# Prices vs. Production Restrictions: China's Coal Industry*

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**Abstract**

Regulators often address externalities with taxes or production restrictions. We develop a criterion to rank the welfare implications of these policies that imposes minimal assumptions on the external loss function. We apply the criterion to analyze a reform of China's coal industry. Using an empirical model of inter-provincial coal demand and supply, we find that relaxing the production restrictions would increase 2017 output by about 600 million tons and reduce prices by roughly 140 RMB per ton. The resulting loss in economic surplus is largely offset by avoided environmental damages. Our criterion shows that a tax could achieve a higher social welfare.

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# 1 Introduction

Regulators often use price and quantity-based policies to mitigate externalities. Urban planners use non-tradable rationing schemes—such as license-plate driving restrictions—and congestion pricing to ease road demand (Weitzman, 1977; Glaeser and Luttmer, 2003). In the financial sector, macroprudential policies use capital requirements and Pigouvian taxes on leverage to manage systemic risk (Hanson et al., 2011; Stein, 2012). In environmental regulations, governments use pollution taxes and a variety of quantity instruments, such as quotas and moratoria, to reduce external losses from pollution that are not internalized by the market.

The shape of the external loss function is critical for these policy choices (Weitzman, 1974). However, pinning down its parameters can be difficult. First, policymakers may face significant uncertainty over the future of the market and the true scale of externalities. For example, estimates of the Social Cost of Carbon fluctuate by orders of magnitude depending on discount rates and tipping point assumptions (Pindyck, 2013). Second, researchers conducting ex-post evaluations rarely observe the specific objective function that guided the initial policy design, making it hard to infer whether the chosen policy was optimal.

We propose a sufficient condition to compare policy instruments. Our criterion requires estimates of economic surplus under these policies and assumes that the external loss is monotonic in a scalar equilibrium outcome; it does not require knowing the convexity of the loss function. Consider, for instance, a loss function strictly increasing in the aggregate quantity, which may reflect emission damages. A policymaker decides between shutting down factories and imposing a pollution tax to maximize the social welfare function, which is the economic surplus minus the external loss. In this case, if a tax can deliver the same expected economic surplus as the shutdown, but the distribution of quantity under the tax is stochastically dominated, then we show that the tax would reduce the expected external losses and raise social welfare.

We apply this criterion to China's coal industry. Policy choices in this setting are consequential. As the world's largest producer and consumer of coal, China faces acute tensions between energy security, environmental consequences and economic stability. It has been widely reported that the reliance on coal undermines China's energy transition and global efforts to mitigate climate change (McGrath, 2019; WSJ, 2022; Bloomberg, 2022). A number of papers have documented the severe air-quality and health consequences associated with coal (Almond et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2013; Ebenstein et al., 2017). At the same time, coal mining provides significant employment opportunities and local government revenues, especially in major producing provinces dominated by state-owned enterprises (Wright, 2012;

Hervé-Mignucci et al., 2015). Policies affecting coal output therefore have large economic and distributional consequences (Clark and Zhang, 2022; Yuan et al., 2025).

We focus on a major reform of this industry launched in 2016. As part of a multi-year effort to reduce coal consumption and pollution while preserving employment and profitability of the industry, the Chinese government in April 2016 ordered small mines to close and large mines to cut output. As provinces implemented these measures, coal prices surged: our data show that the average coal price in the second half of 2016 rose by 34.6% to 503 RMB/ton, from 373 RMB/ton in the same period of 2015. The government continued to close mines and strictly monitor production to reduce production above approved capacity at least through 2018.

These policies are not unique to China. Economists have long advocated for market-based price or quantity instruments, such as Pigouvian taxes (Pigou, 1920; Baumol, 1972) or cap-and-trade systems (Crocker, 1966; Dales, 1968; Montgomery, 1972), to internalize externalities efficiently. Although resource taxation is common, sophisticated cap-and-trade markets are often infeasible due to high transaction costs (Nie, 2012) or weak institutional capacity (Bell and Russell, 2002; Blackman and Harrington, 2000), especially in developing countries. In these cases, the practical policy choice is between a tax and a command-and-control restriction on production, such as factory shutdowns or moratoria on resource extraction (Blackman et al., 2018). An important part of China's coal industry reform is such a production restriction policy.

To evaluate the reform, we combine the policy intervention with a comprehensive dataset on coal production and consumption to analyze the demand and supply of the coal market. Our main data include monthly prices at the province level and shipment quantities from producers to end users both within and across provinces. We validate the shipment data with the production and consumption data reported by other sources.

We next formulate a model that incorporates key institutional features of China's massive and partially regulated coal market. First, coal procurement in the electricity and other sectors have undergone significant market reforms since 2013, essentially allowing the market to set prices that equilibrate demand with supply. Second, the shares of coal shipped from one province to another are highly stable over time, despite varying price dispersions across provinces. Third, large coal producers and buyers often operate under long-term quantity contracts. These contracts at the time often promised a delivery quantity but allowed prices to adjust based on spot market prices. In our model, the market is competitive. We specify a demand function and a supply function for each province. The local price in each province is determined by the province's demand and the total supply from different provinces. The quantity supplied by a province $i$ is determined by a weighted average of prices in provinces

$i$ sells to. The effects of the policy are modeled as province-specific shifts of the supply functions.

We estimate the demand and supply of coal across provinces. To identify demand, we construct price instruments using variations in the policy start dates and policy compliance levels across provinces that shift supply. The key identifying assumption is that the policy exclusively affects supply and is therefore not correlated with the demand unobservables. We also consider a variety of alternative instruments. Similarly, we estimate supply using demand shifters. Our estimates suggest that the policy significantly increases aggregate marginal costs.

Given the estimated equilibrium model of coal demand and supply, we conduct a series of counterfactual simulations to quantify the efficiencies of reducing supply. The first exercise quantifies the effects of the policy, holding capacity fixed. Our estimates show that the policy imposes constraints on supply, especially in the largest coal-producing provinces. Holding mining capacity fixed as in 2017, relieving these constraints would increase annual production by about 600 million tons and decrease the price by about 140 RMB. Using reasonable estimates on coal's environmental impact, we find that the loss of economic surplus is largely offset by the saved environmental costs.

Second, we compare the policy with an efficient quota or a cap-and-trade system. Our supply estimates suggest that the policy increases the aggregate marginal costs, especially near the approved capacity. We also find that larger, lower-cost provinces see greater cost increases. These findings suggest inefficient reductions of quantities both within- and cross-province. Holding fixed the quantity produced by each province, an alternative, efficient quota system would increase producer surplus by up to 315 billion RMB. Efficiently allocating quantity reductions across provinces would increase the producer surplus by up to 367 billion RMB.

Finally, we consider whether a tax can increase the expected social welfare. If the external loss function is linear in quantity, the optimal policy is a Pigouvian tax. However, the loss function may be nonlinear for additional factors, such as expediting energy transition and reducing coal mining accidents. To use our criterion, we assume that the loss function is a bounded increasing function of total quantity, and we do not require knowing the exact form of the loss function to rank policy instruments. We establish two main results. First, when the government places equal weights on each component of the economic surplus, which includes consumer surplus, producer surplus and tax revenues, there exists a tax that would reduce the expected economic surplus by the same amount as the observed policy but has a smaller expected external loss. Therefore, a tax would be more efficient. Second, such a tax continues to exist when the government places a higher weight on the producer surplus,

until the government weighs the gain in producer surplus at least more than 1.35 times the loss of consumer surplus.

## Related Literature and Contribution

In this paper, we present a novel criterion to rank policy instruments regulating externalities. A sizable theoretical literature builds on the insights of Weitzman (1974), where relative slopes of marginal benefits and costs are key determinants of the optimal policy.[1] A number of papers use integrated assessment models (Pizer (2002); Muller and Mendelsohn (2009)) or calibrated theoretical models (Newell and Pizer (2003); Fell et al. (2012)) to quantitatively assess the tradeoff between a price (tax) and a quantity (cap) instrument. We use our criterion to evaluate the effects of coal industry reforms in China under mild assumptions on the external loss function. Importantly, we do not require estimating the convexity of the external loss function, which is central to the criterion in Weitzman (1974).

Our paper is also related to the empirical literature on measuring the economic effects of environmental regulations.[2] A number of papers focus on productivity impacts (for example, Jaffe et al. (1995); Berman and Bui (2001); Greenstone (2002); Greenstone et al. (2012); He et al. (2020)). Using estimated equilibrium models, Ryan (2012) and Fowlie et al. (2016) emphasize the roles of market power, and Chen et al. (2025) studies how conglomerates reallocate internal production. In this paper, we develop and estimate a new competitive equilibrium market for China's coal sector.

We also note that there have been few equilibrium analyses of China's coal industry in economics despite its enormous importance to China's economy and the global environment. One reason might be the lack of granular and recent data.[3] For example, Zhou et al. (2019) studies the evolution of coal mining firms' productivity, and Zheng (2024) studies the effects of buyer market power on productivity and safety, both using a production function approach based on manufacturing census data from before 2007. In our paper, we combine a detailed data set, the institutional knowledge of the market and the supply reduction policy to address the endogeneity problems in the estimation of coal demand and supply in our equilibrium

[1] For a review, see, for example, Hepburn (2006), Weitzman (2020) and Stavins and Wagner (2022).

[2] More broadly, we note that there is a growing literature on the empirical evaluation of industrial policy (Kline and Moretti, 2014; Aghion et al., 2015; Alder et al., 2016; Juhász, 2018; Kalouptsidi, 2018; Lane, 2018; Miravete et al., 2018; Lashkaripour and Lugovskyy, 2018; Criscuolo et al., 2019; Rotemberg, 2019; Barwick et al., 2019; Giorcelli, 2019; Yi et al., 2019; Hanlon, 2020; Bai et al., 2020; Fan and Zou, 2021; Giorcelli and Li, 2021; Guo and Xiao, 2022; Aldy et al., 2022).

[3] Existing studies that estimate or calibrate the coal demand or supply typically use aggregate annual data (see, for example, (Burke and Liao, 2015; Shi et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2019)). A number of papers have studied the coal-mining industry in other countries, with a focus on safety and productivity (Sider, 1983; Gowrisankaran et al., 2015), technology adoption (Rubens, 2022), labor market competition (Delabastita and Rubens, 2022; Demirer and Rubens, 2025), and the decline of the US coal industry (Watson et al., 2023).

model. Our estimates of demand and supply elasticities may be of independent interest for other researchers studying China's coal industry.

In the rest of the paper, we first describe a general model and the ranking criterion in Section 2. We then illustrate the applicability of the criterion using a simple model. In the empirical application, we first describe the main institutional features of China's coal market in Section 3. Section 4 lists the various datasets used in the analysis. Sections 5 and 6 present the demand and supply models and their estimation. We analyze the policy and apply the ranking tests in Section 7. Section 8 concludes.

# 2 Conceptual Framework

## 2.1 General Model

We use a vector of random variables $\omega$ to denote the state of the economy, which could represent shocks to demand, supply or external losses. The total private benefit is denoted by a function $U(e, \omega)$, where $e$ is a vector of actions that could represent output, quality or, in the context of digital markets, the data protection efforts. We use $C(e, \omega)$ to represent the private costs of production. The policymaker can choose a price-based policy instrument, $T(e)$, or a production restriction, which increases the private production cost to $G(C) \geq C$. For simplicity, we assume that the actions are continuous,[4] and the equilibrium action $e^\star$ solves a first order condition

$$\nabla U - G' \nabla C - \nabla T + \Psi = 0, \tag{1}$$

where $\Psi$ represents potential strategic interactions, and $\Psi = 0$ in a perfectly competitive market. The planner must choose a policy before the uncertainty $\omega$ is realized. The expected social welfare is

$$E_\omega \left( U(e^\star, \omega) - G(C(e^\star, \omega)) - \mathbb{L}(e^\star, \omega) \right), \tag{2}$$

where $e^\star$ is the unique equilibrium outcome[5] and $\mathbb{L}(e, \omega)$ is the external loss function. Comparing the objective function in (2) with the first order conditions shows that optimality of a policy is often an empirical issue, which depends on the distribution of the unobservables and the shape of the loss function. This formulation encompasses a variety of applications.

**Example 1.** Quota and taxes on emissions of power plants in a static competitive market (Muller and Mendelsohn, 2009). The actions in $e$ represent the emissions by different power

[4] We can further incorporate discrete actions that can be represented as maximands of private returns.

[5] If the equilibrium is not unique, we assume that an equilibrium choice function exists that chooses one.

plants, $U$ is the aggregate power plant profits, $C$ is the cost at given emission levels, $\mathbb{L}$ is the aggregate emission damages proportional to $\sum e$, and $\Psi = 0$. If the regulator correctly sets a quota level and quotas are efficiently allocated across firms, $G(C)$ represents the aggregate supply curve up to the quota and then turns $\infty$. If the regulator uses a tax at rate $t$, then $T = t\sum e$.

**Example 2.** Dynamic oligopoly with emissions (Fowlie et al., 2016). The action $e$ represents static production and dynamic investment decisions of cement producers,[6] $U$ represents the present discounted values of present and future operating revenues, and $C$ represents the present values of production and investment costs. The loss function accounts for the present values of emission costs of both domestic and foreign producers. The function $G$ can represent a variety of production restrictions such as grandfathering, output-based quotas and cap-and-trade.[7] The function $T$ represents taxes on present and future emissions. The term $\Psi$ accounts for the wedge due to the oligopolistic competition in both production and investment.

**Example 3.** Data production and privacy concerns. The term $U$ represents the firm value of data production, $e$ represents the usage of variety of inputs (such as internet users' private data and the amount of compute), $C$ is the cost of production, and $G$ reflects regulations like GDPR increasing the costs (Demirer et al., 2024). The loss in privacy can be quantified as in, for example, Acemoglu et al. (2022), that increases in the use of private data.

## 2.2 Ranking Criterion

The ranking criterion addresses an empirical question: given an existing policy, is there an alternative policy that can improve the welfare outcomes for any "reasonable" loss function? Specifically, given an observed $(G, T)$, is it possible to find an alternative $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$ that can potentially improve the welfare in (2) for any $\mathbb{L}$ in some set $\mathcal{L}$? We make the following assumptions on $\mathcal{L}$:

**Assumption 1.**

1. *The loss function $\mathbb{L}(e, \omega) = L(H(e), \tilde{\omega})$, where $H$ is a scalar function, and $\tilde{\omega}$ is a subvector of $\omega$. Furthermore, $\tilde{\omega}$ is independent of $H(e^\star(\omega))$.*

2. *The distribution of $H$ has a finite support $\left[0, \overline{H}\right]$ under any policy instrument.*

[6] We can augment the equilibrium first order conditions in (1) with equations representing optimal choice probabilities to allow for discrete decisions such as entry or exit.

[7] We can also augment our model to allow for demand-side policies such as import taxes to affect $U$.

3. *The loss function $L$ is differentiable, monotonic and finite over $H \in \left[0, \overline{H}\right]$, and the direction of monotonicity is the same for any $\tilde{\omega}$.*

The first assumption restricts the external loss to be a function of an aggregate quantity $H$. For example, when $e$ represents production choices, $H$ could represent a weighted sum of productions, where weights reflect different damages of actions. We also require that demand and supply shocks affect the loss only through $H$. For example, uncertainty about the Social Cost of Carbon does not depend on quantities demanded or supplied. Importantly, we require the loss to be a monotonic function but do not make any assumptions on the convexity of the loss in the argument $H$.

The following property of stochastic dominance provides the conditions to rank the losses under different instruments:

**Theorem 1.** *Given random variables $H_1$ and $H_2$ and a loss function $L$ that satisfy Assumption 1, if $H_1$ stochastically dominates $H_2$, then $E\left(L\left(H_1, \tilde{\omega}\right)\right) > E\left(L\left(H_2, \tilde{\omega}\right)\right)$ if $L$ is increasing in $H$, and the inequality is reversed if $L$ decreases in $H$.*

We provide a proof based on integration by parts in the appendix.[8] Using this theorem, we can now describe the procedure to check whether an observed policy $(G, T)$ is optimal.

1. Given $U, C, G, T$ (from, for example, an empirically estimated model given existing policies $G$ and $T$) and the direction of monotonicity of $L$ (from the institutional knowledge, e.g., whether $H$ is a good or a bad), compute the corresponding expected economic surplus $S = E_\omega\left(U\left(e^\star, \omega\right) - G\left(C\left(e^\star, \omega\right)\right)\right)$.

2. Find a new policy $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$ that produces the same economic surplus $\tilde{S} = S$ in the new equilibrium (which can be computed from the estimated model).

3. If the distribution of the equilibrium quantity $H$ under $(G, T)$ is stochastically dominated by (stochastically dominates) that under $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$, and $L$ is increasing (decreasing) in $H$, then by Theorem 1, the expected loss is lower under $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$ and the total welfare in (2) must be higher given the same economic surplus.

We call $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$ an SND (**s**urplus-**n**eutral tax with a **d**ominated/**d**ominating $H$ distribution) policy for $(G, T)$. We note that because stochastic dominance is a sufficient condition to establish a ranking, finding an SND policy shows that $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$ can achieve a higher social welfare than $(G, T)$, but the failure to do so does not prove that $(G, T)$ is the optimal policy.

More generally, the procedure can be adapted to compare any two given policies. For policies $(G, T)$ and $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$, if $S \leq \tilde{S}$ and $H$'s distribution is stochastically dominated by

[8] The result is a variant of, for example, Theorem 1.A.8 in Shaked and Shanthikumar (1994).

(stochastically dominates) that under $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$, and $L$ is increasing (decreasing) in $H$, then $\left(\tilde{G}, \tilde{T}\right)$ achieves a higher expected social surplus than $(G, T)$.

The existence of SND policies can be surprising in some contexts. For example, Weitzman (1974)'s criterion for using a tax or a quota depends on the slopes of the demand, supply and the loss function. We discuss the (non-)existence of the SND policy in an illustrative example in the next section.

## 2.3 An Illustrative Model

Using an illustrative model below, we show that (1) the optimal policy choice between a tax and a production restriction is theoretically ambiguous, and (2) an SND tax exists for some production restrictions.

Consider a linear inverse supply function $P^S = a_0 + a_1 Q$, demand $P^D = b_0 + b_1 Q + \varepsilon$, and an external marginal loss function (such as an environmental cost not internalized by the market) $MD = r_0 + r_1 Q$, where $a_1 > 0, b_1 < 0, r_1 > 0$. In this case, the loss function $L$ is a quadratic function in $Q$. The shock $\varepsilon$ has a mean-zero distribution with a variance of $\sigma^2$.

