Abstract Prior research suggests that ownership structure is associated to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in developed countries. This article examines whether and how ownership structure affects CSR in emerging markets using Chinese firms' social responsibility ranking. Our empirical evidences show that for non-state-owned firms, corporate ownership dispersion is positively associated to CSR. However, for state-owned firms, whose controlling shareholder is the state, this relation is reversed. We attribute the reversed relationship to political interferences and further test this hypothesis by demonstrating that regional economic development is negatively related to CSR for state-owned firms due to decreased political interference in more developed areas. This study is the first to directly examine the relationship between the dispersion of corporate ownership and CSR in emerging markets, and our results depict that it is important to consider ownership type in assessing CSR in emerging market where state ownership is still prevalent such as China. The results also reveal that firm size, profitability, employee power, leverage, and growth opportunity affect CSR in China.

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