Dakota	S.B. 2371
12	2023	Ohio	H.B. 33
13	2023	Tennessee	H.B. 40
14	2023	Utah	H.B. 186
15	2023	Virginia	S.B. 1438
16	2023	Virginia	H.B. 2325

Note: S.B. means Senate Bill. H.B. means House Bill. Bills that are introduced but not passed are listed in Appendix A.

Factors that are expected to affect legislators' actions include their characteristics as well as those of the district that they represent. Legislators' characteristics include gender, political affiliation, tenure, and if they are a member of the agricultural committee in the chamber. District-level characteristics can be categorized into demographic and economic factors. Demographic characteristics include the percentage of male population, white population, Chinese population,[7] noncitizen population, population aged 65 years or above, and population with at least a bachelor's degree. Economic characteristics include the percentage of workers employed in the agriculture industry, the median household income, and an income inequality indicator. The inequality indicator is constructed by dividing the household mean income by the household median income, with a larger number indicating greater

[5] In other words, a total of 6,707 legislators were seated in the state legislature at the time a bill was introduced and could have sponsored/co-sponsored the bill.

[6] There were 1,742 legislators seated when introduced bills came to a vote. Three states (LA, ND, VA) had two bills put to vote in 2023, so a total of 425 legislators showed up twice in the vote dataset.

[7] This refers to the population in a legislative district that identifies their race as Chinese, which could include both Chinese citizens and non-citizens. The citizenship status could not be distinguished from the Census data.

economic inequality in the legislator's district (Facchini & Steinhardt, 2011). To capture national security concerns, we also include the number of military installations in a legislative district.

Information about legislator bill proposals and the final passage votes is collected from each state's legislature. Data of the legislators' characteristics is collected from state legislatures' websites and Ballotpedia.org. District-level data is collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, with the only exception being the military installation information, which is collected from the U.S. Department of Defense's website. Given that state legislative actions mainly occur in the first half of the year, district demographic and economic characteristics from the year prior to the bill proposals and votes are used.

Summary statistics for the legislator-level variables are presented in Table 2. The sample size for the bill proposal analysis is 6,707, and the sample size for the vote analysis is 2,167. In the proposal sample, most legislators are male (71%) and are affiliated with the Republican Party (63%). Only 17% serve on agriculture committees, and their tenure varies widely, ranging from less than a year to 43 years, with an average of 5 years. Turning to the legislative district characteristics, the population of the represented legislative districts is mainly white but is quite balanced with respect to gender. About 21% of the population has at least a bachelor's degree. Agricultural workers overall constitute a small portion in the legislative districts represented (2%). Noncitizens and Chinese individuals constitute about 5% and 0.8% of the district population, respectively, but the range is wide. For example, the noncitizen population in some districts in Florida can reach more than 25% of the total population. Finally, the average number of military installations in a district is 0.12 for all districts under investigation. In the vote-analysis sample, 24% of the legislators proposed a bill, and 83% voted to pass a bill. The other legislator and legislative district characteristics are quite similar to those of the proposal sample.

3.2. State level data

After studying legislators' actions, we then investigate the state-level big picture. We do so by looking at the drivers of a state having a bill proposed or passed using state-level data that includes 49 U.S. states spanning across a three-year period, from 2021 to 2023. Nebraska is excluded because its legislative system differs from the other 49 states. Its legislature consists of only one chamber and its legislators are not required to affiliate with a political party (Hopkins et al., 2022). The two dependent variables are whether a state has a bill proposed and whether a bill is passed. State bill information from 2021 to 2023 was obtained from the NALC resources (NALC, 2024; Brown, 2023c).

Independent variables at the state-level can be categorized into political, legislative, agricultural, demographic, and China-related factors. Political and legislative factors include the political affiliation of the state governor, the partisanship of a state's house and senate, the number of military installations, and a dummy variable indicating if the state has a previous law restricting foreign holdings of private agricultural land.[8] Note that the states with a previous law can also have new bill proposals or passages to amend the existing law. Agricultural factors include the percentage of private agricultural land that is foreign-held cropland and non-crop agricultural land, the share of gross domestic product (GDP) contributed by the agricultural industry,[9] the number of farms, and the average farm size. Demographic factor includes the percentage of the population in a state that is noncitizen. Finally, China-related factors include the percentage of Chinese investment with

Table 2
Summary statistics of legislator and legislative district level variables.

		Proposal		Vote	
		N = 6,707		N = 2,167	
Variable	Definition	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Dependent variable					
Propse	If a legislator proposed a bill (=1)	0.17	0.38	0.24	0.43
Vote_pass	If a legislator voted to pass a bill (=1)			0.83	0.38
Independent variable					
House	If a legislator is a house member (=1)	0.73	0.45	0.71	0.45
Party_R	If a legislator is affiliated with the Republican party (=1)	0.63	0.48	0.70	0.46
Male	If a legislator is male (=1)	0.71	0.45	0.74	0.44
Ag_committee	If a legislator is a member of the agricultural committee in the legislature (=1)	0.17	0.38	0.18	0.39
Tenure	The number of years a legislator has been in their position	5.09	6.38	5.53	6.65
Dist_ag_worker	The percentage of workers in the agricultural industry in a legislative district (%)	2.38	3.47	3.18	4.71
Dist_race_white	The percentage of the population that is white in a legislative district (%)	76.75	20.19	78.00	19.10
Dist_age_65	The percentage of the population that is aged 65 or above in a legislative district (%)	16.62	4.39	16.58	4.78
Dist_male	The percentage of the population that is male in a legislative district (%)	49.56	1.65	49.79	1.74
Dist_med_hh_income	The log of median household income in a legislative district	11.13	0.32	11.14	0.31
Dist_inequality	The inequality indicator of a legislative district (calculated as mean household income divided by median household income)	1.33	0.11	1.34	0.11
Dist_edu_bachelor	The percentage of the population that has at least a bachelor's degree in a legislative district (%)	21.45	9.99	21.16	9.33
Dist_military_base	The number of military installations in a legislative district	0.12	0.42	0.14	0.48
Dist_noncitizen	The percentage of the population that is noncitizen in a legislative district (%)	4.67	4.94	4.16	4.50
Dist_Chinese	The percentage of the population that is Chinese in a legislative district (%)	0.80	2.25	0.60	1.72

Note: SD means standard deviation.

[8] The previous law variable is included to account for the snowball effect of state legislation, which refers to the scenario where one event increases the chances of a similar event happening (Hopkins et al., 2022).