A policymaker can choose a unit tax or restrict production before knowing the value of the shock. When choosing the tax rate $\tau$, the policymaker maximizes (2), which can be written as

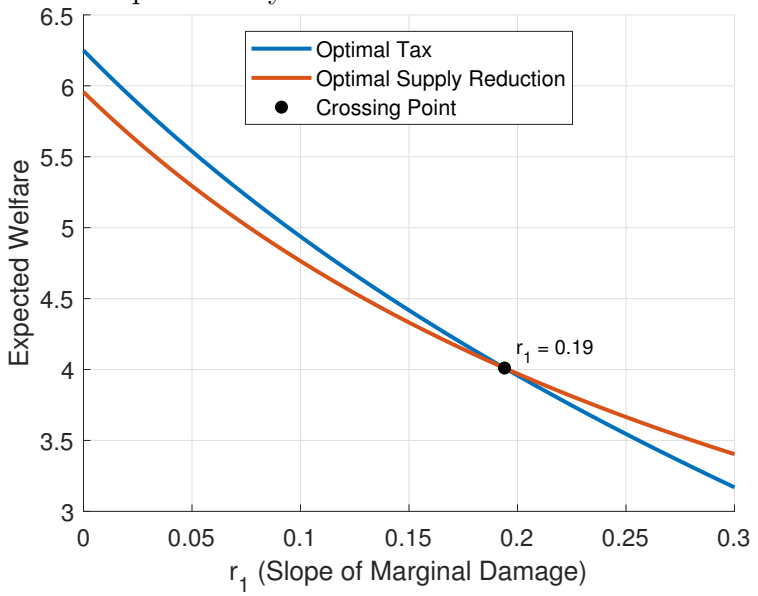
$$W = E\left(\int_0^{\max(Q^\star, 0)} \left(P_D\left(q\right) - P_S\left(q\right) - MD\left(q\right)\right) dq\right), \tag{3}$$

where the equilibrium quantity is given by $Q^\star = \max\left(0, \dfrac{b_0 + \varepsilon - a_0 - \tau}{a_1 - b_1}\right)$, and the expectation is taken over $\varepsilon$. If the policymaker instead wishes to directly restrict production, it enacts policies that shift the supply function leftward. For simplicity, we assume that the policymaker chooses $\alpha_1 > a_1$ that shifts the supply curve to $P^S = a_0 + \alpha_1 Q$ to maximize (3).

### 2.3.1 Optimality of Policy Instruments

We first show that the optimal instrument choice is theoretically ambiguous. The key intuition from Weitzman (1974) is that, when the external marginal loss increases sufficiently quickly in quantity, it is more efficient to regulate quantity directly as opposed to controlling it indirectly through price instruments like a tax. We illustrate this intuition in Figure 1 by plotting $W$ under the optimal tax and supply reduction policies at different values of $r_1$, the slope of the external marginal loss. When $r_1 = 0$, the best tax is the Pigouvian tax and it outperforms any supply reduction policy. As the external damage becomes more convex,

Figure 1: Compare Policy Instruments in an Illustrative Example




Note: we assume $b_0 = 5, b_1 = 0.2, a_0 = 1, a_1 = 0.2, r_0 = 2$ and $\sigma^2 = 1$. Notably, the expected surplus function does not depend on the distribution of $\varepsilon$ up to $\sigma^2$. We assume that the equilibrium quantity is strictly positive on the support of $\varepsilon$ under either instrument.

the best supply reduction is better than any tax in this example.[9]

### 2.3.2 Applying the Criterion to Rank a Production Restriction and a Tax

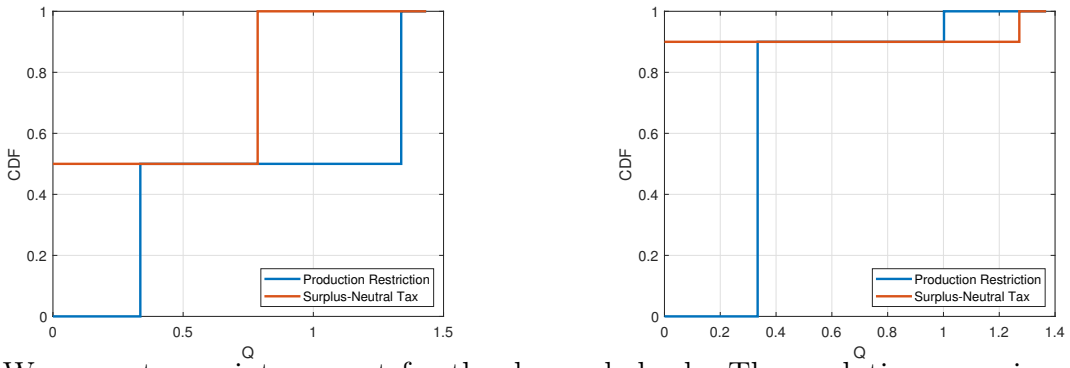
We now show that there exist demand and supply functions where, for a given production restriction policy, our criterion can identify a tax that achieves a higher social welfare. For simplicity, we assume $\varepsilon$ has a discrete distribution with two support points. In panel (a) of Figure 2, the "low" and "high" demand states occur with equal probability (0.5), and we find an SND tax that delivers the same expected economic surplus as a production restriction, but the quantity CDF under the tax is strictly dominated. In panel (b), the demand states are more left-skewed, where the low state occurs with probability 0.9, and the magnitude of the high state is also reduced. Given the same production restriction, we find a higher quantity under a surplus-neutral tax in the high demand state. Consequently, the quantity CDFs cross.

The key reason for the existence of an SND tax is the tax's better allocative efficiency. At the same level of output, a tax generates more economic surplus than the production restriction, which has a steeper supply. Therefore, we typically expect quantity to be lower

[9]We assume that the equilibrium quantity is strictly positive on the support of $\varepsilon$ under either instrument. As the loss function becomes even more convex, a larger tax can shut down production over some support of $\varepsilon$, and the welfare ranking becomes less monotonic.

Figure 2: Quantity Distributions Under Production Restriction and Tax

(a) SND Tax (b) Surplus-Neutral Tax




Note: We use a two-point support for the demand shock. The analytic expressions of the surplus and quantity CDFs depend on the intercept difference, $\varepsilon + b_0 - a_0$, the slope difference $a_1 - b_1$, and how much the supply reduction changes the slope. In panel (a), $\varepsilon + b_0 - a_0$ takes on values of 0.5 and 2 with equal probability, $a_1 - b_1 = 0.5$, the supply reduction policy increases $a_1$ to $\alpha_1 = a_1 + 1$. The SND tax is 1.61. In panel (b), the support of the random demand intercept is $\{0.5, 1.5\}$, and the probability of 0.5 is 0.9. The surplus-neutral tax is 0.87. In both cases, we assume the production is 0 if the tax exceeds $\varepsilon + b_0 - a_0$. The surplus matching taxes in both cases shut down production at the low demand states.

under a surplus-neutral tax.

The non-existence of an SND tax in this example arises when demand shocks are sufficiently left-skewed. Given low-demand shocks, the equilibrium output may be lower under the tax than under a production restriction policy. To see this, consider the extreme case where $\varepsilon < \tau + a_0 - b_0$, and the tax $\tau$ shuts down the production completely. In contrast, production restrictions that rotate supply inward do not lead to complete shutdown. If low-demand states are frequent, a tax can generate significantly less surplus than production restrictions in the left tail of the demand shock distribution. To match the total expected surplus, the tax must therefore permit higher quantities in high-demand states, violating the requirement for stochastic dominance.

**Relationship to Optimal Policy Instruments in Section 2.3.1** Section 2.3.1 shows that an optimal production restriction can achieve a higher social welfare $W$ than the optimal tax if the external loss function is sufficiently convex. However, our SND ranking criterion serves a different purpose: it aims to find a tax that achieves a higher $W$ than a given quantity policy, as opposed to the best quantity policy. If there exists a loss function where the policy coincides with a production restriction that beats the best tax (for example, the policy corresponding with the orange line to the right of the crossing point in Figure 1), our criterion yields a null result—no SND tax exists. In contrast, the criterion is useful for

detecting poorly designed quantity policies.

**Efficient Quota** Instead of a shifted supply, production restrictions can take the form of quota. The supply function under an efficient quota remains unchanged up to the quota level $\overline{Q}$, and then jumps to $\infty$. We find that there is no SND tax for a quota. To see this, note that the economic surplus in (3) is the same for both a quota and a tax given the same equilibrium quantity, which is the area between the demand and supply curves from 0 up to this quantity. Therefore, if the equilibrium quantity is always lower under tax for any $\varepsilon$, the corresponding surplus, an increasing function in quantity, must also be lower. As a result, such a tax would always have a lower expected economic surplus, making surplus-matching impossible. For the same reason, an SND quota for a tax does not exist either. Therefore, for environmental applications, our criterion is better suited to evaluating policies that inefficiently reduce quantities (compared to a quota).

# 3 Empirical Background

## 3.1 Coal Types, Quality and Mining Technology in China[10]

Over 70% of China's coal production are bituminous coal, and 23% are anthracite.[11] High-purity bituminous coal and about half of anthracite are used for coking, which in turn produces coke for steel making. The rest of these two types of coal are mainly used by power plants for electricity production. The main uses of lower-purity coal are for construction (cement making) and heating.

Coal purity and extraction methods vary significantly across regions. Shanxi and Inner Mongolia have the largest reserves and are the largest coal-producing provinces, accounting for over a quarter of national output.[12] Shanxi also produces the highest-quality coal, with an average heat content (defined as the total energy produced per kilogram after complete combustion) of about 6,242 kcal/kg, compared to the national average of 5,350 kcal/kg and the US average of 5,600 kcal/kg. Over 90% of mines in China are pithead mines, where coal is extracted from deep underground. The average mine depth is 456 meters. This extraction method is more costly than open-pit mining more commonly found in other major coal-producing countries, such as Australia, India, and US.

[10] This section is based on Aden, Fridley and Zheng (2009) and National Energy Report (2020).

[11] Coals are usually classified by the carbon content (by weight). The carbon content is over 86% for anthracite and between 45% to 86% for bituminous coal. The remaining coal falls into the categories with lower carbon content, such as subbituminous, lignite and brown coal (American Geosciences Institute, n.d.).

[12] Appendix Figure H.1 shows the distribution of coal reserves.

## 3.2 The Formation of the Coal Market

Historically, the Chinese government exercised tight control over both the supply and demand of coal through planned prices and quantities. The government partially liberalized the market in 1993 by allowing coal to be traded while maintaining special contracts that gave the large state-owned power plants the option to buy coal from mines at planned quantities and prices (Yang et al., 2018). The special contract prices were typically lower than the prevailing market prices. When contracted coal was insufficient to meet electricity demand, power plants turned to the spot market to purchase additional coal. The government further liberalized the market in a series of reforms, and fully abolished the special contracts in 2013 (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2013). These reforms also changed the procurement, operation, and investment decisions of power plants, which then started to respond to fluctuating coal prices in a manner more consistent with profit-maximizing firms (Xu and Chen, 2006; Ma, 2011; Liu et al., 2013; Zhao and Ma, 2013; Gao and Van Biesebroeck, 2014; Eisenberg, 2019, 2024).

### 3.2.1 Method of Sales

**Delivery Contracts** During our sample period, coal buyers and producers trade via both long-term (annual or multi-year) contracts and the spot market. Major buyers include coal power plants, municipal central heating systems,[13] construction firms, steel makers, and fertilizer manufacturers. A long-term contract is signed directly between a coal producer and an end user (not a trading intermediary). Provincial governments are often involved to help firms find their matches, especially in large coal producing provinces, which bear political responsibility to ensure coal supply to other provinces' power plants and heating systems (NDRC, 2021b). These contracts would nominally promise an annual delivery quantity but allow prices to adjust at a quarterly or even monthly basis, based on the spot market prices (e.g., Shanghai Securities News, 2014, 2015; ICBC, 2016). As a result, actual delivered quantities may deviate from the contractual terms (International Energy Network, 2016a).

**Monthly Price Discovery** A standard practice is for long-term contract buyers and sellers to use public monthly price indices to formulate a price. The most commonly used indices during and after our study periods are average transaction prices (net of transportation costs) of coal sold to power plants in different regions (NDRC, 2016c, 2017a). Specifically, buyers

[13] Across northern China, most residential apartments, government facilities, and schools receive heating through municipal centralized systems that primarily burn coal to generate heat. This infrastructure consists of large coal-fired boilers that heat water, which is then distributed through an extensive network of insulated pipes to various buildings (Chen et al., 2013).

and sellers update their contract prices based on the signing prices (which may depend on coal quality in addition to projected supply and demand) and the average delivery prices in the past month published by coal trade associations and port authorities, which may include trades based on the contracts and in the spot market.[14]

**Contract Compliance** While we do not have data on contract compliance, the government has long-standing policies that penalize under-fulfillment of the long-term contracts (NDRC, 2016b). For example, in 2017, power plants that failed to buy at least 75% of their committed volume (by weight) in the signed contracts faced restrictions on their electricity sales (Gao, 2017). In more recent years, long-term contracts have been the main component of coal trades, consistently accounting for more than 75% coal for electricity (Zhou et al., 2024). The government also prioritizes allocating rail transportation for coal sold via long-term contracts.[15] Finally, we note that power plants are usually optimized to burn coal of a specific grade and thus have incentives to procure from consistent sources. Plants that source from multiple mines may need to use a coal blending technique to maintain efficiency, which can increase operational costs (Sloss, 2014; Zhao, 2021).

## 3.3 Economic Policies

### 3.3.1 Coal Supply Reform

In the five-year plan published by National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC, China's macroeconomy management agency) in 2016, the Chinese government outlined a plethora of goals and plans to restructure the coal-mining industry. Specifically, the government explicitly called for improving the industry's profitability, limiting coal production, and reducing the industry's environmental impact.[16] Based on this plan, the State Council, China's chief administrative body, issued orders in February 2016 to limit the number of working days for coal mines from 330 to 276 days. The order also called for the closure of

[14] International Energy Network (2016b) provides an example on how to reset the monthly price using the average coal prices sold to power plants (BSPI) and the average price of coal for other uses (OPI) around the gulf of Bo Hai, both published by Qinhuangdao Ocean Shipping Coal Trading Market Co. Given the contract price $p$, the indices $p_t^{\text{BSPI}}$ and $p_t^{\text{OPI}}$ in month $t$, and the heat content of coal $h$ measured in kcal/kg, the new price in month $t+1$ is adjusted to $0.5p + \left(0.25p_t^{\text{BSPI}} + 0.25p_t^{\text{OPI}}\right) \frac{h}{5,500\text{kcal/kg}}$. The government advises buyers and sellers to explicitly specify this particular form of the formula (dynamic price updates linear in average coal prices) in their long-term contracts. Contract prices, the price indices and the assigned weights could differ across firms and across years.

[15] Around 60% of coal is transported via rail (Sun, 2025).

[16] In Appendix B, we provide snapshots of the original document and its translation.

small coal mines. We refer to these orders as the **supply reduction policy** in the paper.[17]

The actual dates of implementation and compliance with the policy varied across provinces and coal mine ownership types. Shanxi, historically China's largest coal-producing province, was the first to implement the policy in April 2016. Other leading coal producing provinces such as Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia began their implementation in May and June 2016, respectively. Large state-owned coal mines were also subject to more stringent monitoring, and their output fell more (Appendix H.2). Coal prices surged in the second half of 2016 relative to the prior months in 2016 and to the same period in 2015. NDRC officially suspended the 276-working-daying policy in October amid concerns over meeting the (highly inelastic) winter heating and power demand (Lai, 2016; Shi et al., 2018). Nonetheless, mine closures and strict production monitoring continued in 2017 and 2018. The policy was gradually eased in 2019 (NDRC, 2019).

### 3.3.2 Resource Taxation

China instituted a resource tax on coal production in 2014. The central government established a band for the coal resource tax rate of 2-10% on the sales revenues of the raw coal extracted,[18] within which provincial governments choose the specific rate, subject to the central government's approval (STA, 2014). Major provinces such as Shanxi set a rate at 8%, and others set lower rates (Qin et al., 2020).

Policymakers did not use this tax as the main instrument in the coal industry reform two years later for several reasons. First, they designed the new tax to reduce firms' tax burden and fund provincial spending on coal-production-related environmental damage as part of a broader fiscal reform (Xinhua, 2014), which replaced a patchwork of fees on coal production with a single levy. Raising the rate to restrict output would have clashed with that political narrative. Second, fiscal reform moves slowly, while the central government saw cutting coal capacity and output an urgent task better handled through fast, targeted administrative mandates (Li, 2016; People's Daily, 2016).

### 3.3.3 Other Economic Policies

We also note two other sets of significant economic policies during our sample period. First, the government expanded credit and increased infrastructure spending to counter the decline

[17]Literally translated, NDRC planned to reduce coal mining capacity, and the Chinese press often referred to this policy as "capacity reduction policy", reflecting the closure of small mines. Given that the implementation of the policy reduced the output of operating mines but did not require them to, for example, divest and reduce the capability of production, we use the term "supply reduction" as a compromise.

[18]This revenue levy does not additionally distinguish between different grades of the coal, but allows for reduced rates on coal extracted on mines near depletion.

in housing and stock market prices in 2015 and 2016 (Brandt et al., 2020). Many infrastructure projects, such as the national high-speed rail system, experienced rapid expansion in subsequent years (Reuters, 2016). Second, the government started to close small or unproductive plants in other industries.[19] These closures reduced 10% of the state-owned steel capacity in 2016 (Lu, 2016). However, we expect the plant closures to have a small effect on coal demand given that the output share of closed plants is likely low. Between 2016 and 2018, coal demand remained strong as the main consuming sectors—thermal power, coking, steel and cement—either expanded output or maintained historically high production levels, against the backdrop of continued economic growth.[20]

# 4 Data

## 4.1 Data Sources

Our primary data set comes from the China Coal Transportation and Distribution Association (CCTDA), a major trade group in the coal industry. The data include monthly shipment quantities of coal between provinces from 2012 to 2016. The tonnage data combine raw coal, washed coal and other derivative products with high coal content (such as coke and briquette).[21] The shipment data include shipment to the own province and other provinces and shipment from imports to different provinces.

We then compile additional data from other sources. We collect province-level mining capacity data from 2014 to 2019 from National Energy Administration and National Mine Safety Administration. Any capacity change is approved every 6 months.[22] We also obtain province-month production data in 2014-17 from CCTDA and 2018-2019 from National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The production data reflect the total tonnage of excavated raw coal. We also obtain monthly production data for key state-owned (SOE) coal mines from

[19] It is of separate interest that the government, as opposed to the market, needs to order the shutdown of the plants. A plausible explanation is that many plants are supported by the local governments to provide employment despite being unprofitable. To facilitate the shutdown of coal and steel plants, China's Ministry of Finance created a fund of $15.3 billion to provide relief to the laid-off employees (Lu, 2016).

[20] We plot the total output in Appendix D.1.

[21] Consistent with the standard NBS practice, the data account for transportation of the tonnage of final end products from the raw coal producers to the end users. More specifically, if 1 ton of raw coal was extracted in province $A$, transported to province $B$ for washing (removing impurities) with quantity reduced to $x < 1$, and burned at power plants in province $C$, the data would only include $x$ in transportation from $A$ to $C$ and not count the $A - B$ transportation. We also note that not all raw coal needs washing, and many coal mines are integrated with washing facilities and need not transport coal to a third province for processing. Our data closely match the NBS aggregate production and consumption. See Appendix C for more details.

