

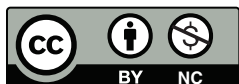
CHINA AS NUMBER ONE?



THE EMERGING VALUES
OF A RISING POWER

Yang Zhong and Ronald F. Inglehart

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TWO | Democratic Authoritarianism: A Study of Chinese Political Orientations¹

WENFANG TANG

Introduction

Freedom, democracy, and human rights are the cornerstones of a political system in the Western liberal world. This chapter will examine these concepts in the Chinese context. It will show how Chinese survey respondents view these ideas in relation to their own political system and how such perception differs from the way Western liberal elites (WLEs) portray China. The findings show that

1. Chinese citizens feel just as free or even freer than people in some liberal democratic societies;
2. the Chinese love democracy, perhaps just as much if not more than their Western liberal counterparts;
3. their understanding of democracy includes both political rights and social justice;
4. they are satisfied with their country's democracy;
5. they support government surveillance in public spaces but less so in private life; and
6. they prefer a strong leader with technical expertise to protect social justice.

The takeaway points of this study are that (1) assessment of democracy should be conducted by WLEs as well as by the public who live in their

own society; (2) the majority of the Chinese public appears to enjoy plenty of freedom, democracy, and human rights; and (3) in China, there is a strong populist authoritarian tendency in which a strong leader can protect people's well-being in exchange for their political support.

Freedom

Western political scientists and social elites spend a lot of time every year assessing the level of democracy, freedom, and human rights in countries and regions around the world. One example of an organization engaged in this work is the widely popular and self-proclaimed authority Freedom House. Its "Board of Trustees is comprised of prominent business and labor leaders, former diplomats and senior government officials, scholars, and journalists" in the United States.² It publishes annual reports on its website, freedomhouse.org, ranking the levels of freedom in different countries and regions.

Under the leadership of its Board of Trustees, Freedom House's reports rely on a number of criteria to assess freedom, democracy, and human rights under the two general categories of political rights and civil liberty. Political rights consist of free and fair elections, multi-party competition and public participation in decision-making, and a representative, clean, and accountable government. Civil liberty is defined by freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, personal autonomy, individual rights to travel and to own property, and social justice and minority rights.

Using the above criteria, the countries and regions that are ranked on top are overwhelmingly Western liberal societies (Figure 2.1a). Also as predicted, post-Communist and Communist societies such as Uzbekistan, Belarus, and China are ranked at the very bottom with zero or close to zero degrees of freedom, democracy, and human rights. These results are highly consistent with the Western liberal media's anti-Communist rhetoric. They come as no surprise if one takes a quick look at the above-mentioned composition of interests represented on Freedom House's Board of Trustees.

The criteria used for the Freedom House reports were developed by Western political and social elites. Freedom House is by no means the only organization that produces such reports. Another example of a similar Western liberal perspective is *Democracy Report 2021* by the V-Dem Institute, which gives China a very similar near-bottom score. In that report, China is ranked 174th out of 179 countries and regions for