[9] Agricultural GDP share captures the importance of the agriculture industry to a state's economy and reflects the degree a state's economy is influenced by agricultural markets and its exposure to trade-related policies.

respect to the total foreign-held agricultural land, the percentage of the population in a state that is Chinese,[10] and whether a state is a net exporter of agricultural products or a net exporter of non-agricultural products to China.[11]

Data on political party control and previous law is collected from Ballotpedia.org, Brown & Spellman (2023), and each state legislature's website. The number of military installations is collected from the U.S. Department of Defense's website, as in the legislator-level data. Information about foreign holdings of agricultural land is collected through the USDA AFIDA data product, and the number of farms and average farm size are collected from USDA "Farms and Land in Farms" reports.[12] States' agricultural GDP is obtained from the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Demographic factors are collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, and trade data used to construct China-related net exporter variables is collected from the International Trade Administration. Similar to the legislator-level data construction, state agriculture, demographic, and China-related characteristics from the year prior to when legislative actions occurred are used.

Summary statistics for the state-level variables are shown in Table 3. From 2021 to 2023, 46 states have at least one bill proposed[13] and 13 states have at least one bill passed. Foreign-held cropland and non-crop agricultural land both make up a small portion of the total private agricultural land. On average, foreign-held cropland constitutes about 0.8% of the total private agricultural land, while the non-crop agricultural land takes up about 2.4% of the total private agricultural land. Over the three years, Maine has been the only state with foreigners holding more than an average of 10% of its agricultural land. The percentage of total GDP that is contributed by the agricultural industries is also small, with an average of 1.4% across the states. In 2022, the states with the smallest agricultural GDP share are Nevada, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. In contrast, the states with the largest agricultural GDP share are South Dakota, North Dakota, and Iowa, and they are also net exporters of agricultural products. In fact, 40 out of the 49 states are net exporters of agricultural products to China in 2022. On the other hand, only five states are net exporters of non-agricultural products to China in the same year, such as Louisiana and Montana.

Throughout the three-year period, twelve states have a previous law, with Indiana being the thirteenth state in 2023. In addition, more than half of the state legislatures have a Republican majority in the chambers, and most of them also have a Republican governor. Noncitizens and self-identified Chinese individuals only account for about 5% and 1% of the total population in a state, respectively, but the numbers vary by state. For example, in states like New York and California, there is a larger population of noncitizens and Chinese individuals compared to most other states. Finally, while a state has seven military installations on average, the range is wide. For example, Vermont has only one military installation, while California has thirty-four.

Table 3
Summary statistics of state level variables.

		Full sample	
		N = 147	
Variable	Definition	Mean	SD
Dependent variable			
Bill_proposed	If a state has at least a bill proposed (=1)	0.31	0.47
Bill_passed	If a state has at least a bill passed (=1)	0.09	0.28
Independent variable			
FHAL_crop	The percentage of total private agricultural land in a state that is foreign-held cropland (%)	0.79	0.84
FHAL_others	The percentage of total private agricultural land in a state that is foreign-held non-crop agricultural land (%)	2.43	3.25
China_to_FHAL	The percentage of total foreign-held agricultural land in a state that is Chinese-held agricultural land (%)	1.29	4.30
Ag_GDP_share	The percentage of GDP contributed by the agricultural industry in a state (%)	1.40	1.78
Number_of_farms	The number of farms in a state (thousands of farms)	40.13	39.06
Average_farm_size	The average farm size of a state (acres)	500.05	562.20
Governor_R	If the governor of a state is affiliated with the Republican party (=1)	0.53	0.50
Senate_House_R	If both chambers have a Republican majority (=1)	0.58	0.50
Previous_law	If a state has a previous law restricting foreign ownership of private agricultural land in the state (=1)	0.25	0.44
Exporter_ag	If a state is a net exporter of agricultural products to China (=1)	0.80	0.40
Exporter_others	If a state is a net exporter of non-agricultural products to China (=1)	0.12	0.33
Military_base	The number of military installations in a state	6.73	6.06
Noncitizen_pop	The percentage of the population that is noncitizens in a state (%)	4.63	2.72
Chinese_pop	The percentage of the population that is Chinese in a state (%)	1.21	2.17

Note: SD means standard deviation.

4. Methods

Our analysis is conducted at two different levels, namely, the legislator level and the state level. At the legislator level, factors associated with state legislators' actions are examined with two separate binary logit models. At the state level, state characteristics predicting state legislative actions are identified using binary logit and sequential logit models. This section first introduces analysis at the legislator level, then at the state level.

4.1. State legislator level analysis

For the legislator-level analysis, we adopt binary logit models to investigate predictors of legislators' bill-proposing and voting behavior. We first estimate the probability of legislators' proposing a bill with the following equation:

$$prob(Y_{ist}=1)=\frac{\exp(X\beta)}{1+\exp(X\beta)} \quad \text{where } X\beta=\beta_0+\beta_1 X_{ist}+\beta_2 X_{ds,t-1}+I_s+J_t \tag{1}$$

Y_{ist} takes value one if legislator i in state s in year t proposed a bill, and zero if otherwise. X_{ist} consists of a set of legislators' characteristics. $X_{ds,t-1}$ is a set of characteristics of legislative district d in state s in year $t-1$. District characteristics from the year prior to the bill proposal are used since legislative actions usually take place in the first half of a year. We include state-level fixed effects I_s and year fixed effects J_t to account

[10] This refers to the population in a state that identifies their race as Chinese, which could include both Chinese citizens and non-citizens. The citizenship status could not be distinguished from the Census data.

[11] The idea behind these variables is that China is a main importing country of U.S. products, and a state being a net exporter of products to China can represent both economic opportunity and/or potential political vulnerability.

[12] USDA "Farms and Land in Farms" reports are available at https://usda.library.cornell.edu/concern/publications/5712m6524.

[13] While more states have bill proposals related to foreign holdings of state agricultural land, we focus only on states with bills that are imposing further restrictions on foreign investment. For example, Mississippi is not counted as having a bill proposal in 2022 since its only proposed bill in 2022 aims to protect the rights of domestic landowners instead of restricting foreign investment. Similarly, Oklahoma is not counted as having a bill proposal in both years 2022 and 2023 since the proposed bills are narrowing the restrictions instead of being more restrictive (NALC, 2024).

for unobserved state- and time-specific factors,[14] and cluster the standard errors at the state level (Grier et al., 2023; Conconi et al., 2020; Mutz, 2018; Facchini & Steinhardt, 2011; Rubenzer, 2011).

The data used in the proposal analysis includes all legislators in the states and years where there was at least one bill proposed (i.e., states and years associated with the 143 introduced bills). Ideally, the dataset should encompass legislators from all states throughout our study period; however, in states where no legislation was proposed, there is no variation in the outcome within those states. As a result, we can exclude them from the dataset without biasing our results.