[22] In principle, the annual production should not exceed the approved level, and monthly production should not exceed more than 10% of the 1/12 of the annual level.

CCTDA, which are the largest coal mines in each province.[23] The monthly coal imports in total tonnage from outside China to each province between 2014 and 2017 are from the firm International Coal.[24] We collect monthly provincial coal prices in 2014-2019 from NDRC.[25] To study the impact of coal consumption on air pollution, we collect air quality data at the monitoring station level from the Ministry of Environmental Protection. We focus on hourly concentrations of one pollutant (PM2.5 or PM10), as the concentrations of other pollutants are highly correlated.

Importantly, we do not directly have data on monthly province level coal consumption. To construct coal consumption at the province-month level, we impute the quantities based on the (1) shipment data from CCTDA, (2) monthly output of major industries using coal and (3) annual province level coal consumption, both from NBS. Details of this imputation are provided in Appendix D.

To verify the consistency of data from different sources, we compare the CCTDA's shipment data out of a province with the production data in NBS in Appendix C. Our shipment data are slightly lower (by about 4% to 8%) than the NBS statistics. At a more granular level, the same pattern holds consistently across provinces.

**Data Aggregation**

In the rest of the paper, we use the total weights of coal produced and consumed to analyze supply and demand. We do not further differentiate among coal types within the quantity data. Given our research questions, several potential concerns about the data may warrant discussion. Importantly, to what extent can a single demand function capture the composite demand for a variety of coal and coal products combined in our quantity data? What is the appropriate price for this composite demand? We note that in China, the demand for different coal products is likely highly correlated. The widespread use of coal blending techniques enables power plants to substitute across different coal types in the event of shortages. Other end users such as heating facilities are likely even less sensitive to coal quality. As we will show next, thermal and coking coal prices are highly correlated. Therefore

[23]NDRC designates an SOE coal mining firm as a "key SOE" based on a number of criteria, which include capacity, reserves, mining technology and coal quality (whether the coal is mainly for electricity production).

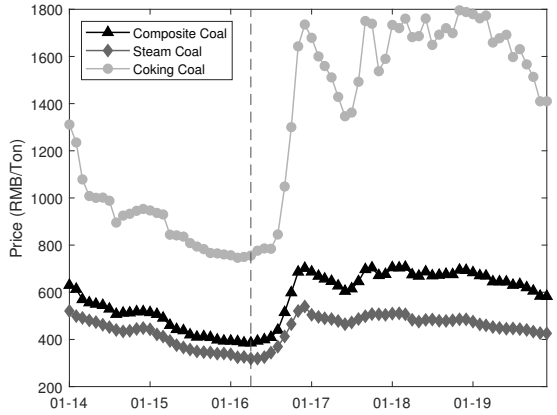
[24]The firm provides the data through the website https://mcoal.in-en.com/. We do not consider China's export, which accounts for less than 0.2% of coal production during our sample period.

[25]The publicly available coal price data are based on coal used for electricity generation and heating. This type of coal, which includes a variety of coals with different heat contents and purity, is collectively referred to as "steam coal" or "thermal coal." We collect monthly province-specific prices of steam coal using the China Steam Coal Price Index from the Price Monitoring Center of NDRC. The index is based on data collected from 1,600 firms that rely on coal as the main fuel source, including major coal-fired power plants and heating facilities. Prices of coal used for coking are based on prices in Ganqimaodu in Inner Mongolia, a major hub of coking coal distribution.

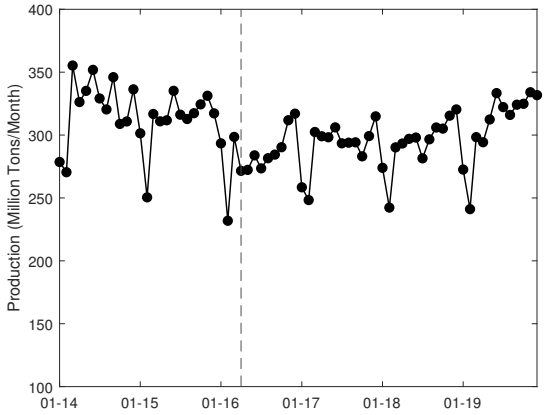
we construct an average price for each province and month based on the two price series weighted by their consumption shares.

Figure 3: Time-Series Data of the Coal Market

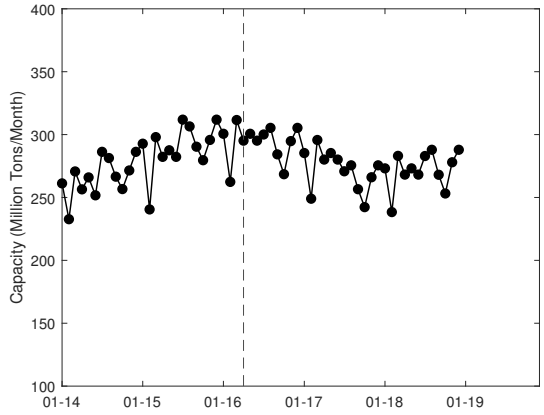
(a): Price (RMB/Ton)



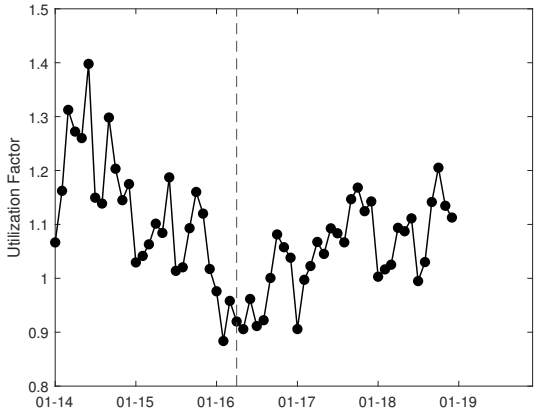

(b): Production (Million Tons/Month)



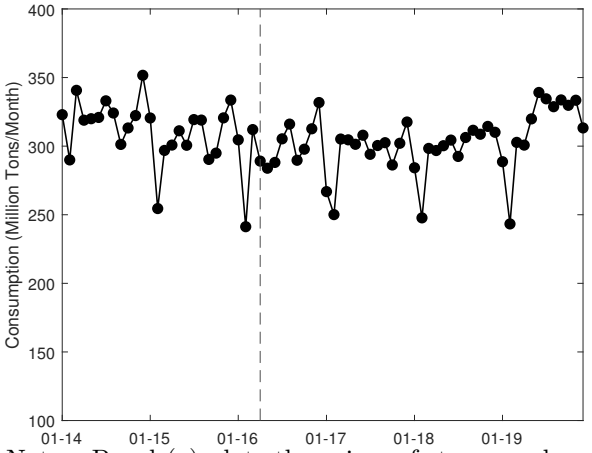

(c): Capacity (Million Tons/Month)



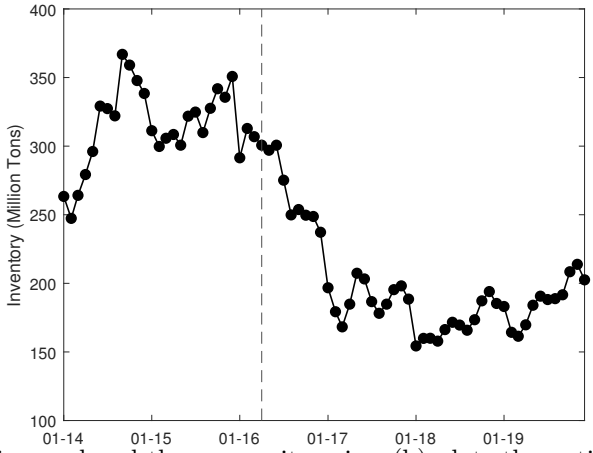

(d): Utilization Rate




(e): Consumption (Million Tons/Month)




(f): Inventory (Million Tons)




Notes: Panel (a) plots the prices of steam coal, coking coal and the composite price, (b) plots the national monthly production, (c) plots the monthly national capacity, which is adjusted from the capacity that changes every 6 months for the number of working days in each month, (d) is the utilization rate, defined as national monthly production divided by capacity, (e) is the national inventory, and (f) is the national monthly consumption.

## 4.2 Data Summary

### 4.2.1 National Time-Series

We plot the time series of the national coal prices, production, capacity, utilization rates, inventory and consumption in Figure 3. Coal prices shown in (a) increased significantly for both coking and steam coal as policy was underway after April 2016. The prices remained higher throughout 2017 and 2018 and gradually decreased in 2019 after the policy pressure was eased in 2019. We plot the monthly production in (b). The production in 2016 was noticeably lower than similar periods both before and after the policy.

The supply squeeze was a result of two aspects of the policy. First, the government closed coal mines and suspended new approvals, resulting in a net decrease in capacity as shown in (c). Second, the campaign to reduce over-production above approved capacity levels directly limits output. In (d), we plot the utilization factor, defined as the production-to-capacity ratio. This ratio in 2017 and 2018 (post-policy) is lower than or comparable to 2014-15, despite significantly higher prices in 2017 and 2018. The utilization factor is also lower in 2016 than in 2017-2018, reflecting more stringent enforcement in 2016 (the 276-working-day policy).

In (e) and (f), we find that the market went through a transition in 2016. The figure (e) shows that consumption has a more muted response in 2016 than production, where the excess demand over production corresponds with an over 40% decrease in inventory (figure (f)) during the rapid price increase in 2016.[26] The inventory stabilized at a lower level in 2017 and 2018, where production increased to above 300 million tons per month, matching the level of consumption.

[26]Monthly foreign imports also increased by about 10 million tons per month in 2016 and remained at about 20 million tons per month post policy.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

| | Mean | SD | p25 | Median | p75 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Panel A. Coal-Consuming Provinces* | | | | | |
| Quantity (10,000 Tons/Month/Province) | | | | | |
| Consumption | 1016.15 | 762.98 | 462.04 | 746.56 | 1329.72 |
| Price (RMB/ton) | 532.01 | 133.87 | 430.21 | 523.03 | 615.45 |
| Wind Generation (TWh) | 0.53 | 0.73 | 0.06 | 0.29 | 0.70 |
| Lagged CDD | 17.77 | 38.16 | 0 | 0 | 11.12 |
| N=1440; based on 30 coal-consuming provinces in 2014-2017 | | | | | |
| *Panel B. Coal-Producing Provinces* | | | | | |
| Quantity (10,000 Tons/Month/Province) | | | | | |
| Supply | 1130.13 | 1991.28 | 119.92 | 361.51 | 997.66 |
| Capacity | 1121.09 | 1784.84 | 158.92 | 517.61 | 1239.99 |
| N=1200; based on 25 coal-producing provinces in 2014-2017 | | | | | |
| *Panel C. Foreign Import* | | | | | |
| Quantity (Million Tons/Month) | 60.4 | 90.3 | 0 | 11.13 | 98.57 |
| N=48; 2014-2017 | | | | | |

Notes: Panel A shows summary statistics for 30 coal-consuming provinces. The demand consists of shipment from Chinese provinces and foreign imports. Coal consumption is aggregated from consumption in all sectors using coal for each province (Appendix D). The price is the quantity weighted average of thermal and coking coal prices plus a calibrated transportation cost (Appendix E) based on coal origins. Panel B reports summary statistics for 25 coal-producing provinces. Supply is the sum of all shipments from that province each month. Capacity is aggregated from the mine-level data from NEA. Panel C reports total imports.

### 4.2.2 Summary Statistics

For the main analysis of the paper, we focus on the years from 2014 to 2017. [27]Table 1 summarizes our main data set. There are 30 coal-consuming provinces and 25 coal-producing provinces. All coal-producing provinces also consume coal. The reported prices include transportation costs based on coal origins, which account for approximately 17.5% of the composite price.[28]

[27]CCTDA's cross-province shipment data are available through 2016, and its production data are available through 2017. We cross-validate both datasets using NBS statistics. For subsequent years, NBS reports province-level monthly production, except for January and February.

[28]Appendix E details how we calibrate the transportation costs.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Cross-province Shipment Shares, 2014–2016

| | Inner Mongolia | Shanxi | Shandong | Hebei | Jiangsu | Shaanxi | Henan | Liaoning | Guizhou | Xinjiang |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inner Mongolia | 0.392 | 0.011 | 0.049 | 0.017 | 0.064 | - | 0.002 | 0.082 | - | - |
| | [0.014] | [0.002] | [0.008] | [0.003] | [0.010] | - | [<0.001] | [0.003] | - | - |
| Shanxi | 0.006 | 0.298 | 0.104 | 0.231 | 0.103 | 0.002 | 0.055 | 0.017 | - | 0.001 |
| | [0.002] | [0.013] | [0.007] | [0.029] | [0.012] | [0.001] | [0.012] | [0.002] | - | [0.001] |
| Shaanxi | 0.004 | 0.148 | 0.086 | 0.039 | 0.101 | 0.411 | 0.059 | - | 0.001 | - |
| | [0.001] | [0.020] | [0.049] | [0.010] | [0.027] | [0.070] | [0.007] | - | [0.001] | - |
| Guizhou | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 0.740 | - |
| | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | [0.025] | - |
| Shandong | - | - | 0.857 | 0.012 | 0.033 | - | 0.008 | 0.002 | - | - |
| | - | - | [0.016] | [0.005] | [<0.001] | - | [0.001] | [<0.001] | - | - |

Notes: The table reports the shipment shares of the 5 largest coal-producing provinces to 10 largest coal-consuming provinces, averaged within 36 months between 2014 and 2016. The share is calculated as a month's shipment from $i$ to $j$ divided by the total shipment from $i$ in the month. The standard deviations are reported in brackets.

### 4.2.3 Cross-province Shipment Shares Are Stable Over Time

We show that the share of a province's coal production transported to another province is highly stable over time. This important empirical fact will guide the modeling decisions in the model. In Table 2, we report the mean and standard deviation (in square brackets) of the shipment shares from province $i$ to province $j$, defined as $\frac{Q_{ijt}}{Q_{it}}$, where $Q_{ijt}$ is the tonnage of coal produced in $i$ and transported to $j$, and $Q_{it}$ is the total production in $i$ in month $t$. We list the five largest coal-producing provinces on the row and the ten largest coal-consuming provinces across columns. The standard deviation for the majority of province pairs is negligible relative to the mean, indicating a high degree of stability in shipment shares over time.

There are two possible reasons for this stability despite substantial variation in coal prices over time. First, the government and railway operators allocate railway capacity when coal buyers and sellers enter into long-term contracts. The rail capacity allocations create rigidity within the duration of long-term contracts, as any significant rerouting of shipment across provinces could create cascading disruptions in the interconnected rail network. This constraint incentivizes coal buyers to switch between suppliers within a given province even when coal buyers procure coal from outside their long-term contracts. Second, although power plants can substitute across different grades of coal to some extent through coal-blending technology, they still tend to prefer similar coals when purchasing on the spot market, because coal blending can add to the plants' operating costs (Zhao, 2021). Since mines within the same province are more likely to produce similar grades of coal, they may supply to the same set of power plants, consistent with stability across multiple years.

We also find support for these structural reasons in explaining the rigidity of shipment shares. Between 2014 and April 2016, the log difference between the highest and lowest coal prices across provinces gradually decreased from 1.02 to 0.93, and then increased to 1.25 after April 2016.[29] If shipment shares could change flexibly in response to price differentials, we would expect to observe strategic shipping behavior to exploit the arbitrage opportunities, keeping price dispersion relatively constant. Instead, the observed persistence of price differentials point to a lack of such strategic behaviors. Our model below thus focuses on production decisions as opposed to shipment destination choices.

[29]The log difference of 25th-75th price levels range from 0.19 to 0.28.

# 5 Coal Demand

We specify coal consumption in province $j$ and month $t$ as

$$\ln q_{jt}\left(p_{jt}\right) = \alpha \ln p_{jt} + X_{jt}\beta_X + FE_j^{\text{demand}} + FE_{m(t)}^{\text{demand}} + \varepsilon_{jt} \tag{4}$$

where the quantity $q_{jt}$ corresponds with the consumption of coal in province $j$, and $p_{jt}$ represents the composite coal price in the province. The parameter $\alpha$ has the straightforward interpretation of price elasticity. The covariates include province $j$'s cooling degree days and wind generation, which affect the local electricity residual demand for coal power plants, and an indicator for the year of 2017 to capture any potential change in demand in response to the policy. We also include fixed effects for the province and the month of the year. The term $\varepsilon_{jt}$ captures the unobserved demand shock.

**Static Demand Assumption** In theory, the coal purchase decisions can be dynamic, where coal users can use existing inventory to smooth consumption when prices change (Jha, 2023). Our demand function is static, because coal consumers do not store large quantities of coal in our context. Specifically, NDRC requires coal power plants to keep enough stock for at least 7 days of operation, but explicitly caps inventories at no more than 12 days in peak seasons (NDRC, 2021a). A historically high value in 2024 is just 27 days (CCTV News, 2024). Major steel plants keep a similar level of coal inventory (BOCI, 2017). This practice contrasts sharply with the norm in the US, where over 90% of coal power plants keep enough coal to generate electricity for over 60 days (EIA, 2023). We also note that, although there may still be arbitrageurs with sizable capacity, such as dedicated coal traders storing coal at ports, the model in (4) focuses on coal consumption by end users instead of shipment. In our counterfactual analysis, we focus on the "steady state" of the market, where demand matches the level of consumption in the markets before 2016 or in 2017 so that the inventory level was roughly stable over time (Figure 3(e) and (f)).

## 5.1 Identification

The equilibrium price may be correlated with the unobservable $\varepsilon_{jt}$. We construct shift-share instrumental variables that exploit the timing and exposure differences of provinces to the supply reductions as documented in Section 3.3.1. We summarize these variations below.

1. The policy started first in Shanxi in April 2016, followed by other provinces in May.

2. The policy closed small coal mines, and the cutoff thresholds differ across provinces.

3. The policy imposes stricter monitoring programs on the production of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and the share of production by SOEs differs across provinces.

In each province, the variations in policy timing and intensity shift the local supply through the largely fixed shipment shares (Section 4.2.3). Importantly, because the demand function (4) already accounts for policy effects through the 2017 indicator, our excluded instruments are therefore based on purely supply-side variations in 2016, when the policy rolls out across provinces at different times and enforcement intensity differs from 2017 (the 276-working-day policy in 2016). Specifically, we use $\chi_{it}$ to denote whether the policy has applied to province $i$'s supply in month $t$, and for each province $j$ in $t$, we define (1) a capacity IV,

$$Z_{jt}^{\text{Capacity}} = \sum_i K_i^{\text{Small}} w_{ij}^{2012-2013} \chi_{it}, \tag{5}$$

where $w_{ij}^{2012-2013}$ is the coal shipped from $i$ to $j$ divided by the total shipment to $j$, averaged across months from 2012 and 2013 (before the estimation sample),[30] and $K_i$ is province $i$'s capacity in January 2014 below the province's cutoff thresholds for closure during the policy.[31] We also define (2) a SOE IV,

$$Z_{jt}^{\text{SOE}} = \sum_i o_i w_{ij}^{2012-2013} \chi_{it}, \tag{6}$$

where $o_i$ is the output share[32] of key SOE in province $i$, also averaged across months from 2012 and 2013. In the above, the ratios $w_{ij}$ capture $j$'s historical dependence on coal from $i$, and the interactions account for the exposure differences to the supply policy shocks.[33]

[30] We find that the shares of shipment from a province, $w_{ij}$, just like the shares of shipment to a province in Section 4.2.3 and are stable over time during our sample. We argue in Section 4.2.3 that structural reasons not due to changing prices are likely responsible for the rigidity.