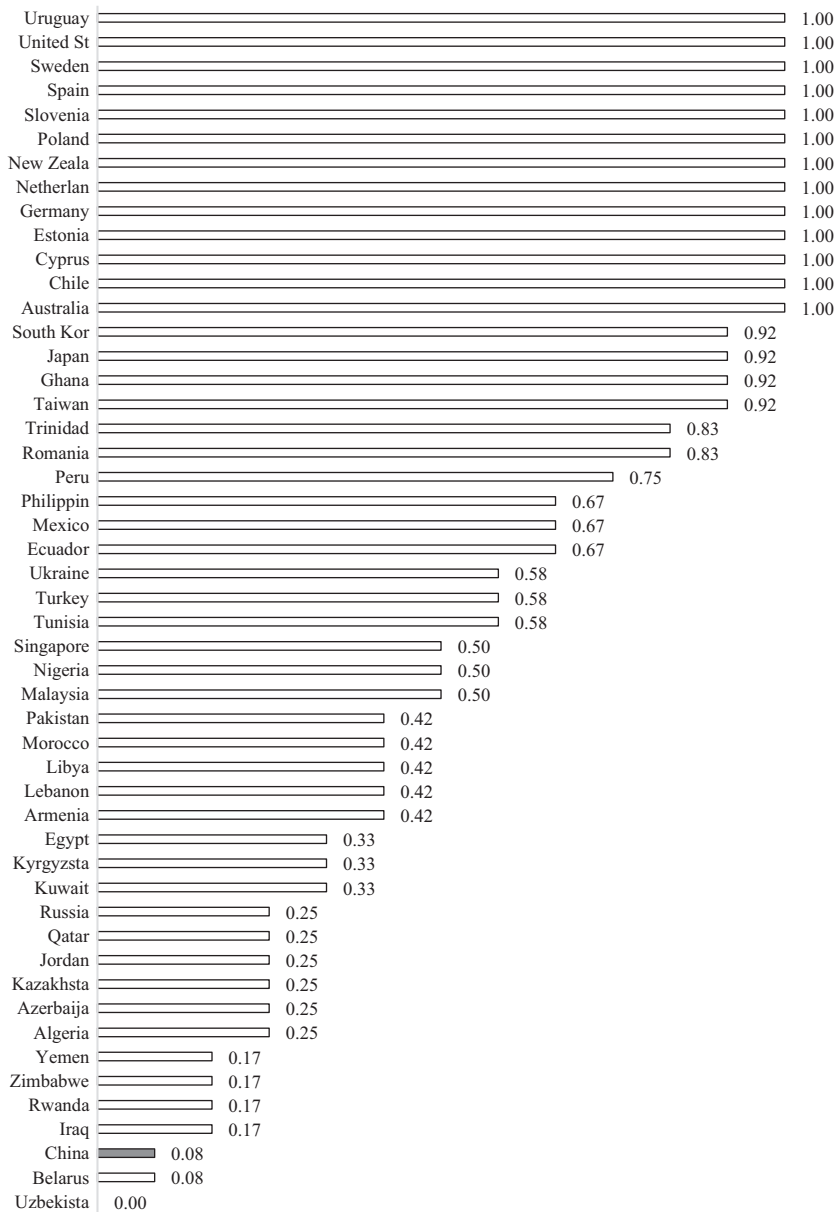


Figure 2.1a. Freedom in the World: FH Rankings 2012

Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world>.

democracy. The countries ranked below China include Turkmenistan, Syria, Yemen, North Korea, and Eritrea. Though the V-Dem report and the Freedom House report do not use the same measures, the fact that their scores are highly correlated (see Chapter 8) suggests that their criteria are similar.³

One question that the Freedom House reports cannot answer is how ordinary people living in each society feel about these criteria. Fortunately, the sixth wave World Values Surveys included a question about people's *perceived* freedom:

Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale where 0 means "none at all" and 1 means "a great deal" to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out. (World Values Survey Wave 6)

When the respondents in the World Values Surveys were asked about how free they felt (Figure 2.1b), the results were interestingly inconsistent with the Freedom House rankings. The average value of Freedom House's "objective" scores in Figure 2.1a is .42 on a 0–1 scale, but people's subjective feeling of freedom was at a much higher level of .68 (Figure 2.1b). When the two sets of scores in Figures 2.1a and 2.1b are compared and weighted by each country's population, there is no statistically significant correlation⁴ between "objective" and subjective freedom.

More importantly, the gap between different societies in the Freedom House measure is far greater than in the World Values Surveys. In other words, the Freedom House rankings seem to have exaggerated the gap between liberal and non-liberal societies. For example, China as a Communist country is given a near zero score in the Freedom House rankings. Yet the Chinese survey respondents reported an above-average level of perceived freedom comparable to its Asian neighbors in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. Studies have shown that the Chinese government encourages the public to voice their opinions that may serve to adjust public policy.⁵ For example, the National People's Congress and its local branches routinely hold public hearings before passing important policies related to income tax, environment regulations, and property tax, among many other issues.⁶ This and other similar channels of voicing public opinion may have contributed to the Chinese people's feeling that they have freedom of expression.