Self-selection can be a concern due to the non-random process by which bills advance to a final passage vote. To address this, we first estimate the probability of a bill reaching a vote. We then incorporate this estimated probability into the analysis of legislators' voting behavior, thereby mitigating the potential bias introduced by self-selection.

A total of 143 introduced bills are included in the bill success estimation, with the binary dependent variable taking the value one if a bill makes to a final passage vote. Bill's characteristics are used as predictors of bill success, and state political and legislative environment is controlled for in the estimation (Adler & Wilkerson, 2005; Boehmer et al., 2008; Browne, 1985; Holman et al., 2022). Given the binary nature of the outcome, the estimation is conducted with a logit model. Since bill success is not the focus of this study, more details on its estimation can be found in Appendix B.

After obtaining the estimated probability of bill success, we estimate the probability of legislators voting to pass a bill with the following specification:

$$prob(V_{ist}=1)=\frac{\exp\left(\widetilde{X}\gamma\right)}{1+\exp\left(\widetilde{X}\gamma\right)}$$

$$\text{where } \widetilde{X}\gamma=\gamma_0+\gamma_1\widetilde{X}_{ist}+\gamma_2\widetilde{P}_{ist}+\gamma_3\widetilde{X}_{ds,t-1}+I_s+Pr\_B_{\ell st} \tag{2}$$

V_{ist} takes value one if legislator i in state s in year t voted to pass a bill, and zero if a legislator voted "no", was absent, abstained or otherwise.[15] Our main interest here is how legislators' characteristics $\widetilde{X}_{ist}$, as well as legislative districts' characteristics $\widetilde{X}_{ds,t-1}$, affect legislators' bill voting behavior. The meanings of $\widetilde{X}_{ist}, \widetilde{X}_{ds,t-1}$ and I_s remain the same as in the proposal analysis. $Pr\_B_{\ell st}$ is the estimated probability of an introduced bill ℓ in state s in year t coming to a vote and is the key difference between equation (2) and equation (1). In addition, $\widetilde{P}_{ist}$ is included to capture legislators' bill-proposing behavior.

4.2. State level analysis

For the state-level analysis, a panel dataset for 49 U.S. states[16] spanning across 3 years is used to model the drivers of state-level legislative actions. The two dependent variables are state legislative actions that include bill proposals and bill passages, which equal one if a state has a bill proposed or passed in a given year, and zero if otherwise. Given the binary nature of the dependent variables, we estimate a logit model for each outcome. The equation is specified as follows:

$$prob(Z_{st}=1)=\frac{\exp(W\alpha)}{1+\exp(W\alpha)}$$

$$\text{where } W\alpha=\alpha_0+\alpha_1 Ag_{s,t-1}+\alpha_2 Demo_{s,t-1}+\alpha_3 China_{s,t-1}+\alpha_4 Politics_{st}+\delta_t \tag{3}$$

Z_{st} indicates the state legislative actions (bill proposal and bill passage) in state s in year t. $Ag_{s,t-1}$ is a set of characteristics of foreign holdings and the agricultural industry in state s in year $t-1$, and $Demo_{s,t-1}$ includes the proportion of noncitizen population to the total population in state s in year $t-1$. $China_{s,t-1}$ captures factors related to the economic and political engagement with China in state s in year $t-1$. Data of the agricultural, demographic, and China-related characteristics from the previous year are used for the same reason as in the legislator-level analysis. $Politics_{st}$ indicates political and legislative factors in state s in year t, which includes the political affiliation of the governor, the political party control in the chambers, the existence of previous law restricting foreign holdings of state agricultural land, as well as the number of military installations. We include year fixed effects δ_t to account for unobserved time-specific factors in each year, and cluster the standard errors by states (Hopkins et al., 2022).

5. Results

5.1. Factors predicting legislators' bill-proposing and voting behavior

Factors predicting legislators' bill-proposing and voting behavior are estimated with two separate logit models. The raw coefficient estimates can be found in Table 4. The coefficient of the predicted bill success is significant, suggesting that its inclusion is crucial in the vote analysis to mitigate the potential bias introduced by self-selection. To interpret the results in terms of the change in probability of performing each behavior, marginal effects are presented in Table 5.[17]

Legislators' characteristics are found to affect their legislative actions. Specifically, if a legislator is affiliated with the Republican party, the probability of the legislator proposing a restrictive bill increases by 13 percentage points. In addition, being a member of the agricultural committee in the state legislature increases their probability of proposing a bill by 7 percentage points. This is consistent with the committee's mandate to oversee and protect state agricultural resources. Turning to legislators' voting behavior, it is no surprise that legislators who proposed a restrictive bill are also more likely to vote to pass a bill. Gender and political affiliation are also found to affect legislators' voting behavior. Male legislators are 5 percentage points more likely to vote to pass a bill than their female counterpart, and affiliation with the Republican party increases the probability of a legislator voting to pass a bill by 32 percentage points.

The positive results of the Republican party affiliation align with the conservative-oriented ideology, particularly right-wing populism. According to the four Republican-oriented groups identified by Pew Research Center (2021), the populist right tends to express skepticism about economic fairness and favor stringent immigration policies. There is also a clear connection between the populist right ideology and the legislators' behavior when considering that many of these restrictive bills target certain countries like China. During Donald Trump's presidency from 2017 to 2020, the "America First" movement gained prominence and hostility towards China increased (O'Brien, 2020), and the "populist right" is among the strongest supporters of President Trump (Pew Research Center, 2021).

[14] Unobserved state-specific factors can include institutional structures or geographic factors that affect policy priorities. Unobserved time-specific factors can include national economic conditions or major national events that occurred in a given year.

[15] Within our sample, there are 124 cases where legislators did not vote "yes" or "no" on a bill. However, further classification is not feasible for all such instances due to data availability across states.

[16] Nebraska is excluded because its legislative system is different from the other 49 states. Its legislature consists of only one chamber and the legislators are not required to affiliate with a political party (Hopkins et al., 2022).

[17] As a robustness check, we perform our analysis with data from the same or closest year to the bill proposals and passages, and the results are similar. The estimated marginal effect for this can be found in Appendix C.

Table 4
Logit model coefficients of factors predicting legislators' behavior.