[31] Following the official policy document, the capacity cutoff for "small" coal mines are 0.3 million tons/year for major coal-producing provinces: Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Shaanxi and Ningxia, 0.15 million tons/year for Hebei, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong, Henan, Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang, and 0.09 million tons/year for the remaining provinces.

[32] Ideally, we should use capacity shares to construct the IV because there can be potential serial correlations in unobservables. We do not have capacity data for SOE mines. The main assumption is that any serial correlation between 2013 and 2016 production is negligible.

[33] We can also use the policy start time alone to define a policy timing IV,

$$Z_{jt}^{\text{Policy}} = \sum_i w_{ij}^{2012-2013} \chi_{it}.$$

We estimate a slightly larger elasticity (-0.696) compared with the main specification using capacity and SOE IVs (-0.662).

**Further Discussions of the IV Validity**

For the IVs to be valid, the exclusion restriction requires any change in demand due to other policies at the same time (Section 3.3.3) to be uncorrelated with transportation shares. We note that the 2015-2016 economic stimulus plan is a nationwide policy that generally eases the borrowing constraints for transportation projects (such as the national network of high-speed rails), and the subsequent years coincide with stable or slightly increasing output of industries that consume the most coal. A correlation with our instruments may arise from provinces more dependent on coal from, say Shanxi, systematically seeing more or less immediately buildout of railways and other infrastructures. This seems unlikely, because our instruments exploit the timing difference in policy start dates over a short time window.

Another threat to identification is that policy timing may be endogenous if coal buyers anticipated the policy and stockpiled coal in advance. Policy guidance and common industry practices discussed above show that major end users of coal do not have significant storage capacity. National coal inventory data from NBS in Figure 3 shows that the inventory actually declined before the policy, suggesting that the policy is likely a surprise.

## 5.2 Estimation

We report our estimates in Table 3. The first stage results in column (1) are consistent with the nature of the reform, where price increases are more prominent in provinces with more SOE production and small mine closures, although the latter is not precisely estimated. In column (2), we estimate a demand elasticity of -0.66 in the second stage, which is sharply different from the positive demand coefficient in an OLS regression (column (3)). In comparison, prior work (Burke and Liao, 2015) has estimated the elasticity for coal demand to be between -0.3 to -0.7.

Table 3: Estimation of Demand

| | (1) IV: First Stage | (2) IV: Second Stage | (3) OLS |
|---|---|---|---|
| ln(price) | | -0.662*** | 0.115*** |
| | | (0.203) | (0.031) |
| $Z_{jt}^{\text{SOE}}$ | 0.140*** | | |
| | (0.024) | | |
| $Z_{jt}^{\text{Capacity}}$ | 0.026 | | |
| | (0.023) | | |
| Wind Generation(TWh) | -0.067** | -0.079*** | -0.039** |
| | (0.025) | (0.024) | (0.016) |
| Lagged CDD/1000 | 0.252** | 0.731*** | 0.465** |
| | (0.085) | (0.232) | (0.219) |
| Province FE | YES | YES | YES |
| Month FE | YES | YES | YES |
| Kleibergen-Paap F Statistic | 18.66 | | |
| $N$ | 1440 | 1440 | 1440 |

Notes: The table reports OLS and IV estimates of the demand model. The dependent variable is the log of demand (shipment into a province). Standard errors are clustered at the province level. We use two instruments for log(price). The first is calculated in (6) and captures the historical dependency on SOEs in coal-producing provinces. The second is given in (5), which measures the size of "small coal mines", which were forced to close in later years.

# 6 Coal Supply

Our supply model incorporates two key institutional features of China's coal industry. First, the coal market is not concentrated. In Appendix H.3, we plot the combined output shares of the three largest coal-mining firms (based on the output in the key SOE production data) in each of the top five coal-producing provinces. No single firm in a province has more than 30% of the output share in a province, and the share of the third largest firm is often below 11%. Second, as we show in Section 5.1, the share of supply from one province to another is highly stable over time.

Motivated by these two observations, we specify the aggregate marginal cost function at the province level as

$$\ln \text{mc}_{it} = \alpha \frac{q_{it}}{K_{it}} + FE_j^{\text{supply}} + FE_{m(t)}^{\text{supply}} + \xi_{it}, \tag{7}$$

where $K_{it}$ is the capacity in province $i$ in month $t$,[34] and we include fixed effects at the

[34]We fix capacity in a province as observed in the data.

province and month level. We assume that in equilibrium, the marginal cost matches the effective price $P_{it} = \sum_j s_{ij} (p_{jt} - \tau_{ij})$, where $s_{ij}$ is the share of coal shipped from $i$ to $j$ in the total shipment from $i$,[35] $p_{jt}$ is the price in the destination province $j$ and $\tau_{ij}$ is the transportation costs calibrated following the procedure in Appendix E.[36]

**Behavioral Foundation**

The marginal cost function (7) implies the supply curve $\frac{Q_{it}(P_{it})}{K_{iy(t)}} = \gamma \ln P_{it} + \widetilde{FE}_i^{\text{supply}} + \widetilde{FE}_{m(t)}^{\text{supply}} + \tilde{\xi}_{it}$, where $\gamma = \frac{1}{\alpha}$, with fixed effects and shocks also appropriately transformed. The supply function can be microfounded as the aggregate decisions of many atomistic, competitive mines. Suppose each producer in province $i$ sells a share $s_{ij}$ to province $j$. The cost function is given by $c(q;\theta)$, where the cost parameter $\theta$ differs across mines and follows the distribution $\Theta_i$. The total mass of the mines is $\mathcal{M}$. Slightly abusing notation, we use $a_{\theta t}$ to denote this producer's output decision, which satisfies the first order condition $P_{it} = c'(a_{\theta t};\theta)$. Under the assumptions that the marginal cost function $c'$ is strictly monotonic in $a_{\theta t}$ for any $\theta$, we can then invert the production decision as $a_{\theta t} = c'^{-1}(P_{it};\theta)$. Integrating both sides with respect to $\Theta_i(\theta)$ and multiplying the total mass of the mines $\mathcal{M}$ yield an aggregate supply curve as a function of $P_{it}$, and appropriate choices of $c$ and $\Theta_i$ would give the specific exponential form.

A caveat of this microfoundation is that the effective price $P_{it}$ would no longer be a sufficient statistic for all relevant prices if the output decision is fully decentralized and the output share $s_{ij}$ is heterogeneous across individual mines. In the extreme case, each mine may supply coal to only one destination province, as opposed to splitting its output across provinces. Although we do not have mine-level data on output and shipment, we can rule out this extreme case based on news reports where large mines routinely supply to buyers in multiple provinces (Xinhua, 2016; China Securities Journal, 2017; Xinhua, 2018). Furthermore, the supply in a province is not fully decentralized, and the effective price is a useful first order approximation of how government directives on coal production respond to price signals. In particular, as we explained in Section 3.2.1, the guidelines on adjusting contract prices explicitly use average prices at the destinations.

**Static Supply Assumption**

We assume the coal output decisions are static. According to our interviews with industry practitioners, mine owners plan production based on current prices, and dynamic factors

[35] We use the average shares as in Table 2, and the results are similar if we use just any one year's data (like the early year 2014) to construct the shares.

[36] We also include the resource tax in the effective price.

such as the amount of unexcavated coal or interest rates do not appear to be first-order drivers of their production decisions. For context, the coal reserve in China is close to 150 billion tons, while the annual production varies between 3 and 4 billion tons, with a similar amount of new reserves discovered every year.

**Supply Function After Policy**

Given that we observe only 25 provinces and the enforcement intensities differ in 2016 and 2017, our model of the policy effects is necessarily parametric. Our main specification estimates the policy effects as a proportional and province-specific change in the aggregate marginal cost curve:

$$\ln \mathrm{mc}_{it} = \alpha \frac{q_{it}}{K_{it}} + FE_i^{\text{2016 policy}} + FE_i^{\text{2017 policy}} + FE_i^{\text{supply}} + FE_{m(t)}^{\text{supply}} + \xi_{it}. \tag{8}$$

In the above, $FE_i^{\text{2016 policy}}$ reflects the proportional reduction in output under the 276-working-day policy in 2016, and $FE_i^{\text{2017 policy}}$ reflects the adjusted enforcement intensities in the following year.

We note that the policy may raise the marginal costs significantly higher when production is closer to and past the approved capacity levels. The functional form in (8) allows for this feature when the enforcement terms are positive. At the same time, we note that the policy shifts the focus on reducing all coal mines' output in 2016 to more targeted enforcement of overproduction in 2017 NDRC (2017b). Smaller, often higher cost mines are subject to higher intense scrutiny, which may translate to a larger increase in the aggregate marginal cost near capacity, Therefore, a potentially more flexible specification allows the policy to affect $\alpha$ (thus further tilting the marginal cost) after production reaches a certain threshold. We thus consider the following alternative specification similar to Ryan (2012), which replaces the policy effect in 2017, $FE_i^{\text{2017 policy}}$, with a term that directly depends on quantity:

$$\ln \mathrm{mc}_{it} = \alpha \frac{q_{it}}{K_{it}} + FE_i^{\text{2016 policy}} + \beta \chi_{it}^{2017} \left( \frac{q_{it}}{K_{it}} - \nu \right)_+ + FE_i^{\text{supply}} + FE_{m(t)}^{\text{supply}} + \xi_{it}, \tag{9}$$

where $\chi_{it}^{2017}$ is an indicator for whether $t$ is in 2017, and $(x)_+ = \max(x, 0)$. The term $\left(\frac{q_{it}}{K_{it}} - \nu\right)_+$ captures the additional effect of the policy on marginal costs when production is close to capacity through the cutoff $\nu$ . In the extreme case where $\beta$ is large, the policy mimics an efficiently implemented quota within a province. A tradeoff of this specification is that we capture province-specific policy effects only up to the approved capacity $K_{it}$. In the counterfactual exercises later, we report results from both specifications.

## 6.1 Identification

The supply function and the resulting estimation equation can be written in the general form

$$\ln P_{it} = g\left(q_{it}, X_{it}^{\text{supply}}\right) + \xi_{it}, \tag{10}$$

where $q_{it}$ is correlated with $\xi_{it}$, and there is a vector of exogenous covariates $X_{it}^{\text{supply}}$ that accounts for province capacities, locations and time. A sizeable literature (e.g., Newey and Powell (2003)) studies the nonparametric identification and estimation of models in this form. In addition to requiring instruments that are mean or quantile independent of the unobservables, the instruments should induce sufficient variations in $q$. We use demand shifters in (4) as instruments for the supply (Wright, 1928). The excluded instruments include wind generation, the one-month lagged cooling degree days and the exponential of demand residuals, which we assume to be orthogonal to shocks to coal's production costs (MacKay and Miller, 2024; Döpper et al., 2024). We additional include their interactions with the 2017 indicator.

Table 4: Supply Function Estimates

| | (1) Proportional Policy Effect | (2) Threshold Policy Effect |
|---|---|---|
| $\alpha$ | 2.007*** | 1.572*** |
| | (0.296) | (0.517) |
| $\beta$ | | 1.141** |
| | | (0.575) |
| $\nu$ | | 0.461*** |
| | | (0.104) |
| Province FE | YES | YES |
| Month FE | YES | YES |
| N | 1200 | 1200 |

Notes: The table reports GMM estimates of the supply model. Prices faced by domestic producers in each province are constructed as weighted averages of destination prices, where the weights correspond to each destination's share in total shipments from the province. "Proportional Policy Effect" model is the supply function in (8), and the "Threshold Policy Effect" model is the supply function in (9). In both cases, standard errors are clustered at the province level.

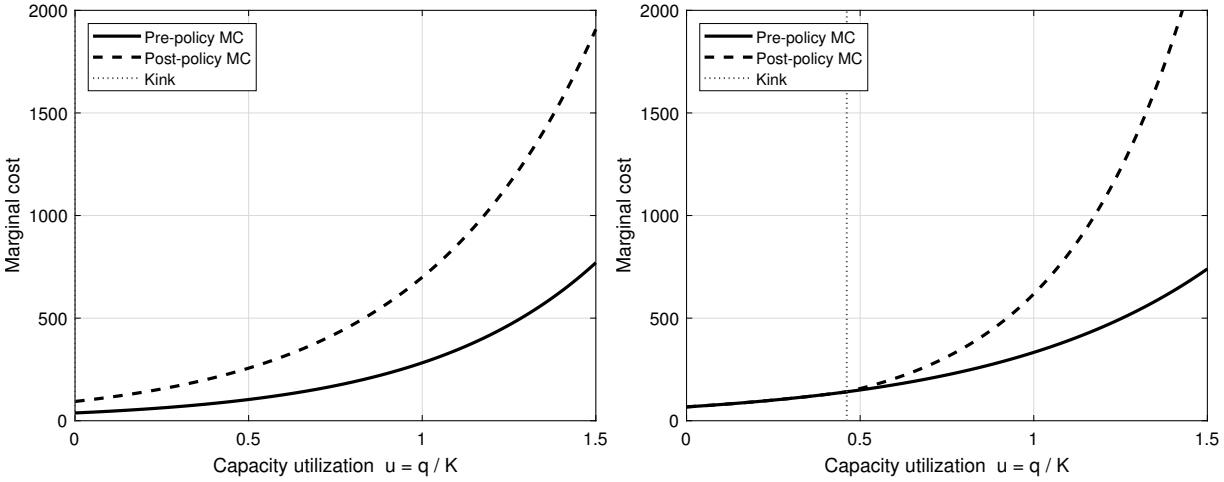
## 6.2 Estimation

Column (1) of Table 4 reports the estimates of the supply function that assumes proportional, province-specific policy effects in (8), and column (2) reports the estimates of the supply function (9) where the policy effects in 2017 are threshold-based. To further visualize the

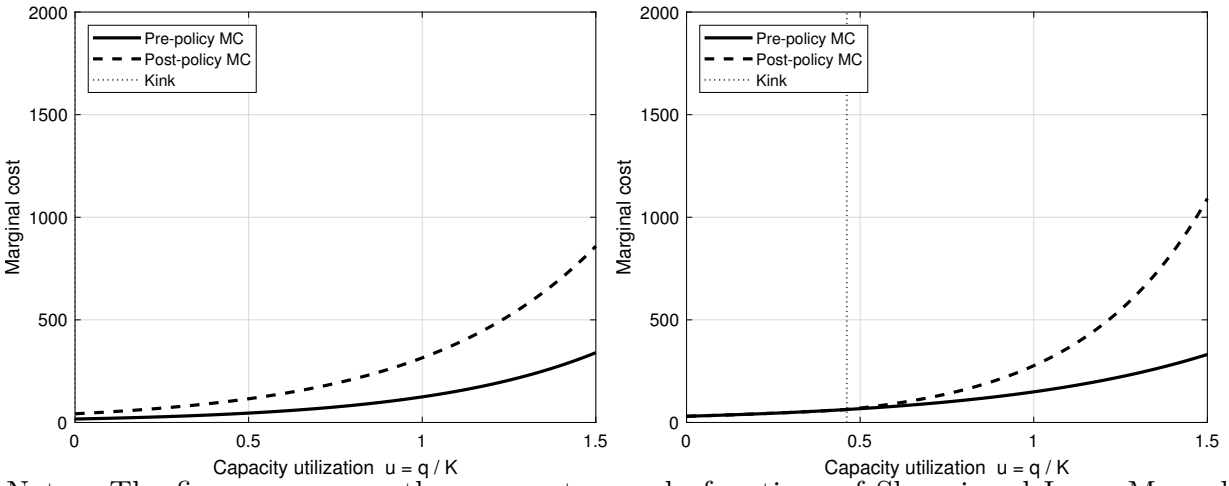
Figure 4: Estimated Aggregate Supply in the Two Largest Coal-Producing Provinces (Shanxi and Inner Mongolia)

Proportional Policy Effects Threshold Policy Effects

(a) Shanxi




(b) Inner Mongolia




Notes: The figures compare the aggregate supply functions of Shanxi and Inner Mongolia with and without policy effects in 2017.

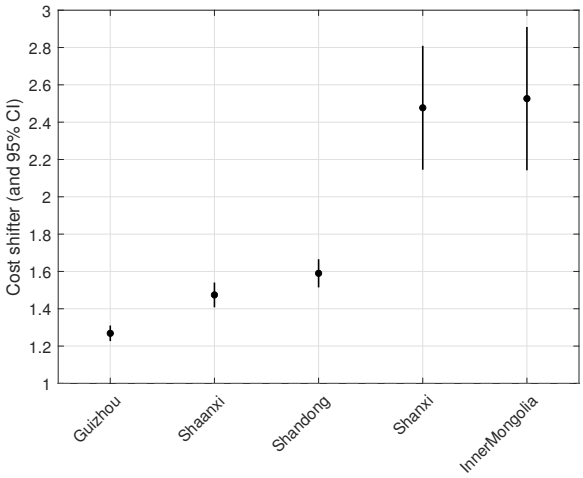



Figure 5: Policy Effects in the 5 Largest Coal-Producing Provinces

Notes: We plot the estimated proportional increase of marginal costs, $\exp\left(FE_i^{2017\text{ policy}}\right)$, and the 95% confidence intervals for each province, ordered by the magnitude of the estimated cost increase.

cost functions and the cost increases in 2017, we plot the aggregate marginal cost functions for the largest coal producing provinces, Shanxi and Inner Mongolia, before and after the policy in Figure 4. The aggregate marginal cost increases are similar in both models when production is close to capacity.

For the model of proportional policy effects, Figure 5 breaks out the estimated increase in marginal costs in 2017 (relative to pre-policy periods), $\exp\left(FE_i^{2017\text{ policy}}\right)$ for the top 5 largest coal-producing provinces. The largest increases occur in the two largest coal producing provinces, Shanxi and Inner Mongolia, where aggregate production costs increase by 2.5 times. Overall, policy effects are larger in lower cost provinces: the scale of cost increase is negatively correlated with the average variable costs, with a correlation coefficient of -0.375.

Finally, we compare the average variable costs with costs reported in financial statements of publicly listed coal mining firms. We plot these costs in Appendix Figure H.5. The estimated and reported costs are well aligned, with a correlation coefficient of 0.549 for the proportional effect model and 0.552 for the threshold policy effect model. For example, we find that Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia have the lowest production costs, consistent with more open-pit mining in these provinces.