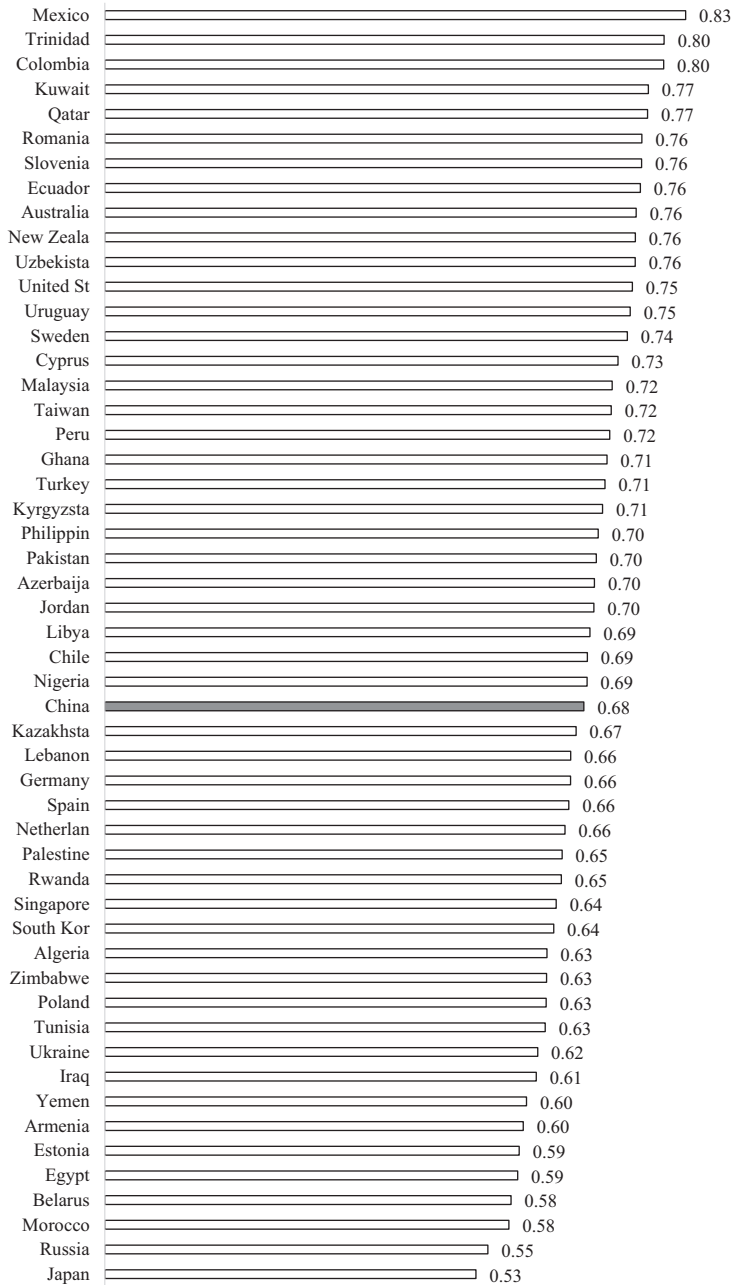


Figure 2.1b. Feeling Free
 Source: 6th Wave World Values Surveys.

Some people in the liberal democratic world are often too quick to say that surveys are not reliable in authoritarian societies.⁷ These people need to support their opinions with evidence, not just rely on their impressions, which could be heavily biased by the Western media. Others may think that Chinese citizens are brainwashed by their government's propaganda. That may be true, but their subjective feeling of freedom is valuable political capital for the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and for political stability in any society. Freedom House's rankings are less meaningful if its version of freedom does not make people feel free.

Democracy

In the seventh wave of the World Values Survey in China, conducted in 2018, there is a set of questions related to people's preferred political system, including democracy, strong leader rule, military rule, expert rule, and religious rule. As shown in Figure 2.2, democracy was the top choice by an overwhelming majority of Chinese respondents (83 percent), followed by strong leader rule (54 percent), military rule (53 percent) and expert rule (52 percent). At the bottom was religious rule (24 percent), which is not surprising in an atheist society like China. Chinese respondents' preference for democracy was further reflected in another question in the same survey, where 85 percent of the respondents agreed that it is very important to live in a democratic country.⁸

The fact that democracy is the top choice of so many Chinese people may be surprising for many in the West, who customarily believe Communism and democracy cannot coexist, like water and oil. Others

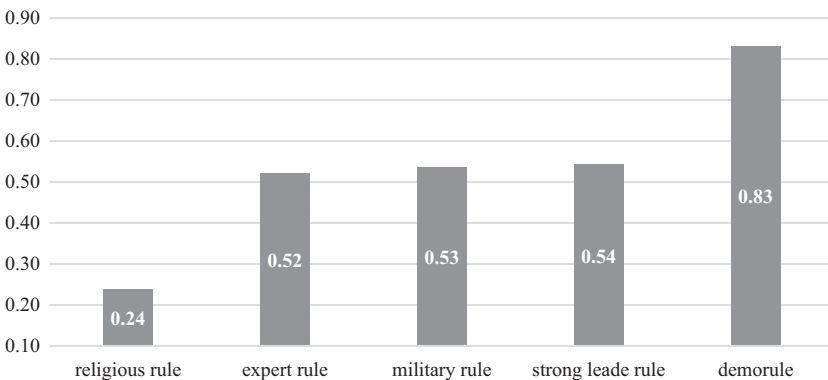


Figure 2.2. Preferred Political System in China

Source: World Values Survey China 2018.

may interpret such a result as democratic deprivation, meaning the Chinese people are deprived of democracy and that is why they want it so desperately.⁹

In fact, in the Chinese political vocabulary, *democracy* has never been a strange word.¹⁰ On the official list of core socialist values developed under Xi Jinping, democracy is ranked second after prosperity, followed by civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship. In fact, these terms are posted publicly in many places in China. Living in this political culture, it is not surprising at all that so many Chinese people picked democracy as their preferred political system.