	Proposal		Vote pass	
	Coefficient	Robust SE	Coefficient	Robust SE
Variable				
Proposal			0.725***	0.277
House	0.313	0.314	0.306	0.221
Party_R	1.468***	0.381	2.448***	0.577
Male	−0.042	0.113	0.476***	0.181
Ag_committee	0.613***	0.156	0.311	0.316
Tenure	−0.013	0.012	0.011	0.009
Dist_ag_worker	0.024*	0.013	−0.042	0.030
Dist_race_white	0.013**	0.006	0.005	0.010
Dist_age_65	−0.012	0.019	0.051*	0.028
Dist_male	−0.038	0.024	0.093	0.067
Dist_med_hh_income	0.272	0.352	−0.342	0.429
Dist_inequality	−0.660	0.522	−0.611	0.858
Dist_edu_bachelor	−0.006	0.012	0.014	0.020
Dist_military_base	−0.109	0.089	0.044	0.113
Dist_noncitizen	−0.001	0.014	0.052*	0.029
Dist_Chinese	−0.073	0.053	−0.003	0.037
Predicted bill success			24.884***	1.123
Constant	−5.715	4.414	−6.320	5.686
N	6,707		2,167	
Log pseudolikelihood	−2214.35		−676.86	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% level, respectively. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state.

Table 5
Marginal effects of factors predicting legislators' behavior.

	Proposal		Vote pass	
	Marginal effect	SE	Marginal effect	SE
Variable				
Proposal			0.065***	0.024
House	0.031	0.030	0.030	0.022
Party_R	0.130***	0.026	0.319***	0.073
Male	−0.004	0.011	0.047***	0.017
Ag_committee	0.067***	0.018	0.029	0.028
Tenure	−0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Dist_ag_worker	0.002*	0.001	−0.004	0.003
Dist_race_white	0.001**	0.001	0.001	0.001
Dist_age_65	−0.001	0.002	0.005*	0.003
Dist_male	−0.004	0.002	0.009	0.006
Dist_med_hh_income	0.028	0.036	−0.032	0.040
Dist_inequality	−0.067	0.053	−0.058	0.084
Dist_edu_bachelor	−0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002
Dist_military_base	−0.011	0.009	0.004	0.011
Dist_noncitizen	0.000	0.001	0.005*	0.003
Dist_Chinese	−0.007	0.005	0.000	0.004
N	6,707		2,167	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% level, respectively. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state.

Given the significant impacts of political affiliation, we illustrate the relationship between the predicted probability of legislators' proposing and voting to pass a bill and their political affiliation while holding all other factors at their mean values (Fig. 5). The predicted probability of bill proposal is 16% for Republican legislators and 4% for non-Republican[18] legislators. Interestingly, the predicted probability of votes suggests that there is some degree of bipartisan support. While it is almost certain that a Republican legislator would vote to pass a bill (96%), the predicted probability of non-Republican legislators[19] with similar controlled characteristics voting to pass a bill is 65%. However, it is important to keep in mind that these results speak to the bills that were eventually voted to pass, and the overall support from each party could be lower if also considering the bills that did not enter the final passage vote.

Regarding the legislative district characteristics, the only factor that is statistically significant at the 5% level is the percentage of the white population in the bill-proposal analysis. Specifically, legislative districts with a larger white population are more likely to see their representatives propose bills restricting foreign agricultural landholdings. This may be attributed to the fact that these areas often coincide with rural regions, where concerns about foreign control of farmland are more prevalent (Johnson & Lichter, 2020).

In the vote analysis, no legislative district characteristic shows a significant impact. This means that the motivation of these legislators' actions may go beyond position-taking for their constituents. The overall insignificant findings of the legislative district characteristics are similar to Conconi et al. (2020), where their results indicate that district characteristics are not strong predictors of legislators' voting behavior on trade bills, and Hopkins et al. (2022), where the effects of district characteristics on animal welfare bill votes are overall economically insignificant. Interestingly, although the legislative district characteristics are limited in explaining legislators' bill proposals and votes, the state fixed effects are jointly significant in both cases. This suggests that further analysis at the state level with more relevant variables could yield additional insights.

5.2. Factors predicting state bill proposals and passages

We further conduct an analysis using state-level data that allows us to capture information about foreign holdings of state agricultural land, and economic and political relations with China, which are important factors that may affect state legislative actions. Two separate logit models are estimated for bill proposals and passages at the state level. Marginal effects of the state-level analysis are presented in Table 6.[20]

5.2.1. Factors predicting state bill proposals

Results for state bill proposals show that foreign-held cropland is a driver of state bill proposals. Specifically, when the ratio of foreign-held cropland to total private agricultural land in a state increases by 1 percentage point, the probability of that state having a bill proposal increases by 6 percentage points. This suggests that protecting a state's agricultural assets is a factor in state bill proposals. Regarding the political factors, if both chambers of a state legislature have a Republican majority, the state will more likely have a bill proposed to restrict foreign holdings of agricultural land. This coincides with the legislator-level results that Republican legislators are more likely to propose a bill. Interestingly, the number of military installations is also positively associated with bill proposals. In particular, the probability of a state having a bill proposal increases by 2 percentage points with an additional military installation, suggesting that the motivation of these state bill proposals could also be addressing national security concerns driven by the China-related incidents.

5.2.2. Factors predicting state bill passages

The results of the bill passage analysis indicate that Republican control in the chambers and the number of military installations are

[18] Only 10 out of the 2,511 non-Republican legislators in the proposal sample are independent. The rest are all Democrats.

[19] Only 3 out of the 641 non-Republican legislators in the vote sample are independent. The rest are all Democrats.

[20] Raw data output can be found in Appendix D. In addition, as robustness check, we performed our analysis with data from the same or closest year to the bill proposals and passages, and the results are similar. The estimated marginal effect for this can be found in Appendix E.

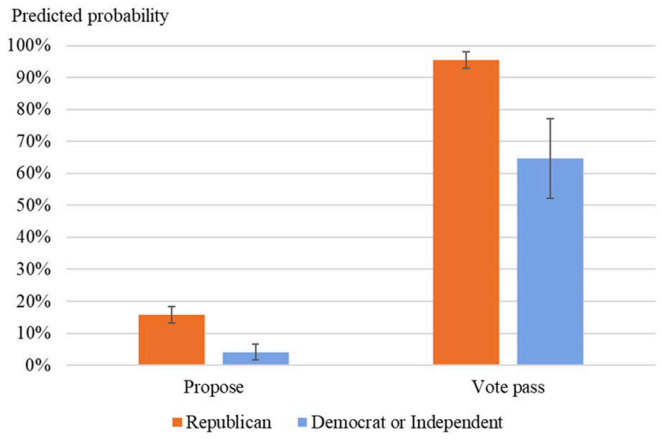

Fig. 5. Predicted probability of legislators' actions by political affiliation. Note: The error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Table 6
Marginal effects of factors predicting state legislative action from two separate logit models.