# 7 Counterfactual Simulation

We begin by defining the equilibrium given a set of shocks. Let $\mathcal{J}$ denote the set of coal-consuming provinces and $\mathcal{I}$ for the coal-producing provinces.

**Definition.** In period $t$, an equilibrium consists of a set of delivery prices $\{p_{jt}\}_{j\in\mathcal{J}}$ and production quantities $\{Q_{it}\}_{i\in\mathcal{I}}$ that satisfy (4) and (10), where a province $j$'s demand is given by $q_{jt} = \sum_{i\in\mathcal{I}} s_{ij} Q_{it}$, and the price facing producers in province $i$ is $P_{it} = \sum_j s_{ij}\left(p_{jt} - \tau_{ij}\right)$.

Given that the demand and supply functions are continuous, strictly monotonic in prices, and map to the ranges of $[0, \infty)$, the equilibrium exists based on an application of Brouwer's fixed point theorem.

The supply reduction policy has two main effects: (1) it reduces capacity by closing small mines and halting new entry, and (2) it tightens enforcement by closely monitoring remaining mines to prevent production above approved capacity. Because we lack mine-level data on entry and exit, we take capacity as given and focus on the enforcement effects—how stricter enforcement reduces production conditional on capacity. Our estimates of economic surplus should be interpreted as the sum of consumer surplus and variable profits, which do not account for investment or fixed costs. In all simulations, we allow foreign import to respond endogenously following an estimated model of import supply function.[37]

## 7.1 Enforcement Effects

Our first simulation quantifies the enforcement effects of the policy. We set the estimated shifts in supply, $\beta$ and $\nu$, to 0, and recompute the expected equilibrium outcomes. We assume that the demand and supply shocks at the province level follows an AR1 process.[38] We simulate the equilibrium path 300 times and report the $2.5, 50$ and 97.5th percentiles of the market outcomes.

Figure 6 compares the average equilibrium prices and production under the no-policy simulation with observed outcomes under the policy, holding fixed the capacity as observed in the data. The simulations align closely with the data before the policy. We further show in Appendix H.5 that either supply model can match province-level production despite the parsimonious specifications. We find that, absent the policy, prices would have been about 550 RMB/ton in December 2016 as opposed to nearly 700 RMB/ton in the data. The quantity would have been nearly 50% higher.

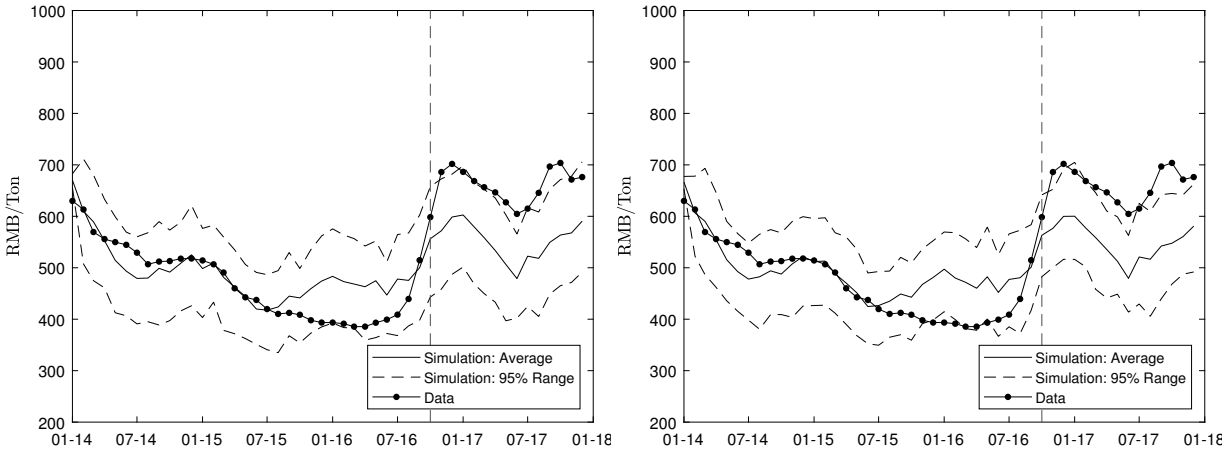
[37] Our shipment data show that the share of import to each province is also stable over time and allows us to construct a similar effective price for imports. We estimate the import supply elasticity in a log-log specification. An OLS regression based on data from 2014 to 2016 (36 months) yields an estimate of 1.22, with a robust standard error of 0.14. A similar IV estimation yields an estimate of 1.31 with a standard error of 0.15. We use the OLS estimates for our results given concerns about IV estimates' bias in small samples, but all of our results are similar using either estimate.

[38] Appendix F reports the estimates of the AR1 process.

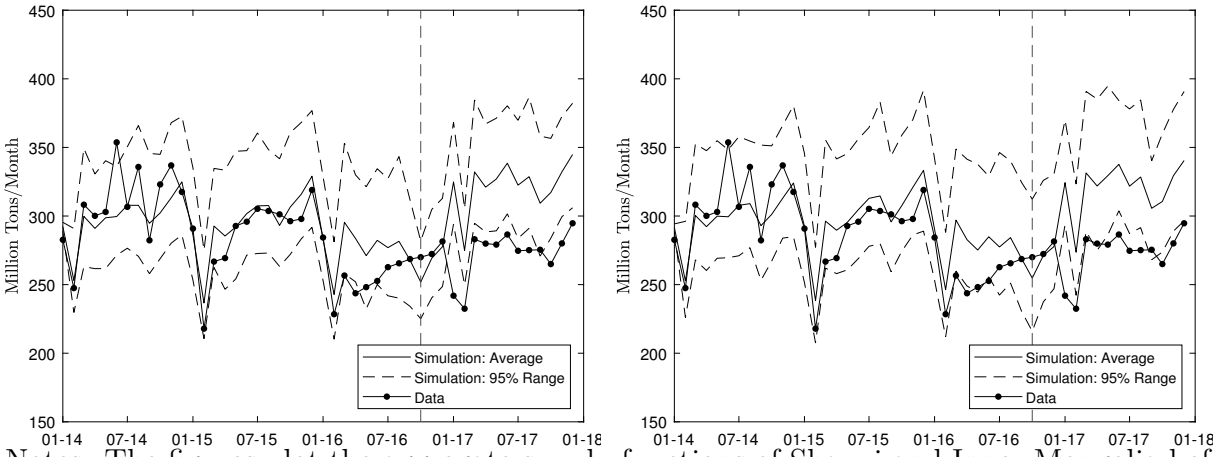
Figure 6: Prices and Production With and Without the Policy

Proportional Policy Effects | Threshold Policy Effects

(a) Average Price




(b) Production




Notes: The figures plot the aggregate supply functions of Shanxi and Inner Mongolia before and after the 2017 policy.

**Welfare Effects**

Table 5 presents how the policy changes the welfare outcomes in 2017 relative to a no-policy counterfactual. We focus on 2017 because inventory adjustment was unusually large in 2016: between April and December 2016, a substantial inventory drawdown contributed to the consumption of coal's end users. By 2017, inventory levels had largely stabilized, so consumption more closely tracked production. This makes 2017 the appropriate period to apply our equilibrium framework, in which demand reflects consumption and supply maps production to consumption without a sizable inventory-change component. In the counterfactual simulations, we compare the expected equilibrium outcomes in 2017 with and without the estimated policy effects on coal supply, where for the supply model (8), we set the $FE^{2017\ \text{policy}} = 0$, and for the model in (9), we set $\beta = 0$.

Column (1) estimates the loss of economic surplus and saved environmental costs from restricting production based on the supply model of proportional policy effects. The total loss in economic surplus amounts to 446 billion RMB, which is 0.05% of China's GDP in 2017. The loss of the consumer surplus is 1.1 times. At the same time, producer surplus increases by 33.6 billion, consistent with the policy objective of improving the profitability of the coal industry. The changes in resource tax revenues are relatively small because of the low tax rates. Saved environmental costs, including reduced air pollution, water depletion and costs of carbon almost completely offset the economic cost of the policy. The resulting total welfare loss is just 3% of the economic surplus loss.

Column (2) reports the results based on the supply model of threshold policy effects. The policy estimates a greater increase in producer surplus due to the policy. This is not surprising, because the policy effects on costs are more concentrated near the production levels close to the capacity and therefore are more similar to a quota compared with the supply model of proportional effects. The estimates show that the net effect of the policy is positive, after taking into account the policy's environmental impact. We thus see the two models quantifying bounds on the welfare impact of the policy.[39]

[39] At the province level, we see that both models predict similar consumer surplus losses, but the increase in producer surplus is higher in the model of threshold effects. Appendix Figure H.8 breaks down the surplus changes at the province level.

Table 5: Enforcement Effects of the Policy in 2017

| | (1) Supply Model of Proportional Effects | (2) Supply Model of Threshold Effects |
|---|---|---|
| Δ Delivery price (RMB/Ton) | 131.96 | 147.69 |
| | [118.41, 144.82] | [135.67, 161.30] |
| Δ Domestic coal production (Million Tons/Month) | -590.94 | -651.53 |
| | [-605.48, -574.97] | [-718.22, -587.79] |
| Δ Coal consumption (Million Tons/Month) | -542.30 | -605.08 |
| | [-538.99, -444.67] | [-671.22, -544.49] |
| Δ Economic Surplus and Environmental Costs (bn RMB) | | |
| Economic Surplus | -445.78 | -284.62 |
| | [-493.54, -397.99] | [-325.54, -249.30] |
| Consumer | -489.71 | -554.70 |
| | [-538.99, -444.67] | [-624.59, -492.52] |
| Producer | 33.58 | 257.63 |
| | [23.84, 45.60] | [232.26, 284.87] |
| Resource Tax | 10.35 | 12.46 |
| | [9.20, 11.37] | [10.84, 14.10] |
| Saved Environmental Cost | 431.54 | 485.94 |
| | [423.83, 436.91] | [444.22, 529.58] |
| Air Pollution | 193.36 | 220.86 |
| | [186.04, 199.12] | [206.96, 235.63] |
| Social Cost of Carbon | 159.55 | 178.03 |
| | [154.71, 164.40] | [160.20, 197.48] |
| Water Depletion | 78.63 | 87.05 |
| | [76.59, 80.57] | [78.49, 96.18] |
| Total Surplus | -14.24 | 201.32 |
| | [-62.60, 32.34] | [172.26, 239.89] |

Notes: The interval in the square brackets is the 2.5%-97.5% range across simulations in 2017, given the estimated parameters. We simulate forward the equilibrium based on the shocks in the last month of 2016. We report the changes relative to the observed policy. The air pollution is calculated in Appendix G. The social cost of carbon is set at 162 RMB/ton for China (Ricke et al., 2018), and we assume that one ton of consumed coal generates 1.886 tons of $CO_2$. We account for the environmental costs of water depletion at 86.6 RMB per ton of coal (Gu and Li, 2017).

**Allocative Inefficiency**

We next quantify the policy's inefficiency relative to an efficiently implemented quota. We note two types of inefficiencies. First, our estimates suggest that the policy raises infra-marginal costs, which is similar to the supply rotations in the illustrative model in Section 2.3 and leads to within-province allocative inefficiency. Second, our estimates indicate greater supply reductions in larger, lower-cost provinces such as Inner Mongolia, indicating cross-province inefficiency. Understanding these inefficiencies not only sheds light on the implementation of the policy, but also enables us to apply the ranking criterion in Section 2 to compare the policy with a hypothetical tax.

Table 6 quantifies the two inefficiencies. We first decompose the inefficiencies caused by the supply function shift in each province. Holding the 2017 equilibrium quantity fixed in each simulation path, we re-compute producer surplus using the pre-policy supply curve integrated up to that quantity. Columns (1) and (3) report the increase in producer surplus under the two supply models relative to the observed policy. The within-province inefficiency is large, estimated to be at least 149 billion RMB (model of threshold effects) and up to 315 billion RMB (model of proportional effects).

Next, we measure the total inefficiency. An efficient quota allocation across provinces requires the marginal surplus loss from an additional unit of reduction to be equalized across provinces. Therefore, holding fixed a time series of simulated shocks in 2017, for any total reduction $\Delta Q$, the efficient allocation is the one implied by a uniform tax that achieves the same total reduction. We use the following procedure to find the efficient allocation: in each simulation based on the post-policy supply function, we (i) solve for the tax that delivers the same aggregate reduction in equilibrium, (ii) fix the quantities produced in each province under this tax, and (iii) compute economic surplus by integrating demand and the pre-policy supply functions up to those efficient quantities. Column (2) and (4) report the increase in producer surplus under the two supply models relative to the observed policy. We note that the within-province inefficiency accounts for 76.3% and 62.5% of the total inefficiency in the two models.

## 7.2 Is Tax More Efficient?

In Section 3.3.2, we discussed the political reasons why production restrictions, as opposed to a tax, are used to implement the reform. Yet, the economic question remains: is it more efficient to use a tax? Given the inefficient quantity reduction by the policy estimated in the previous section, we apply the criterion developed in Section 2 to check whether a tax can increase the expected social welfare.

Table 6: Policy Inefficiency Relative to Efficient Quotas

| | Supply Model of Proportional Effects | | Supply Model of Threshold Effects | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Within-Province (1) | Total (2) | Within-Province (3) | Total (4) |
| Δ Producer Surplus (bn RMB) | 314.77 | 412.62 | 149.05 | 238.55 |

Notes: The table reports the increase in producer surplus when we correct the within-province and total inefficiences of the policy relative to efficient quotas under the two models. The increases of the total economic surpluses are 366.68 billion RMB under the supply model of proportional effects and 193.87 billion RMB under the supply model of threshold effects.

Consistent with Assumption 1, we assume that the external loss function increases in the aggregate quantity. This assumption aligns with most of the central government's guidelines which target a national total capacity or output. For example, the 5-year planning document NDRC (2016a) explicitly calls for an annual production target of 3.9 billion tons of coal by 2020. Furthermore, aggregate coal output is a reasonable sufficient statistic for policy-relevant harms we study, including air pollution, carbon emissions, mine-site ecological damage, and mining accidents.

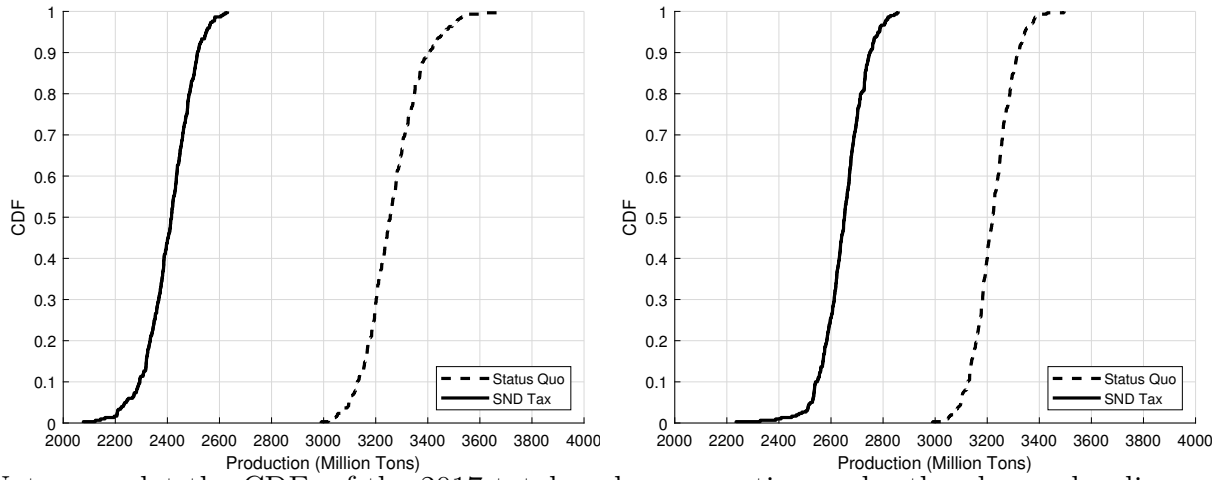
To identify an SND tax, we solve for the tax rate that produces the same expected economic surplus as the policy. The surplus is calculated as the sum of the expected producer surplus, consumer surplus and tax revenues based on the estimated AR1 processes of the demand and marginal cost shocks. Panel (a) of Figure 7 shows that at a SND tax level of 657 RMB/ton, the CDF of the total quantity is stochastically dominated by that under the observed policy given the supply model of proportional policy effects.[40] Panel (b) based on the supply model of threshold policy effects identifies a lower SND tax (517.540 RMB/ton). Our criterion thus suggests that a tax can increase the expected social welfare than the observed policy. The high SND tax is also consistent with the large economic surplus loss identified in the previous section.

**Anticipation of the Demand and Supply Shocks** An assumption in the application of the criterion above is that the unobservables in the demand and supply functions are also unknown to the market participants or policymakers. This assumption is important for correctly defining expected welfare, but our qualitative results on the efficiency of the tax are likely robust to weaker information assumptions. In the extreme case where the

[40]There are several ways to formally test the stochastic dominance. First, for a simple but formal statistical test, we verify an even stronger condition, which is that the quantity under the SND tax based on the estimated parameters is statistically smaller than under the policy for each simulated path of shocks. More generally, given sufficiently many simulation draws, we can ignore the simulation errors and compute the maximal difference between the two CDFs over their support. The 95% confidence interval of this difference can be simulated using the asymptotic distribution of the estimated parameters.

Figure 7: Quantity CDFs Under the SND Tax For Reducing Production

(a) Supply Model of Proportional Effects (b) Supply Model of Threshold Effects




Note: we plot the CDFs of the 2017 total coal consumption under the observed policy and the SND tax for the two supply models.

unobservables are fully known to buyers, sellers and the government, a tax would generate less allocative inefficiency and is, therefore, unambiguously more efficient than a production restriction for the same quantity target.[41]

**Government Weighs Producer Surplus More**

Our analysis above focuses on a social welfare function where consumer surplus, producer surplus and tax revenue are weighed equally. Yet, one of the policy objectives is to raise the profitability of the coal industry, which suggests that in the government objective function, producer surplus may be valued more than the tax. Furthermore, as discussed in Section 3.3.2, one reason that a tax was not chosen for the reform is the challenge to redistribute the tax revenue, which decreases the value of the tax if the government wishes to use it to compensate the coal producers. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the following government objective function

$$\underbrace{\text{consumer surplus} + \mu \cdot \text{producer surplus} + \text{tax revenue}}_{S_\mu} - \text{external loss}$$

for a weight $\mu > 1$. We can adapt our method to rank policy instruments based on this objective function by looking for a tax that matches the re-weighted economic surplus $S_\mu$.

[41] On the other hand, an optimally chosen production restriction can sometimes outperform even an optimally chosen tax given uncertainties, as we show in Section 2.3.1.