	Bill proposal		Bill passage	
Variable	Marginal effect	SE	Marginal effect	SE
FHAL_crop	0.056**	0.026	0.042	0.054
FHAL_others	0.000	0.007	-0.004	0.011
China_to_FHAL	0.007	0.006	0.010***	0.003
Ag_GDP_share	0.026	0.021	0.071***	0.019
Number_of_farms	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001
Average_farm_size	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Governor_R	0.023	0.052	0.015	0.066
Senate_House_R	0.247***	0.059	0.175***	0.043
Previous_law	-0.077	0.093	-0.259***	0.041
Exporter_ag_china	-0.003	0.077	-0.206**	0.100
Exporter_others_china	-0.071	0.049	0.022	0.083
Military_base	0.015***	0.005	0.025***	0.006
Noncitizen_pop	-0.017	0.022	-0.062***	0.019
Chinese_pop	0.018	0.012	0.019	0.017
Year FE				
2022	0.032	0.067		
2023	0.582***	0.069	0.160***	0.060
N	147		98	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% level, respectively. FE means fixed effect. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state. Year 2021 is the base group for the year FE in the bill proposal analysis. Year 2022 is the base group for the year FE in the bill passage analysis, and year 2021 is omitted because no states have a bill passed in that year. Raw coefficients can be found in Appendix D.

significant factors influencing bill passages.[21] A state is 18 percentage points more likely to have a bill passed with Republican majority in both of its chambers, and 3 percentage points more likely with an additional military installation. Chinese holdings are also positively associated with state bill passages. Specifically, a 1 percentage point increase in Chinese holdings of agricultural land increases the probability of the state bill passage by about 1 percentage point. Agricultural GDP share is another significant driver such that a 1 percentage point increase in a state's agricultural GDP share increases the probability of the state having a bill passed by about 7 percentage points.

The noncitizen population and the existence of previous law, on the other hand, are negatively associated with bill passages. The former suggests that states with more noncitizens could be more noncitizen-friendly and would be less likely to pass a bill to restrict their rights. This is a bit surprising but understandable since noncitizens can come from a variety of ethnic background and are not necessarily Chinese. The latter suggests that if a state already has a restrictive law in place, it is unlikely to have a new bill passed to impose further restrictions on foreign holdings of agricultural land. Finally, if a state is a net exporter of agricultural products to China, it is 21 percentage points less likely to pass such a bill. This result highlights the importance of the Chinese market for U.S. agricultural products and suggests that states gaining economic benefits from exporting agricultural products to China would be less likely to pass legislation that could deteriorate their relationship with the country.

5.2.3. *Additional insights from sequential logit estimation*

In addition to two separate logit models, we employ a sequential logit model to account for the consecutive nature of the state legislative process. This approach reflects the fact that a state can only pass a bill if one has been proposed (Fig. 6). This is different from the legislator's behavior where a legislator could vote no matter whether they proposed a bill or not. The sequential logit model allows us to capture the factors predicting bill passage considering the entire sequential procedure or at the transition point of a bill proposal to a bill passage. Marginal effects of the sequential logit analysis are reported in Table 7.[22]

Results from the sequential logit model suggest that predictors of state bill passages, considering the entire sequential procedure, include foreign-held cropland, agriculture GDP share, Republican party control in the chambers, the existence of previous law, and the number of military installations. Specifically, a 1 percentage point increase in foreign-held cropland increases the probability of a bill passage by about 9 percentage points, while a 1 percentage point increase in agriculture GDP share increases it by about 7 percentage points. In addition, if both the Senate and House have a Republican party majority, the probability of observing a bill passage increases by 37 percentage points. An additional military installation in a state also increases the probability of bill passage by 3 percentage points. Finally, if a state already has a law restricting foreign holdings of state agricultural land, the likelihood of observing a bill passage in the state decreases by 23 percentage points.

The results at the transition point following a bill proposal generally align with the bill passage outcomes from the separate logit estimation. This alignment suggests that the factors influencing the specific transition from bill proposal to bill passage differ slightly from those affecting the entire sequential procedure. In essence, the predictors of bill passage, when considering the complete process, are a combination of factors that influence both the initial bill proposal and its subsequent transition to passage. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating bill proposals into analyses of state legislative processes.

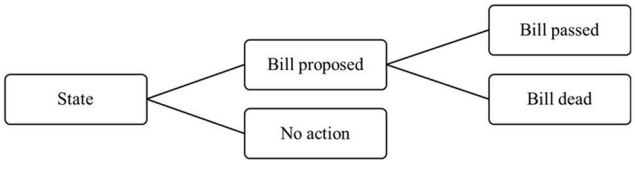

Fig. 6. The sequential nature of legislative procedures observed at the state level.

[21] Self-selection may be a concern in our bill passage analysis since bill proposal is not random. Comparing explanatory variables across states with and without a bill proposal, we found statistically significant differences in only 4 out of 14 variables. Although this suggests that self-selection may have a limited impact, we acknowledge that it remains a consideration when interpreting these results.

[22] Raw data output can be found in Appendix G.

Table 7
Marginal effects of factors predicting state legislative actions from sequential logit model.

	Bill proposal		Bill passage		Transition from bill proposal to bill passage	
Variable	Marginal effect	SE	Marginal effect	SE	Marginal effect	SE
FHAL_crop	0.056**	0.026	0.085**	0.036	0.035	0.042
FHAL_others	0.000	0.007	−0.003	0.011	−0.006	0.013
China_to_FHAL	0.007	0.006	0.014*	0.008	0.011**	0.005
Ag_GDP_share	0.026	0.021	0.067**	0.029	0.066***	0.023
Number_of_farms	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001
Average_farm_size	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000**	0.000
Governor_R	0.023	0.052	0.047	0.077	0.036	0.070
Senate_House_R	0.247***	0.059	0.367***	0.072	0.178***	0.050
Previous_law	−0.077	0.093	−0.231**	0.103	−0.258***	0.067
Exporter_ag_china	−0.003	0.077	−0.092	0.098	−0.168***	0.044
Exporter_others_china	−0.071	0.049	−0.054	0.079	0.061	0.098
Military_base	0.015***	0.005	0.030***	0.007	0.022***	0.007
Noncitizen_pop	−0.017	0.022	−0.049*	0.026	−0.054***	0.020
Chinese_pop	0.018	0.012	0.032*	0.016	0.018	0.015
Year FE						
2022	0.034	0.071	0.241**	0.115	0.403***	0.108
2023	0.584***	0.070	0.940***	0.094	0.394***	0.060
N	147		147		147	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% level, respectively. FE means fixed effect. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state. Year 2021 is the base group for the year FE. Raw coefficients can be found in Appendix F.

6. Policy implications and conclusion

Foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land have raised concerns regarding American farmers' livelihood as well as the food and national security of the country. In response, state legislative actions seeking to restrict foreign interest in agricultural land within the state have gained momentum in recent years. In 2023, about 34 states proposed relevant bills, and more than 10 states enacted restrictive bills into law. Interestingly, foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land remain a fraction, and so far, there has not been clear evidence of their negative impacts. In the meantime, potential benefits associated with foreign investment can be forgone due to these restrictive bills and laws. For example, the Ohio governor's veto message towards H.B. 33 states that prohibiting foreign ownership of non-agricultural real property is against public interest. It is apparent that underlying these restrictive state bills and laws exist conflicting interests and considerations beyond protecting state agricultural land from further foreign acquisition. So, what are the factors driving these state legislations restricting foreign investment in agricultural land or property in general?

This study investigates the factors influencing restrictive state legislative actions. The findings on legislators' behavior indicate that while legislator and legislative district characteristics contribute to understanding their actions, these factors play a relatively modest role in explaining legislative decision-making. While membership of the agricultural committee in the state legislature prompts legislators to propose a restrictive bill, the only strong predictor for both bill-proposing and voting behavior is the legislator's political ideology. Specifically, legislators affiliated with the Republican party demonstrate a higher likelihood of proposing and voting to pass bills that restrict foreign investment in agricultural land and property. Potential reasons of this include the association between the populist right's ideology and higher skepticism towards economic fairness and preference for more stringent immigration policies (Pew Research Center, 2021), as well as the "America First" movement and increased hostility towards China during Trump's presidency from 2017 to 2020 (O'Brien, 2020).

To gain additional insights into the impacts of state agricultural characteristics and factors related to the economic and political engagement with China, we conduct further analysis at the state level. The consistently significant effects of the foreign-held cropland, agriculture GDP share, and military installations suggest that the motivation of the state legislative actions is to protect state agricultural assets and to respond to national security concerns raised by the China-related incidents in recent years. Notably, when a bill is proposed but its outcome remains uncertain, states face a critical policy dilemma: whether to prioritize protecting agricultural land from Chinese ownership or to foster favorable relations with China to sustain agricultural exports.

The state-level bill passage analysis may be subject to self-selection due to the non-random nature of bill proposals, and results should be interpreted with this potential limitation in mind. Addressing self-selection in this case remains challenging. Future research in this area could further enhance our understanding of state-level policy adoption dynamics. In addition, state bills and laws can vary widely, and some predictors can have a stronger effect on the proposals and passes of state legislations with certain characteristics. For example, Chinese ownership could be a more powerful predictor of legislative actions that seek to restrict interests specifically from foreign adversaries. While our study simplifies this variation by analyzing binary outcomes, future studies can explore this in more detail by conducting formal content analysis, and categorize these bills based on their unique characteristics.

Another direction for future research points to exploring the effect of campaign contributions on legislators' behavior. Previous studies on Congress roll call votes have suggested that legislators' votes are affected by campaign contribution (Grier et al., 2023; Roscoe & Jenkins, 2005), but such data is not currently available for all state-level legislatures. Moreover, increased public awareness on foreign landholding issues could also affect state legislative actions (Hopkins et al., 2022). Although our analysis is limited to capturing national trends due to data availability constraints, future research could construct data that captures public awareness specific to each state.

Finally, some caveats relate to the accuracy and completeness of the USDA AFIDA data (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2024). The AFIDA data are collected based on a self-report system, but the lack of reporting enforcement poses a challenge to capturing all transactions (Greene, 2023; Ortega, 2023). In addition, data entries might not be up to date given the staffing shortage in prior years in USDA (USDA, 2023), and manual errors have been reported in the paper-based data collection system (GAO, 2024). Lastly, in part due to

incomplete filing or no predominant country being listed as responsible for the transactions, some of the documented foreign-held agricultural land do not have the country of holdings identified,[23] so the number of foreign-held acres by each country in the AFIDA data should be treated as a lower bound (USDA, 2023). Despite the noted concerns, this study utilizes the AFIDA dataset, as it remains the primary and most comprehensive source of information on foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land.

This study sheds light on factors predicting restrictive state legislative actions on foreign holdings of U.S. agricultural land. Our study period covers 2021 to 2023, and legislative interests are expected to extend in the future. In 2024, several states have filed new bills that aim to impose new or further restrictions on foreign holdings of agricultural land within the state, and a couple of these bills continue to target certain foreign countries like China (e.g. H.B. 1183, Indiana, 2024; H.B. 1231, South Dakota, 2024; H.B. 1995, Pennsylvania, 2024). In addition to the possibility of creating barriers for foreign farmers that immigrate to the U.S. or depriving immigrants' residential rights, some of these bills could lead to unintended economic consequences on the broader U.S. agri-food system given that China remains one of the U.S.'s top trading partners (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Therefore, while it is crucial to secure a valuable and finite resource like agricultural land, it is also important to carefully evaluate the impact of certain legislative actions to strike a balance between national security and economic interests.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Lin Lin: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **David L. Ortega:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Bills in the legislator-level analysis that are introduced but not passed