At high values of $\mu$, restricting production becomes a more attractive policy than a tax. To see this, we note that when $\mu$ is sufficiently large, no tax can generate sufficient revenues to offset the loss of producer surplus weighted by $\mu$. We find SND taxes for values of $\mu \leq 1.95$ under the proportional effect supply model or $\mu \leq 1.35$ under the threshold effect supply model. In other words, for the government to prefer production restriction to taxation, it must value one dollar of producer surplus at least 35% more than a dollar of consumer surplus or tax revenue.

# 8 Conclusion

Conceptually, the paper studies the instrument-choice problem with minimal assumptions on the economic impact of externalities. We apply this criterion to China's 2016 coal supply-reduction reform. We find that the administrative enforcement tightened output conditional on capacity and shifted surplus from consumers to producers. Our criterion shows that a tax could raise social welfare and reduce total output, even though the fiscal reform required to implement such a tax can be challenging. We also show that a tax may no longer be the optimal policy if the government values producer surplus more than consumer surplus or tax.

The results also underscore the challenges of transitioning to a low-carbon economy given the institutional constraints. Consistent with this observation, China has made massive investments in renewable energy. In 2024, for the first time, the share of coal in electricity generation fell below 60%, primarily driven by the growth of low-cost electricity production from renewable sources (Howe, 2024).

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# A Proof of Theorem (1)

Use $F_{H_1}$ and $F_{H_2}$ to denote the cdfs of $H_1$ and $H_2$. Consider the difference of the expectation in Lebesgue integrals:

$$E\left(L\left(H_1\right)\right) - E\left(L\left(H_2\right)\right) = \int_0^{\overline{H}} L\left(h\right)\left(dF_{H_1}\left(h\right) - dF_{H_2}\left(h\right)\right)$$

Apply integration by parts. The difference above becomes

$$\begin{aligned} & L\left(\overline{H}\right)\left(F_{H_1}\left(\overline{H}\right) - F_{H_2}\left(\overline{H}\right)\right) - L\left(0\right)\left(F_{H_1}\left(0\right) - F_{H_2}\left(0\right)\right) \\ & - \int_0^{\overline{H}} \left(F_{H_1}\left(h\right) - F_{H_2}\left(h\right)\right) dL\left(h\right). \end{aligned}$$

Because $F_{H_1}\left(\overline{H}\right) = F_{H_2}\left(\overline{H}\right) = 1$ and $F_{H_1}\left(0\right) = F_{H_2}\left(0\right) = 0$, the difference simplifies to

$$- \int_0^{\overline{H}} \left(F_{H_1}\left(h\right) - F_{H_2}\left(h\right)\right) dL\left(h\right).$$

The monotonicity of $L$ implies that $L' > 0$. Given the dominance relationship, we have

$$E\left(L\left(H_1\right)\right) - E\left(L\left(H_2\right)\right) = \int_0^{\overline{H}} \left(F_{H_2}\left(h\right) - F_{H_1}\left(h\right)\right) L'\left(h\right) dh > 0.$$

# B Policy Documents

Figure B.1 provides a snapshot of the original government document for the supply reduction policy. We provide an English translation of this document in this section.

In order to implement the *"Opinions of the State Council on Resolving Overcapacity in the Coal Industry and Achieving Sustainable Development"* (Guo Fa [2016] No. 7, hereinafter referred to as the "Opinions"), and to further regulate and improve the coal production and

management order, effectively resolve overcapacity, and promote the sustainable development of coal enterprises, the following notice is issued regarding related issues:

1. **Fully understand the importance of standardizing and improving the order of coal production and operation**

   Currently, the coal industry is in a serious predicament. Especially since last year, some coal enterprises have resorted to measures such as overcapacity production, compensating for price through volume, and low-price dumping to maintain production operations in an effort to seize market share. These actions have not only severely disrupted the normal order of coal production and operation but have also exacerbated the imbalance between supply and demand in the market, intensifying the difficulties faced by the industry. If these issues are not promptly curbed, the national goals and tasks related to the development of the coal industry will be difficult to achieve. All regions and enterprises must adopt a strategic perspective that promotes supply-side structural reform and effectively addresses capacity reduction tasks. It is essential to enhance overall awareness and fully recognize the importance of standardizing and improving the order of coal production and operation for facilitating the recovery and development of the coal industry. This requires unifying thought and action with the spirit of the "Opinions", taking effective measures to ensure the implementation of regulations concerning the control of overcapacity production, reduction of production volume, suspension of production during holidays, and maintenance of fair competition.

2. **Main Measures to Standardize and Improve Production and Operation Order**

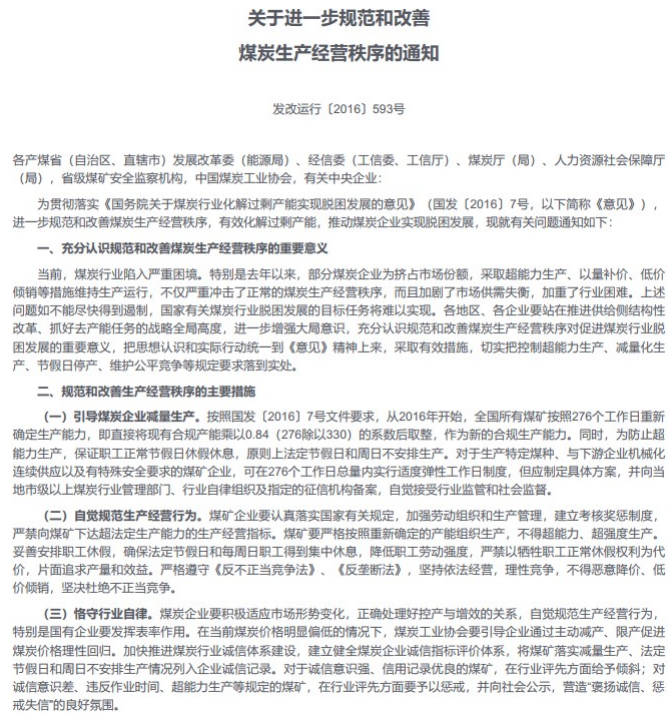
   (a) **Guiding Coal Enterprises to Reduce Production Volume:** In accordance with the requirements of the State Council Document [2016] No. 7, starting from 2016, all coal mines nationwide are to re-determine their production capacity based on 276 working days. This means directly multiplying the existing compliant capacity by a coefficient of 0.84 (276 divided by 330) and rounding to the nearest whole number to establish the new compliant production capacity. Additionally, to prevent overcapacity production and ensure employees can take their normal holidays, no production should be scheduled on statutory holidays and Sundays. For coal mines producing specific coal types, providing mechanized continuous supply to downstream enterprises, or with special safety requirements, a moderately flexible working day system may be implemented within the total of 276 working days, provided that a specific plan is developed and filed with local

coal industry management departments at or above the municipal level, industry self-regulatory organizations, and designated credit institutions, and that these enterprises consciously accept industry regulation and social supervision.

(b) **Consciously Standardizing Production and Operation Behavior:** Coal mines must earnestly implement national regulations, strengthen labor organization and production management, and establish a performance assessment and reward-punishment system. It is strictly prohibited to set production and operation targets that exceed the legal production capacity for coal mines. Production must be organized strictly according to the re-determined capacity, and overcapacity or excessively intense production is not allowed. Employee leave must be properly arranged to ensure that staff can rest during statutory holidays and every Sunday, thereby reducing labor intensity. It is forbidden to sacrifice employees' normal leave rights in order to pursue output and efficiency. Coal mines must strictly adhere to the "Anti-Unfair Competition Law" and the "Anti-Monopoly Law," operate in accordance with the law, engage in rational competition, refrain from malicious price cuts, and eliminate unfair competition.

(c) **Upholding Industry Self-Regulation:** Coal enterprises must actively adapt to changes in market conditions, correctly balance production control and efficiency enhancement, and consciously regulate their production and operation behavior, especially state-owned enterprises which should set a leading example. In the current context of notably low coal prices, the coal industry association should guide enterprises to promote rational price recovery through proactive production reduction and output limitations. The construction of an integrity system in the coal industry should be accelerated, establishing and improving an integrity index evaluation system for coal enterprises. Compliance with production reduction, as well as not scheduling production on statutory holidays and Sundays, should be included in the integrity records of enterprises. Coal mines with strong integrity awareness and good credit records should receive favorable treatment in industry evaluations, while those with poor integrity awareness, violations of operational times, and overcapacity production should face penalties in industry evaluations and be publicly disclosed to create a positive atmosphere of “rewarding integrity and punishing dishonesty.”

Figure B.1: Policy Document: Supply Reduction Policy



**关于进一步规范和改善**

**煤炭生产经营秩序的通知**

发改运行〔2016〕593号

各产煤省（自治区、直辖市）发展改革委（能源局）、经信委（工信委、工信厅）、煤炭厅（局）、人力资源社会保障厅（局），省级煤矿安全监察机构，中国煤炭工业协会，有关中央企业：

为贯彻落实《国务院关于煤炭行业化解过剩产能实现脱困发展的意见》（国发〔2016〕7号，以下简称《意见》），进一步规范和改善煤炭生产经营秩序，有效化解过剩产能，推动煤炭企业实现脱困发展，现就有关问题通知如下：

**一、充分认识规范和改善煤炭生产经营秩序的重要意义**

当前，煤炭行业陷入严重困境。特别是去年以来，部分煤炭企业为挤占市场份额，采取超能力生产、以量补价、低价倾销等措施维持生产运行，不仅严重冲击了正常的煤炭生产经营秩序，而且加剧了市场供需失衡，加重了行业困难。上述问题如不能尽快得到遏制，国家有关煤炭行业脱困发展的目标任务将难以实现。各地区、各企业要站在推进供给侧结构性改革、抓好去产能任务的战略全局高度，进一步增强大局意识，充分认识规范和改善煤炭生产经营秩序对促进煤炭行业脱困发展的重要意义，把思想认识和实际行动统一到《意见》精神上来，采取有效措施，切实把控制超能力生产、减量化生产、节假日停产、维护公平竞争等规定要求落到实处。

**二、规范和改善生产经营秩序的主要措施**

**（一）引导煤炭企业减量生产。**按照国发〔2016〕7号文件要求，从2016年开始，全国所有煤矿按照276个工作日重新确定生产能力，即直接将现有合规产能乘以0.84（276除以330）的系数后取整，作为新的合规生产能力。同时，为防止超能力生产，保证职工正常节假日休假休息，原则上法定节假日和周日不安排生产。对于生产特定煤种、与下游企业机械化连续供应以及有特殊安全要求的煤矿企业，可在276个工作日总量内实行适度弹性工作日制度，但应制定具体方案，并向当地市级以上煤炭行业管理部门、行业自律组织及指定的征信机构备案，自觉接受行业监管和社会监督。

**（二）自觉规范生产经营行为。**煤矿企业要认真落实国家有关规定，加强劳动组织和生产管理，建立考核奖惩制度，严禁向煤矿下达超法定生产能力的生产经营指标。煤矿要严格按照重新确定的产能组织生产，不得超能力、超强度生产。妥善安排职工休假，确保法定节假日和每周日职工得到集中休息，降低职工劳动强度，严禁以牺牲职工正常休假权利为代价，片面追求产量和效益。严格遵守《反不正当竞争法》、《反垄断法》，坚持依法经营，理性竞争，不得恶意降价、低价倾销，坚决杜绝不正当竞争。

**（三）恪守行业自律。**煤炭企业要积极适应市场形势变化，正确处理好控产与增效的关系，自觉规范生产经营行为，特别是国有企业要发挥表率作用。在当前煤炭价格明显偏低的情况下，煤炭工业协会要引导企业通过主动减产、限产促进煤炭价格理性回归。加快推进煤炭行业诚信体系建设，建立健全煤炭企业诚信指标评价体系，将煤矿落实减量生产、法定节假日和周日不安排生产情况列入企业诚信记录。对于诚信意识强、信用记录优良的煤矿，在行业评先方面给予倾斜；对诚信意识差、违反作业时间、超能力生产等规定的煤矿，在行业评先方面要予以惩戒，并向社会公示，营造"褒扬诚信、惩戒失信"的良好氛围。

# C Data Comparison

To validate the provincial and monthly dataset we compiled from various sources, we compare the statistics based on our data and those from National Bureau of Statistics of China in Table C.1. The first column displays the national values aggregated from our main dataset, the second column is derived from the NBS Coal Balance Table for all provinces, and the third column represents the national statistics in the NBS National Coal Balance Table.

Overall, the national statistics derived from our main dataset are reasonably close to those in NBS, supporting the overall validity of our data. For instance, both datasets show declining output and consumption between 2014 and 2016, and a decrease in imports in 2015 followed by a rebound in 2016. These trends are consistently reflected in both the NBS and our dataset.

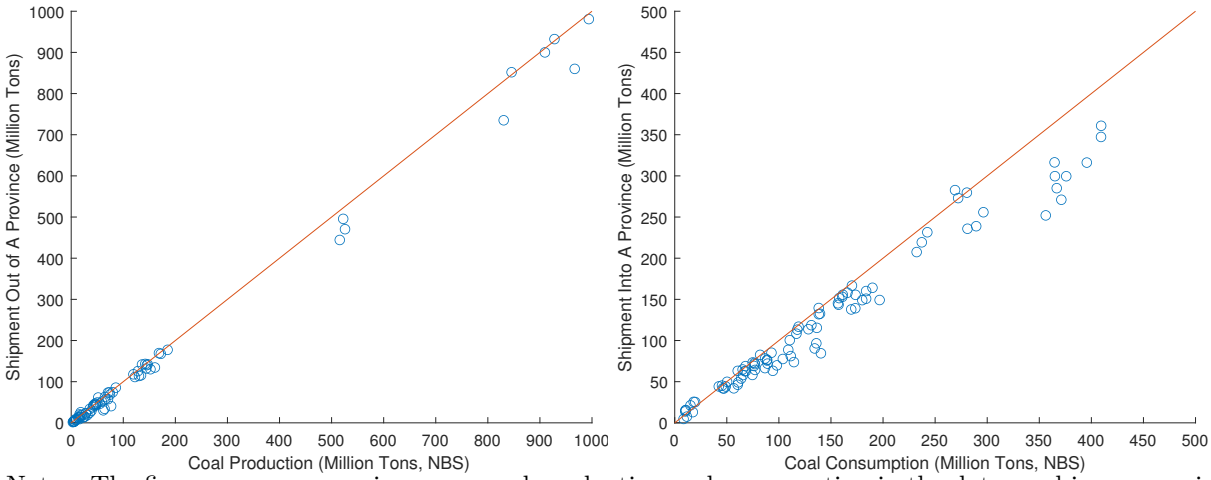
We validate our data at the province-year level. Figure C.1 compares the shipment out of and into a province in year with the annual coal production and consumption data by province in the provincial coal balance tables from NBS. Overall, they align closely, with the imputed consumption data being slightly lower than those reported by the NBS. This difference is expected because NBS data explicitly states that they do not remove certain

Table C.1: Data Comparison of Coal Output and Consumption (million tons)

| | 2014 | | | 2015 | | | 2016 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Main | NBS (Prov) | NBS (Nat) | Main | NBS (Prov) | NBS (Nat) | Main | NBS (Prov) | NBS (Nat) |
| Output | 3703 | 3876 | 3874 | 3457 | 3747 | 3747 | 3135 | 3411 | 3411 |
| Consumption | 3860 | 4317 | 4136 | 3662 | 4255 | 3998 | 3574 | 4249 | 3888 |
| Thermal power | 1974 | 1823 | 1895 | 1872 | 1792 | 1796 | 1908 | 1818 | 1827 |
| Heating supply | 181 | 306 | 224 | 204 | 323 | 241 | 222 | 345 | 266 |
| Coking Coal | 563 | 667 | 639 | 530 | 625 | 609 | 536 | 626 | 606 |

Notes: The table compares the data used in the empirical analysis (under main columns) with the annual numbers reported by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. The column of NBS (Prov) contains data collected from province coal balances tables and aggregated to national numbers, and the column NBS (Nat) are statistics reported in the national coal balance tables. The sum of coal consumption across provinces exceeds the national total because of the potential double counting according to the official Q&A from China NBS (See `https://www.stats.gov.cn/hd/cjwtjd/202302/t20230207_1902276.html`). Under the main column, the output is calculated as total shipment and the monthly consumption is constructed based on monthly by-sector coal consumption and the output of main downstream output in different provinces, detailed in Appendix D. We then aggregate province-month production and consumption to the national level.

Figure C.1: Data Comparison of Shipment, Coal Output and Consumption at Province Levels (Million Tons)
(A) Shipment Out of A Province vs Production (B) Shipment into A Province vs Consumption




Notes: The figure compare province-year coal production and consumption in the data used in our empirical analysis with those reported by province coal balance tables. One dot in the figures represents one province-year pair. The $y$-axis is calculated by aggregating monthly total shipment out of and into a province within a year.

instances of double-counting at the province level.[42]

# D Coal Consumption

We collected monthly steam coal consumption data from 2014 to 2016 across six sectors: electricity, heating supply, construction, steel, chemistry, others, and the coking sector. Table D.1 displays annual consumption in these sectors. Electricity is the largest coal consumer, accounting for over 50% of total consumption. Other major users include coking and cement plants, each accounting for 15%. The consumption breakdown is stable during our sample period. The "others" sector, which mainly includes residential demand and small-scale industrial processes, accounted for 7% in 2014 and declined to 3% in 2016. We plot the national time series of the downstream output in Figure D.1

[42]For example, coal transported to province A for washing and burned at power plants in B are both counted as consumption in provinces A and B. Our shipment data only count the final consumption in B.

Table D.1: Consumption Shares by Sectors

| Year | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Electricity | 0.51 | 0.51 | 0.53 |
| Coking | 0.15 | 0.14 | 0.15 |
| Construction | 0.15 | 0.15 | 0.14 |
| Heating Supply | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| Steel (steam coal only) | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| Chemistry | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| Others | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.03 |

Note: The table shows annual coal consumption shares by sector. We collected monthly coal consumption by sector from China Coal Resource, and then aggregated them annually to calculate those shares.

To allocate coal consumption by sector across provinces, we further collect the monthly output of primary products in each sector by province from the NBS and converted it into coal consumption. For the electricity sector, we use thermal electricity output as the main product. Although thermal electricity generation includes both coal and natural gas, natural gas contributes to only about 4.5% of total thermal generation, making its impact negligible.[43] We use cement as the representative product for the construction sector, as it accounts for 83.7% of coal consumption there. In the chemistry sector, fertilizers serve as the primary product.

Provincial coal balance tables provide annual coal consumption for thermal electricity generation and coking. We aggregate thermal and coke output to the province-year level and calculate coal consumption per 1 MWh of electricity and per ton of coke for each province and year. We assume these ratios remain constant across months within a province and year, converting thermal electricity generation and coke into coal consumption for the electricity and coking sectors. For cement, steel, and fertilizers, we aggregate their output by month across provinces and calculate the coal-to-output ratio. Assuming this ratio is constant across provinces within a month, we compute coal consumption in the construction, steel, and chemistry sectors based on their province-month output. Table D.2 shows that producing 1 MWh of electricity uses less coal, reflecting the gradual improvement in power plant energy efficiency. The conversion ratios are also consistent with engineering estimates by industry experts.[44]

[43] `https://chinaenergyportal.org/en/2016-detailed-electricity-statistics-updated/`

[44] For example, producing 1 ton of cement requires 0.011 ton of standard coal, equivalent to a conversion ratio of 0.15 between coal and cement, given that 1 ton of raw coal equals 0.7143 ton of standard coal. See `https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cj/2011/05-03/3011403.shtml`.