No.	Year	State	Bill	No.	Year	State	Bill	No.	Year	State	Bill
1	2021	AR	S.B. 312	44	2023	KS	H.B. 2397	87	2023	NJ	A.B. 5383
2	2021	MO	H.B. 1136	45	2023	KS	S.B. 100	88	2023	NJ	S.B. 3666
3	2021	MO	H.B. 1296	46	2023	KS	S.B. 283	89	2023	NJ	S.B. 3534
4	2021	MO	H.B. 506	47	2023	KY	H.B. 500	90	2023	NY	A.B. 5301
5	2021	MO	S.B. 243	48	2023	LA	S.B. 91	91	2023	NY	A.B. 6410
6	2021	OK	H.B. 1497	49	2023	MD	H.B. 842	92	2023	NY	A.B. 6444
7	2021	TN	H.B. 1451	50	2023	MD	H.B. 968	93	2023	NY	S.B. 6522
8	2021	TN	S.B. 1070	51	2023	MI	H.B. 4134	94	2023	NY	S.B. 6583
9	2021	TX	H.B. 303	52	2023	MI	H.B. 4283	95	2023	OH	H.B. 212
10	2021	TX	H.B. 305	53	2023	MI	H.B.4329	96	2023	SC	H.B. 3118
11	2021	TX	H.B. 58	54	2023	MI	H.B. 4881	97	2023	SC	H.B. 3566
12	2021	TX	H.B. 69	55	2023	MI	H.B. 5050	98	2023	SC	S.B. 576
13	2022	AL	S.B. 14	56	2023	MI	S.B. 260	99	2023	SD	H.B. 1069
14	2022	AZ	S.B. 1342	57	2023	MI	S.B. 270	100	2023	SD	S.B. 185
15	2022	IA	H.F. 2311	58	2023	MO	H.B. 1004	101	2023	TN	S.B. 122
16	2022	IA	H.F. 2467	59	2023	MO	H.B. 1033	102	2023	TX	H.B. 1075
17	2022	MO	H.B. 1947	60	2023	MO	H.B. 430	103	2023	TX	H.B. 124
18	2022	MO	S.B. 791	61	2023	MO	H.B. 465	104	2023	TX	H.B. 2788
19	2022	SC	H.B. 4845	62	2023	MO	H.B. 499	105	2023	TX	H.B. 3470
20	2023	AR	H.B. 1255	63	2023	MO	H.B. 707	106	2023	TX	H.B. 4006
21	2023	AR	H.B.1479	64	2023	MO	H.B. 832	107	2023	TX	H.B. 50
22	2023	AR	S.B. 340	65	2023	MO	H.B. 903	108	2023	TX	H.B. 93
23	2023	AZ	H.B. 2376	66	2023	MO	S.B. 144	109	2023	TX	S.B. 1441
24	2023	AZ	H.B. 2676	67	2023	MO	S.B. 332	110	2023	TX	S.B. 147
25	2023	AZ	H.B. 2761	68	2023	MO	S.B. 334	111	2023	TX	S.B. 38
26	2023	AZ	S.B. 1112	69	2023	MO	S.B. 541	112	2023	TX	S.B. 51
27	2023	AZ	S.B. 1115	70	2023	MO	S.B. 55	113	2023	TX	S.B. 552
28	2023	CA	A.B. 475	71	2023	MO	S.B. 649	114	2023	TX	S.B. 711
29	2023	CA	S.B. 224	72	2023	MO	S.B. 76	115	2023	UT	H.B. 218
30	2023	CO	H.B. 1152	73	2023	MO	S.B. 9	116	2023	WA	H.B. 1412
31	2023	FL	H.B. 1355	74	2023	MS	H.B. 1236	117	2023	WA	S.B. 5754
32	2023	FL	H.B. 835	75	2023	MS	H.B. 1275	118	2023	WI	A.B. 269
33	2023	FL	S.B. 924	76	2023	MS	H.B. 280	119	2023	WI	A.B. 349
34	2023	GA	H.B. 246	77	2023	MS	H.B. 984	120	2023	WI	S.B. 264
35	2023	GA	H.B. 452	78	2023	MS	S.B. 2089	121	2023	WI	S.B. 348
36	2023	GA	S.B. 132	79	2023	MS	S.B. 2092	122	2023	WV	H.B. 3436
37	2023	HI	H.B. 505	80	2023	MS	S.B. 2632	123	2023	WV	H.B. 3493
38	2023	HI	H.B. 929	81	2023	MS	S.B. 2828	124	2023	WV	S.B. 581

(*continued on next page*)

[23] For example, more than 3 million acres of documented foreign-held agricultural land in the 2023 AFIDA dataset do not have the country of holdings identified.

(*continued*)

No.	Year	State	Bill	No.	Year	State	Bill	No.	Year	State	Bill
39	2023	IA	H.F. 211	82	2023	MT	S.B. 256	125	2023	WY	H.B. 116
40	2023	IA	H.F. 542	83	2023	NC	H.B. 463	126	2023	WY	H.B. 88
41	2023	IL	H.B. 1267	84	2023	ND	H.B. 1356	127	2023	WY	S.F. 124
42	2023	IL	H.B. 2125	85	2023	ND	H.B. 1503				
43	2023	IL	H.B. 2930	86	2023	NJ	A.B. 5120				

Note: S.B./S.F. means Senate Bill/Senate File. H.B./H.F./A.B. means House Bill/House File/Assembly Bill. Legislations can have different terminology in different states, but the meanings are equivalent.

Appendix B. Bill success estimation

In our study, bill success is defined as an introduced bill making to a final passage vote. The purpose of estimating the probability of bill success is to address self-selection issues in the vote analysis. Our sample for this estimation includes the 143 bills that have been introduced over our study period, from 2021 to 2023.

Previous studies have suggested that factors predicting bill success include the characteristics of bills, as well as the political and legislative environment in a state (e.g., Adler & Wilkerson, 2005; Boehmer et al., 2008; Browne, 1985; Holman et al., 2022). Bill characteristics include its chamber of origin, its political party of origin, if it is a target bill or not, if it is a committee bill or not, and the percentage of sponsors that is affiliated with the majority party of the state. All bill characteristics data are collected from state legislatures' websites and the LegiScan website.

State controls include if a state legislature has a term limit, if the state governor is affiliated with the Republican party, and if the chambers have a Republican majority. Data is collected from National Conference of State Legislatures' website[24] and "State Partisan Composition" sheets. We also construct and include a dummy variable to capture the scenario where there are more than one bill restricting foreign holdings of state agricultural land proposed in the same legislature session. Summary statistics of the bill characteristics and state controls are presented in Table B1.

To estimate the probability of bill success, given the binary nature of the dependent variable, we estimate the following equation with a logit model:

$$prob(\pi_{jst}=1)=\frac{\exp(H\kappa)}{1+\exp(H\kappa)} \quad \text{where} \quad H\kappa=\kappa_0+\kappa_1 B_{jst}+\kappa_2 P_{st} \tag{B1}$$

π_{jst} takes value one if bill j in state s in year t made to a final passage vote, and zero if otherwise. B_{jst} is a set of characteristics of bill j in state s in year t, and P_{st} controls for the political environment in state s in year t. Our main interest here is how bills' characteristics affect their probability of success.

Table B2 shows the results of bill success estimation. To interpret the results as the change in probability of a bill making to a final passage vote, marginal effects are presented. Several bill characteristics are found to affect bill success. In particular, if a bill is sponsored by a Republican majority, it is more likely to succeed. Similarly, if a bill is sponsored by a committee, its rate of success also increases. On the other hand, a narrow focus of the bill content shows a negative effect. Previous studies have found that bills addressing relatively minor or uncontroversial issues are more likely to achieve success (Adler & Wilkerson, 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising that bills solely focusing on restricting foreign landholdings are too specific and controversial, decreasing their rate of success.

Table B1
Summary statistics of variables used in bill success estimation.

		Full sample	
		N = 143	
Variable	Definition	Mean	SD
Dependent variable			
Bill_success	If an introduced bill enters the final passage vote (=1)	0.11	0.32
Independent variable			
Bill characteristics			
Senate	If a bill originates from the Senate (=1)	0.38	0.49
Party_origin	If the bill spectrum is Republican partisanship (=1)	0.87	0.34
Target_bill	If the bill focuses solely on restricting foreign ownership of farmland or related issues (=1)	0.97	0.17
Committee	If a bill is sponsored by a committee (=1)	0.05	0.22
Sponsor_majority_percent	The percentage of sponsors that are affiliated with the majority party of the state (%)	71.93	42.77
State controls			
Term_limit	If there is a term limit in the state legislature (=1)	0.43	0.50
Party_gov_r	If the governor is Republican (=1)	0.68	0.47
Party_partisanship_r	If both chambers have a Republican majority (=1)	0.78	0.41
Other bills	If there are other restrictive bills proposed in the same legislative session (=1)	0.91	0.29

Note: SD means standard deviation

[24] A list of term-limited states is available on National Conference of State Legislatures' website at https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/the-term-limited-states.