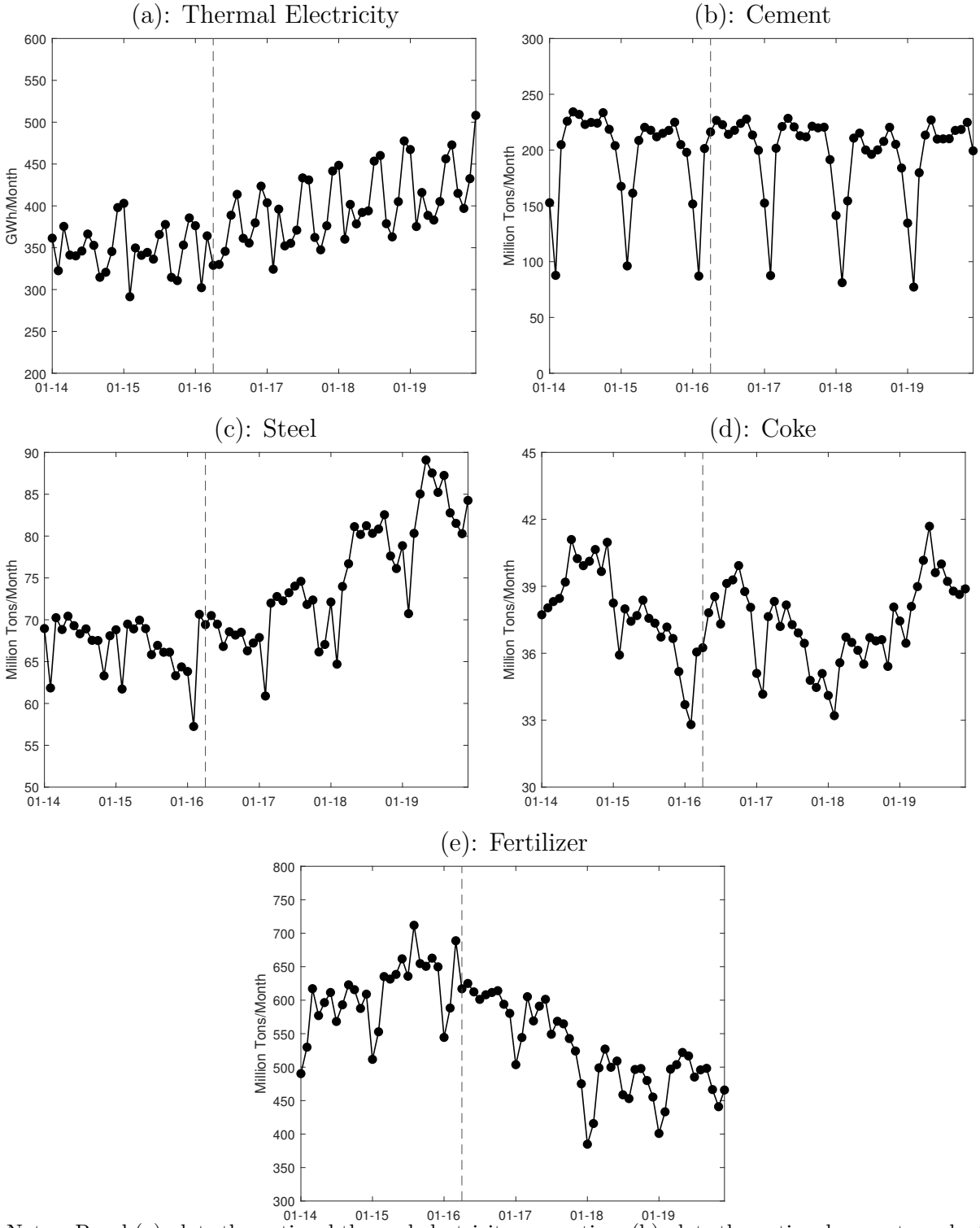
Table D.2: Coal-to-End Product Output Ratio by Sectors

| Year | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Electricity (1,000 tons of coal/MWh) | 4.7 | 4.4 | 4.3 |
| Cement (1 ton of coal/ton) | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Steel (1 ton of coal/ton) | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Coke (1 ton of coal/ton) | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Fertilizer (1 ton of coal/ton) | 2.0 | 1.8 | 2.0 |

Note: The table reports the conversion ratios used to estimate coal consumption for the production of key downstream products in each sector. Monthly data on the output of thermal electricity, cement, steel, coke, and fertilizers by province is collected from the NBS. The provincial coal balance tables provide annual coal consumption for thermal electricity generation and coking. We aggregate thermal and coke output to the province-year level to calculate the coal consumption per 1 MWh of electricity and per ton of coke. The table shows the average across provinces for each year. For cement, steel, and fertilizers, we calculate national output annually and match it with coal consumption data for the construction, steel (steam coal only), and chemical sectors from China Coal Resource, resulting in an annual conversion rate applied uniformly across all provinces.

For the heating sector and the "other" sector, which lack representative products, we collect annual coal consumption for heating supply from provincial coal balance tables. We then compute annual consumption in the "other" sector as the residual of total coal consumption after accounting for electricity generation, heating supply, industry, and construction. Using these data, we first calculate province-specific annual coal consumption shares by sector and then allocate monthly consumption across sectors according to these shares.

Figure D.1: Output in Major Downstream Sectors




Notes: Panel (a) plots the national thermal electricity generation, (b) plots the national cement production, (c) plots the national steel production, (d) plots the national coke production, (e) plots the national fertilizer production.

# E Coal Transportation

An integrated railroad and coastal marine shipping is the primary mode of coal transportation in China, accounting for 65.2% of total coal transport in 2017.[45] The transportation costs typically include the direct expenses associated with freight charges, which are influenced by the distance to be traveled, the mode of transportation (such as rail, truck, or barge), and the specific logistics involved. While shipping fares for waterway transport are influenced by market forces, railroad transportation fares are typically regulated.[46] Additionally, loading and unloading fees, terminal charges, and any necessary handling costs contribute to the total transportation expenditure. Other factors, such as fuel prices, maintenance of transportation vehicles, and labor costs, also play a significant role in shaping these costs.

Due to the limited variation in transportation shares, directly estimating transportation costs through shipping choices via a behavioral model is challenging. Instead, we manually collected estimated transportation costs between major coal producers and consumers from an authoritative industry report (Cao and Feng, 2017) published by China Bond Rating Co., Ltd., a leading agency that investigates and collects industry information to assess default risks of bonds across various sectors, including coal. Then we fit a quadratic relationship between the transportation costs and the distance between any two provinces, imposing the restriction that transportation costs increase with distance up to the maximum distance between any two provinces in China. Figure E.1 shows the transportation costs of province pairs estimated by the industry report, along with the estimated relationship between interprovincial distance and transportation costs. The intercept represents the costs of transporting coal within a province, estimated to be 60.9 RMB/ton. The estimates also indicate slight distance discounts.

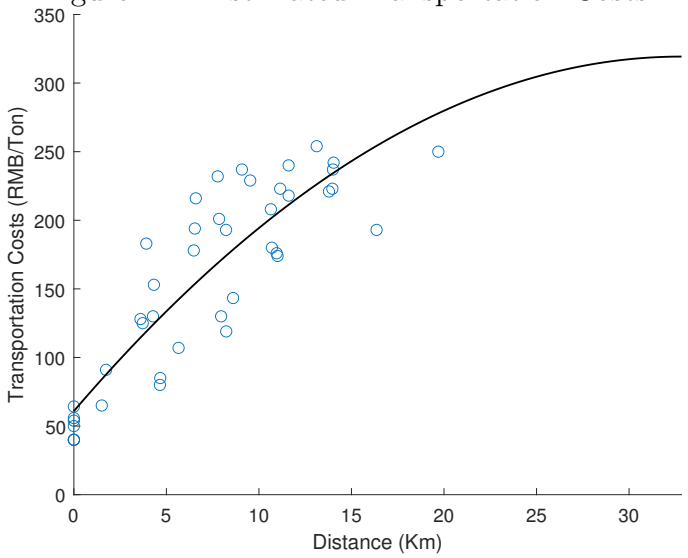
[45] See `http://pdf.dfcfw.com/pdf/H3_AP201811151246522585_1.PDF`.

[46] For more details about the composition of regulated fares for transporting coal by railroad, please refer to `http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-12/26/5250421/files/5a71188c4fd34d1d9f05ef5e16690d2e.pdf`.

| | Demand | Domestic Supply |
|---|---|---|
| $\delta_1$ | 0.81 | 0.50 |
| | (0.02) | (0.06) |
| $N$ | 1080 | 900 |

Table F.1: Estimated AR(1) Process for Demand and Cost Shocks

Figure E.1: Estimated Transportation Costs




Notes: The figure shows transportation costs (RMB/ton) between major coal-producing and coal-consuming provinces, plotted against the distance between their capital cities (km), based on an authoritative industry report (Cao and Feng, 2017) published by China Bond Rating Co., Ltd. We then approximate the relationship between transportation costs and distance using a quadratic function and the black curve shows the estimated transportation costs for the province pairs not in the industry report.

# F Simulation of Demand and Supply Shocks

We estimate AR(1) processes for demand shocks $\varepsilon_{jt}$, supply shocks $\xi_{it}$ using data from the period preceding our counterfactual analysis (up to December 2016):

$$\varepsilon_{jt} = \delta_0^D + \delta_1^D \varepsilon_{jt-1} + \omega_{jt}^D$$

$$\xi_{it} = \delta_0^S + \delta_1^S \xi_{it-1} + \omega_{it}^S,$$

Table F.1 reports the estimated AR(1) coefficients, showing that demand shocks exhibit greater persistence than cost shocks.

To forecast future demand and imports, we additionally model the evolution of wind

generation and cooling-degree days (CDD). Wind generation is assumed to follow

$$X_{jt}^{\text{Wind}} = \delta_{j0}^{\text{Wind}} + \delta_{j1}^{\text{Wind}} t + \delta_{j,m(t)} + \omega_{jt}^{\text{Wind}}$$

which is estimated separately for each province. We assume that $\omega_{jt}^{D}, \omega_{jt}^{S}, \omega_{jt}^{\text{Wind}}, \xi_{I+1,t}$ are mutually independent over time. To generate future realizations of cooling demand, we resample historical CDDs by year, under the assumption that cross-year climate variation over the sample period is stable.

# G Coal Consumption and Air Pollution

To quantify the environmental impact of reducing coal production, we additionally model air pollution as a function of coal consumption and health benefits from changes in pollution levels.

## G.1 Air Pollution

We specify a mapping from coal consumption to monthly PM2.5 and PM10 concentrations within a province,[47] which are the primary predictors of health costs in the literature we use later. We estimate the following model for the concentration of pollutant $\ell \in \{\text{PM2.5, PM10}\}$ in province $j$ and month $t$ (where the coefficients are $\ell$-specific):

$$\ln \ell_{jt} = \psi_C \ln \tilde{C}_{jt} + \psi_X X_{jt} + FE_j^{\text{pollution}} + FE_{m(t)}^{\text{pollution}} + \omega_{it}. \tag{G.1}$$

In the above, to account for spillover effects (Fu et al., 2022), we define the variable $\tilde{C}_{jt}$ as the total coal consumption in province $j$ and all of its neighboring provinces in period $t$.[48] The variable $X_{jt}$ includes meteorological conditions, including temperature, dew point temperature, sea level pressure, wind speed, sky condition total coverage code, liquid precipitation duration depth dimension. Additionally, we control for fixed effects at the province and month of the year levels.

Coal consumption and the unobservable $\omega_{it}$ may be correlated. Specifically, the coal consumption could be correlated with other economic activities that also contribute to pollution, but also correlated with heightened monitoring and regulation that reduces pollution. We therefore use the same IVs as the demand estimation for coal consumption.[49]

[47] We use the average of all monitoring stations' concentration readings in a province.

[48] We do not further normalize the variables by the province's size because both the pollution measure and the consumption are logged, and we control for province fixed effects.

[49] We construct instruments for $\tilde{C}$ by summing the instruments across neighboring provinces.

Table G.2 indicates that a 1% increase in coal consumption in a province and its neighbors raises local PM2.5 concentration by about 1.4%. The effect is similar when we use PM10 concentration as the outcome variable.[50]

Table G.2: The Effects of Coal Consumption on Air Pollutants

| | (1) ln(PM2.5) OLS | (2) ln(PM 10) OLS | (3) ln(PM2.5) IV | (4) ln(PM 10) IV |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\ln \tilde{C}_{jt}$ | 0.416*** | 0.386*** | 1.438*** | 1.284*** |
| | (0.115) | (0.096) | (0.332) | (0.314) |
| Province FE | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Month FE | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Meteorological Controls | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Observations | 1,440 | 1,440 | 1,440 | 1,440 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.654 | 0.605 | 0.554 | 0.490 |
| Kleibergen-Paap F Statistic | | | 35.13 | 35.13 |

Notes: the table reports estimates of the effects of coal consumption on PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by OLS and IV. All estimates control for meteorological conditions, including air temperature, dew point, sea level pressure, wind speed, sky condition coverage, and liquid precipitation duration and depth. The instruments used are the same as those in estimating demand. Standard errors are clustered at the province level.

## G.2 Health Effects

We monetize the morbidity and mortality costs due to changes in pollutant concentration levels based on Barwick et al. (2021).[51] Specifically, they estimate a $9.2 billion of annual saved morbidity costs from 10 $\mu g/m^3$ in daily PM 2.5 generates. We then combine this cost with the mortality effect in Ebenstein et al. (2017) (with data from 2004 to 2012), which estimates a cost of 13.4 billion dollars per year per 10 $\mu g/m^3$ increase of PM10. We convert these estimates to a per person per month 2016 RMB basis.[52] In the simulation, we first

[50]Ito and Zhang (2020) estimates the elasticity of PM10 concentration with respect to coal usage to be 0.5 using a RD design exploiting the Huai-River heating policy and by OLS applied to an annual province panel data. This is similar to the OLS estimates of our province by month panel data, but smaller than the IV estimates.

[51]An alternative approach is based on the willingness to pay approach in Ito and Zhang (2020) that estimate a household's willingness to pay of 1.34 dollars per year for 1 $\mu g/m^3$ decrease in PM10 based on data from 2006 to 2014. They also derive a income-dependent willingness to pay based on their estimates of random-coefficient logit model for air purifiers. We obtain a slightly lower value for reducing air pollution.

[52]The national health benefit of 9.2 billion per 10 $\mu g/m^3$ PM2.5, as estimated by Barwick et al. (2021), is in 2015 US dollars. We convert this to 45.08 RMB per capita in 2016, assuming a 2015 exchange rate of 6.5 between US dollar and RMB in 2015, a national population of 1.375 billion in China, and CPIs of 637.5 in 2016 and 615.2 in 2015. Similarly, the 13.4 billion estimate based on Ebenstein et al. (2017), converts to

predict the percentage changes of concentrations of both pollutants from coal consumption changes based on the marginal effects of coal consumption estimated using IV, and then translate the level changes to the total morbidity and mortality health costs per capita. The total changes are calculated by weighting the changes by the population for each province and then summing across provinces.

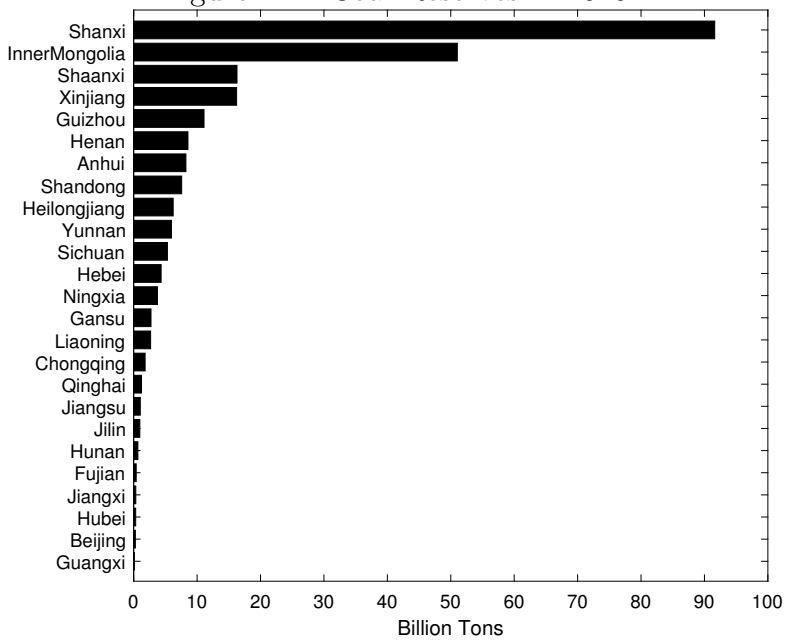
This approach likely understates the health benefits from reducing coal production by focusing solely on air pollution attributed to the resulting decrease in coal consumption. Other environmental damages associated with coal production (Chu et al., 2023), transportation, and storage of coal (Jha and Muller, 2018), such as air pollution from the excavation process, water contamination and land degradation, are not quantified here. We account for the environmental costs of water depletion at 86.6 RMB per ton of coal Gu and Li (2017). Nevertheless, addressing air pollution from coal consumption likely would have the greatest welfare impact given the large affected population and is a high priority goal of the supply reduction policy (Feng et al., 2019).

65.66 RMB.

# H Additional Figures and Tables

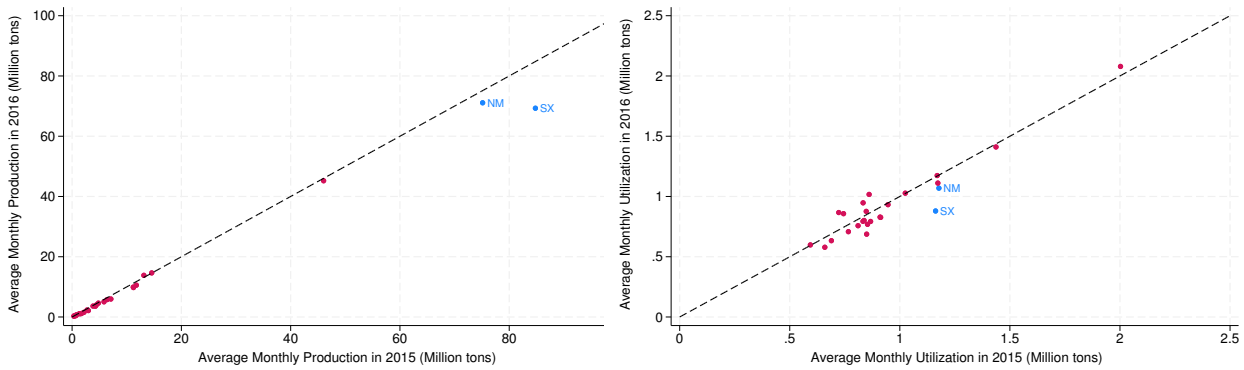
## H.1 Distribution of Coal Reserves

Figure H.1: Coal Reserves in 2016



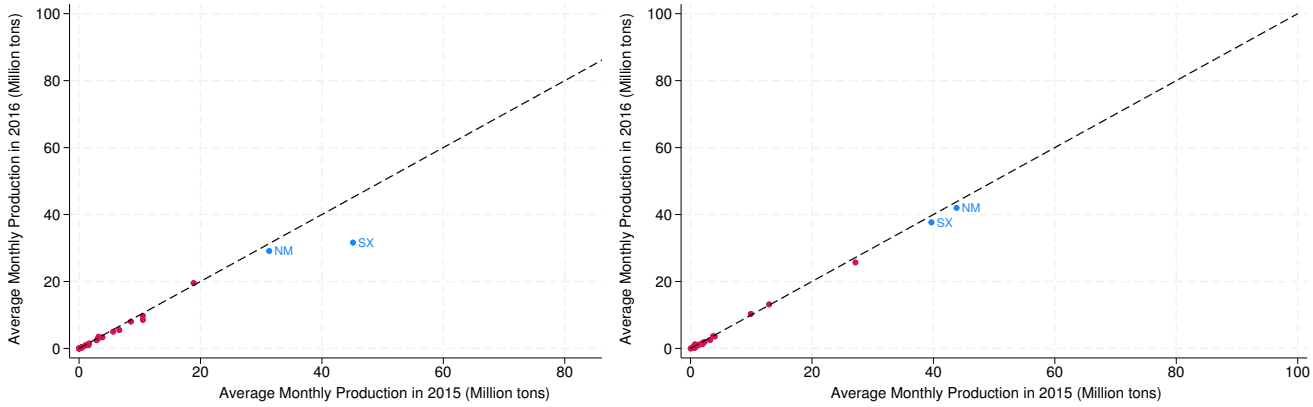

Notes: Reserves are coal resources that have been surveyed and are feasible for excavation based on data from Qianzhan Industrial Research Institute.

Figure H.2: Shanxi and Inner Mongolia Reduce Production More in 2016
(a): Year-to-Year Production (b): Year-to-Year Utilization Factor




Notes: In panel (a), each dot represents a combination of 2015 (horizontal) and 2016 (vertical) average monthly production of a province. A location below the 45 degree line indicates that the 2016 production is lower. In panel (b), each dot represents a combination of average monthly utilization factors, defined as production over capacity (both normalized to the monthly level), of a province. A location below the 45 degree line indicates that the 2016 utilization factor is lower.

Figure H.3: SOE Reduces Production More in 2016
(a): Year-to-Year SOE Production (b): Year-to-Year Non-SOE Production




Notes: In panel (a), each dot represents a combination of 2015 (horizontal) and 2016 (vertical) average monthly production of a province's state-owned enterprises (SOE). A location below the 45 degree line indicates that the 2016 production is lower. In panel (b), each dot represents a combination of average monthly production by a province's non-SOE.

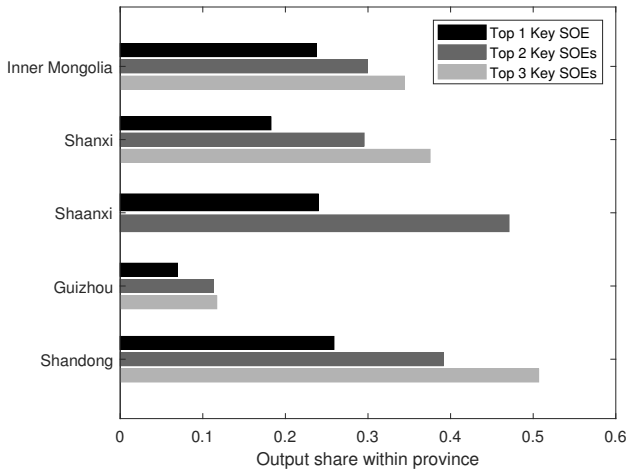


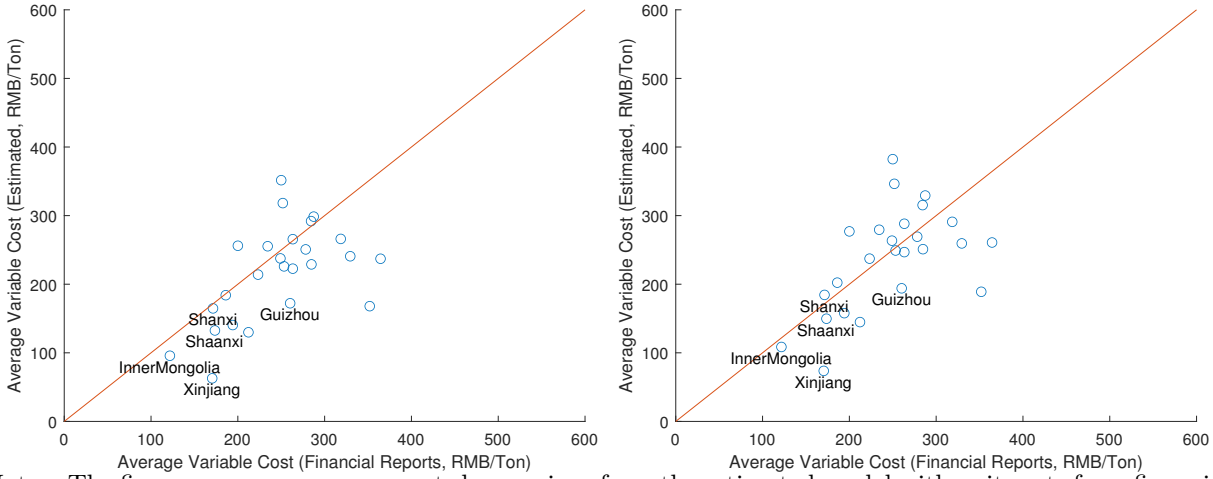

Figure H.4: Market Shares of Major SOE Coal Producers in Key Provinces

## H.2 Policy Effects on Each Province and SOEs

## H.3 Concentration of Top State-owned Coal Companies

## H.4 Comparison between Estimated Average Costs and Unit Costs from Financial Reports

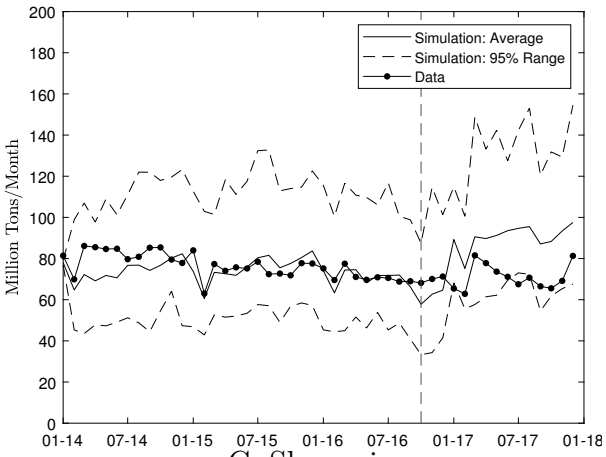
Figure H.5: Compare Estimated Average Costs with Unit Costs from Financial Reports
(A) Supply Model of Proportional Effects (B) Supply Model of Threshold Effects



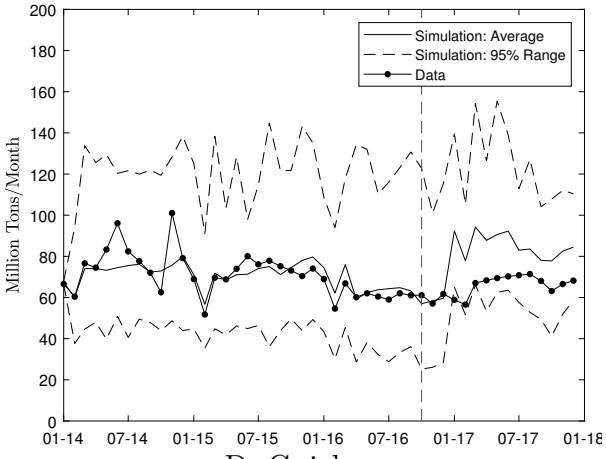

Notes: The figure compares average costs by province from the estimated model with unit costs from financial reports. The model's estimated average costs are calculated at the observed quantity and averaged between 2014 and 2016. The unit costs are collected from financial reports and bond prospectuses of major coal companies in each province, then averaged across all companies over three years in the sample.

Figure H.6: Simulations: Output by Provinces (Supply Model of Proportional Effects)

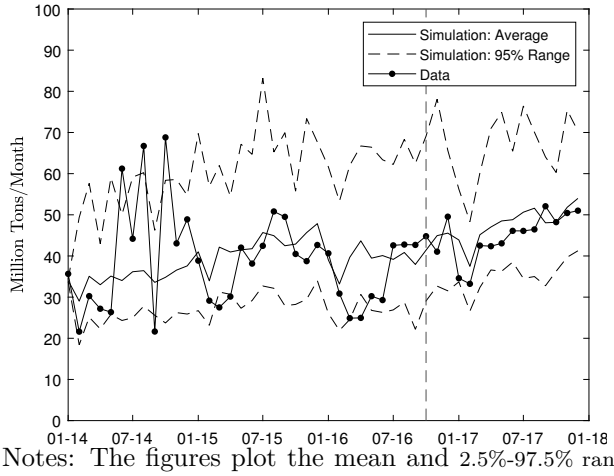
A: Inner Mongolia



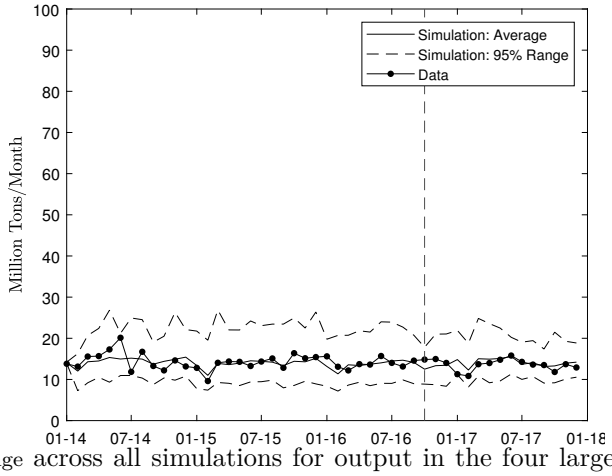

B: Shanxi




C: Shaanxi




D: Guizhou



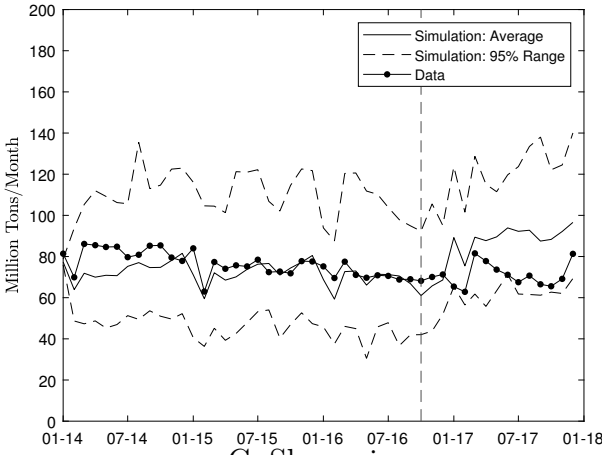

Notes: The figures plot the mean and 2.5%-97.5% range across all simulations for output in the four largest coal-producing provinces: Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Guizhou.

## H.5 Model Fit by Provinces

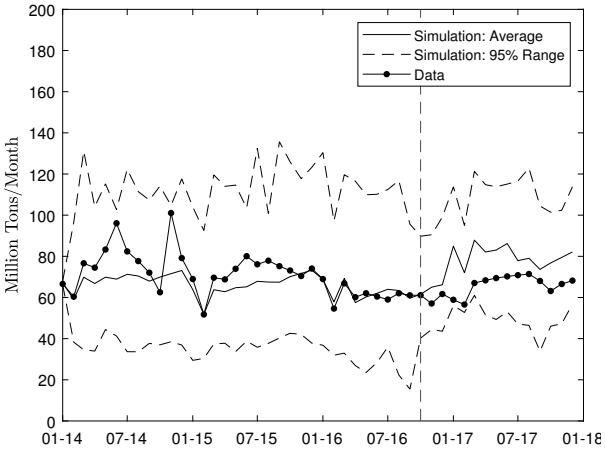
## H.6 Distribution of Economic Surplus by Top 10 Provinces

Figure H.7: Simulations: Output by Provinces (Supply Model of Threshold Effects)

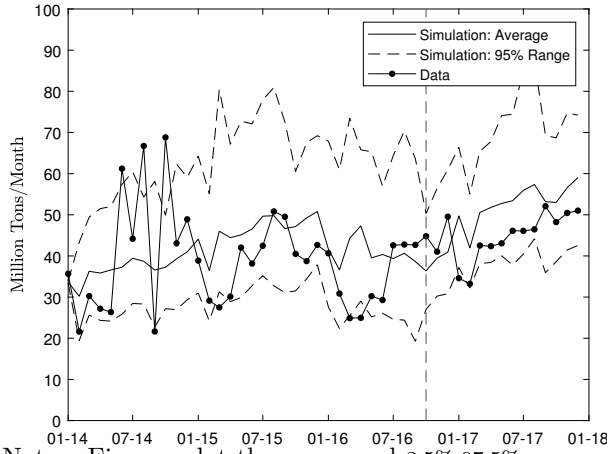
A: Inner Mongolia



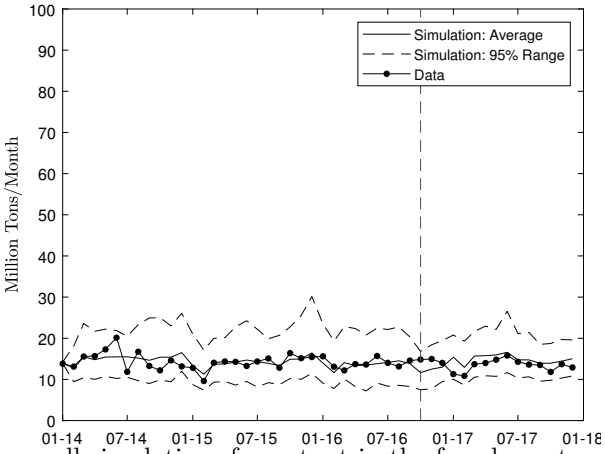

B: Shanxi




C: Shaanxi




D: Guizhou

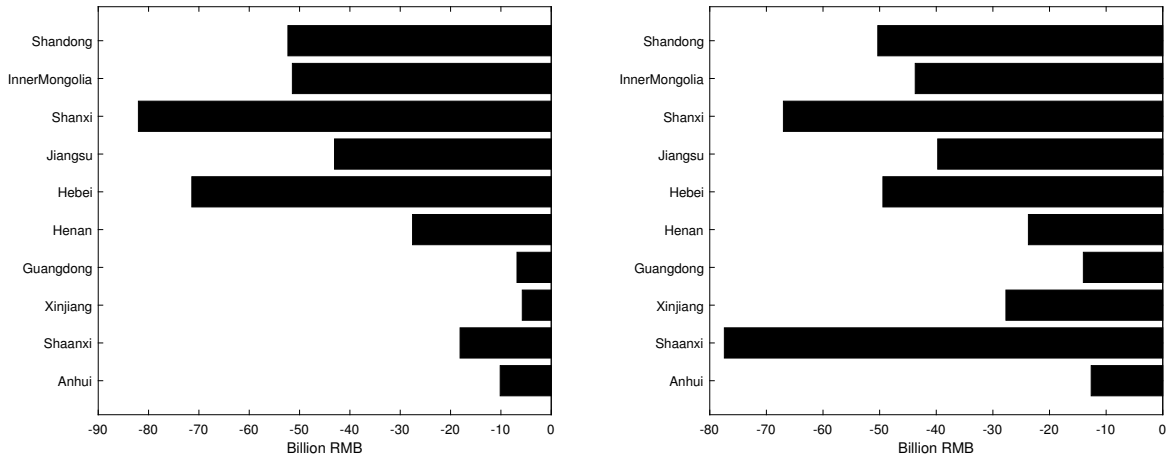



Notes: Figures plot the mean and 2.5%-97.5% range across all simulations for output in the four largest coal-producing provinces: Inner Mongolia, Shanxi and Shaanxi and Guizhou.

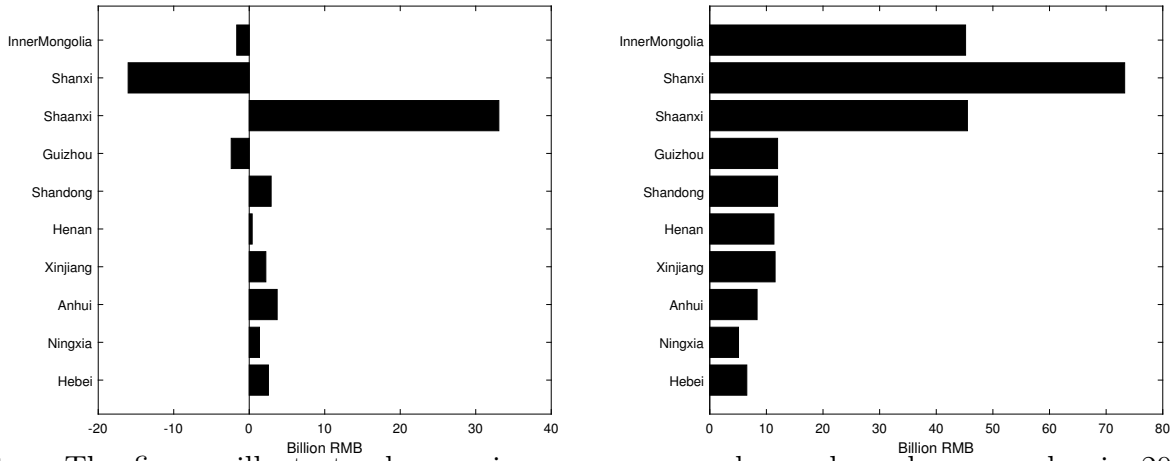
Figure H.8: Policy Effects on Economic Surpluses in Major Provinces

Proportional Policy Effects | Threshold Policy Effects

(a) Δ Consumer Surplus (Billion RMB)




(b) Δ Producer Surplus (Billion RMB)




Notes: The figures illustrate changes in consumer surplus and producer surplus in 2017 relative to a no-policy counterfactual. Changes in consumer surplus are ordered by provinces' average pre-policy consumption, while changes in producer surplus are ordered by provinces' average pre-policy production.