Table B2
Marginal effects of bill success estimation.

	Bill success	
Variable	Marginal effect	SE
Senate	−0.023	0.036
Party_origin	0.114***	0.027
Target_bill	−0.807***	0.042
Committee	0.564***	0.052
Sponsor_majority_percent	0.019	0.014
Term_limit	0.082	0.059
Party_gov_r	−0.015	0.077
Party_partisanship_r	−0.628***	0.026
Other bills	−0.079	0.091
N	143	

Note: *** indicates statistical significance at the 1 % level. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state.

Appendix C. Marginal effects of factors predicting legislators' behavior using data from the same or closest year

	Proposal		Vote pass	
Variable	Marginal effect	SE	Marginal effect	SE
Proposal			0.066***	0.024
House	0.031	0.030	0.030	0.022
Party_R	0.133***	0.025	0.313***	0.075
Male	−0.004	0.011	0.048***	0.017
Ag_committee	0.068***	0.018	0.027	0.028
Tenure	−0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Dist_ag_worker	0.002	0.001	−0.003	0.003
Dist_race_white	0.001**	0.001	0.000	0.001
Dist_age_65	−0.001	0.002	0.005**	0.003
Dist_male	−0.002	0.003	0.009	0.006
Dist_med_hh_income	0.018	0.032	−0.018	0.045
Dist_inequality	−0.076*	0.043	−0.027	0.084
Dist_edu_bachelor	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.002
Dist_military_base	−0.012	0.009	0.003	0.010
Dist_noncitizen	0.000	0.001	0.005*	0.003
Dist_Chinese	−0.009	0.005	−0.007***	0.002
N	6,707		2,167	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1 %, 5 %, and 10 % level, respectively. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state.

Appendix D. Coefficients of factors predicting state legislative actions from separate logit models

	Bill proposal		Bill passage	
Variable	Coefficient	Robust SE	Coefficient	Robust SE
FHAL_crop	0.582*	0.328	0.827	1.037
FHAL_others	0.002	0.074	−0.085	0.212
China_to_FHAL	0.069	0.064	0.198**	0.091
Ag_GDP_share	0.273	0.218	1.411***	0.472
Number_of_farms	0.008	0.010	0.004	0.014
Average_farm_size	0.000	0.000	−0.002**	0.001
Governor_R	0.245	0.545	0.308	1.337
Senate_House_R	2.670***	0.775	4.232***	1.486
Previous_law	−0.832	1.040	−12.075***	3.710
Exporter_ag_china	−0.029	0.801	−3.624*	2.129
Exporter_others_china	−0.806	0.590	0.415	1.565
Military_base	0.154***	0.053	0.492***	0.135
Noncitizen_pop	−0.172	0.228	−1.235***	0.476
Chinese_pop	0.192	0.123	0.378	0.358
Constant	−5.989***	1.751	−4.641	2.842
Year FE				
2022	0.357	0.761		
2023	4.423***	0.967	2.752**	1.368
N	147		98	
Log pseudolikelihood	−46.14		−15.93	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1 %, 5 %, and 10 % level, respectively. FE means fixed effect. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state. Year 2021 is the base group for the year FE in the bill proposal analysis. Year 2022 is the base group for the year FE in the bill passage analysis, and year 2021 is omitted because no states have a bill passed in that year.

Appendix E. Marginal effects of factors predicting state legislative actions from separate logit models using data from the same or closest year

	Bill proposal		Bill passage	
Variable	Marginal effect	SE	Marginal effect	SE
FHAL_crop	0.042	0.027	0.089**	0.040
FHAL_others	0.001	0.008	0.000	0.008
China_to_FHAL	0.006	0.006	0.007	0.004
Ag_GDP_share	0.020	0.016	0.043***	0.015
Number_of_farms	0.001	0.001	−0.001	0.001
Average_farm_size	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Governor_R	0.021	0.054	0.066	0.066
Senate_House_R	0.252***	0.061	0.174***	0.041
Previous_law	−0.074	0.097	−0.239***	0.035
Exporter_ag_china	−0.021	0.090	0.049	0.091
Exporter_others_china	−0.076	0.050	0.011	0.075
Military_base	0.015***	0.005	0.023***	0.006
Noncitizen_pop	−0.016	0.022	−0.036*	0.019
Chinese_pop	0.015	0.011	−0.011	0.011
Year FE				
2022	0.027	0.068		
2023	0.598***	0.066	0.195***	0.055
N	147		98	

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1 %, 5 %, and 10 % level, respectively. FE means fixed effect. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state. Year 2021 is the base group for the year FE in the bill proposal analysis. Year 2022 is the base group for the year FE in the bill passage analysis, and year 2021 is omitted because no states have a bill passed in that year.

Appendix F. Coefficients of factors predicting state legislative actions from sequential logit model

	No action vs. having a bill proposed or passed		Having a bill proposed but not passed vs. having a bill proposed and passed	
Variable	Coefficient	Robust SE	Coefficient	Robust SE
FHAL_crop	0.582*	0.328	0.827	1.097
FHAL_others	0.002	0.074	−0.130	0.287
China_to_FHAL	0.069	0.064	0.265	0.170
Ag_GDP_share	0.273	0.218	1.557**	0.761
Number_of_farms	0.008	0.010	0.006	0.015
Average_farm_size	0.000	0.000	−0.002**	0.001
Governor_R	0.245	0.545	0.809	1.512
Senate_House_R	2.670***	0.775	4.921*	2.659
Previous_law	−0.832	1.040	−13.929**	5.791
Exporter_ag_china	−0.029	0.801	−5.269**	2.464
Exporter_others_china	−0.806	0.590	1.448	2.568
Military_base	0.154***	0.053	0.523**	0.237
Noncitizen_pop	−0.172	0.228	−1.282**	0.592
Chinese_pop	0.192	0.123	0.432	0.345
Constant	−5.989***	1.751	−19.317***	3.413
Year FE				
2022	0.357	0.761	17.871***	2.302
2023	4.423***	0.967	17.449***	1.684
N	147			
Log pseudolikelihood	−57.17			

Note: ***, **, * indicate statistical significance at the 1 %, 5 %, and 10 % level, respectively. SE means standard error. Standard errors are clustered by state. FE means fixed effect. Year 2021 is the base group for the year FE.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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