Other studies have shown that China as a non-democratic society carries a number of “democratic” characteristics, including accountability without democracy,¹¹ a growing middle class,¹² strong regime support,¹³ civil society without democracy,¹⁴ and a high rate of government responsiveness to public demand,¹⁵ among many others.

It is one thing to show that people in China desire democracy; it is another to find out whether they think they have it in their own country. Studies like the Democracy Perception Index (DPI), conducted jointly by the Dalia Research Group and the Alliance of the Democracies, have shown that no government is living up to the democratic expectations of its citizens, and there is a gap called “democratic deficit” between people’s expectation for democracy and how they actually experience it in their country.¹⁶ Surprisingly, China is ranked in the top twenty countries with the smallest democratic deficit according to the DPI’s survey results.

The seventh wave of the World Values Survey asked another set of questions related to Chinese people’s satisfaction with their country’s political system, democracy, and human rights. Similar to earlier studies,¹⁷ the results show that satisfaction with China’s political system was at a high level of 72 percent. In the meantime, satisfaction with democracy and human rights were also relatively high, at 68 percent and 72 percent, respectively (Figure 2.3).

Further examination of the relationship between these concepts shows that the correlation coefficients of political system satisfaction with democracy satisfaction and human rights satisfaction are high, at .63 and .41, respectively. In other words, the Chinese survey respondents were satisfied with their political system, mostly because they were satisfied with democracy and human rights within that system. Again, these findings seem to go against the Freedom House and V-Dem perceptions of China as having near-zero democracy and human rights.¹⁸

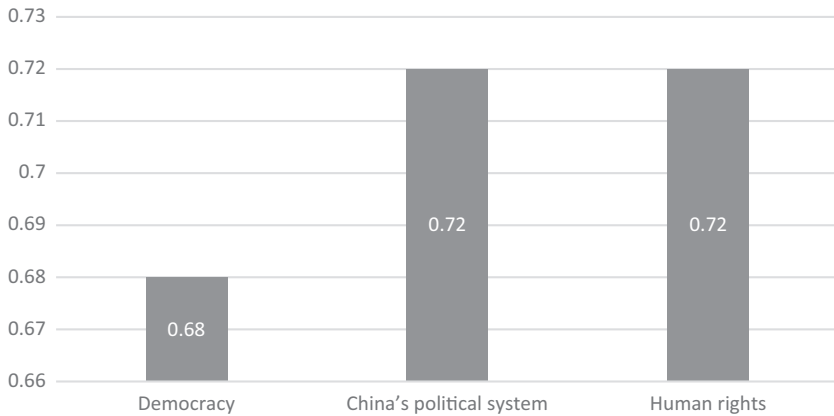


Figure 2.3. Political Satisfaction in China
 Source: World Values Survey China 2018.

Further cross-country and cross-regional comparisons of satisfaction with democracy are possible using the sixth wave of the World Values Surveys (Figure 2.4). In these surveys, the maximum level of satisfaction with democracy is .74 on a 0–1 scale (Uruguay and Sweden), the minimum level is .32 (Armenia), and China is at .60, which is above the average score of .55. When compared with the Freedom House scores in Figure 2.1a, they do not show any statistically significant relationship with the scores in Figure 2.4 when weighted by each country’s population.¹⁹ In other words, there is no statistically significant relationship between the Freedom House’s “objective” ranking of democracy and people’s subjective satisfaction with democracy in their own societies.

Even if the Chinese survey respondents expressed their strong desire for and high degree of satisfaction with democracy, skeptics may still question the validity of these findings. For these skeptics, one unanswered question is the meaning of democracy in the Chinese context. The Chinese could define democracy very differently from the standard understanding in the West.

The meaning of democracy can be identified by a set of questions in the seventh World Values Survey in China. The respondents were asked to assess how essential each of a list of concepts was in their understanding of democracy, including political rights (competitive election and individual freedom), social justice (gender equality, unemployment protection, equal pay, taxing the rich), and rule by religious law.

While they considered religious law the least important for democracy (25 percent), the Chinese survey respondents considered political

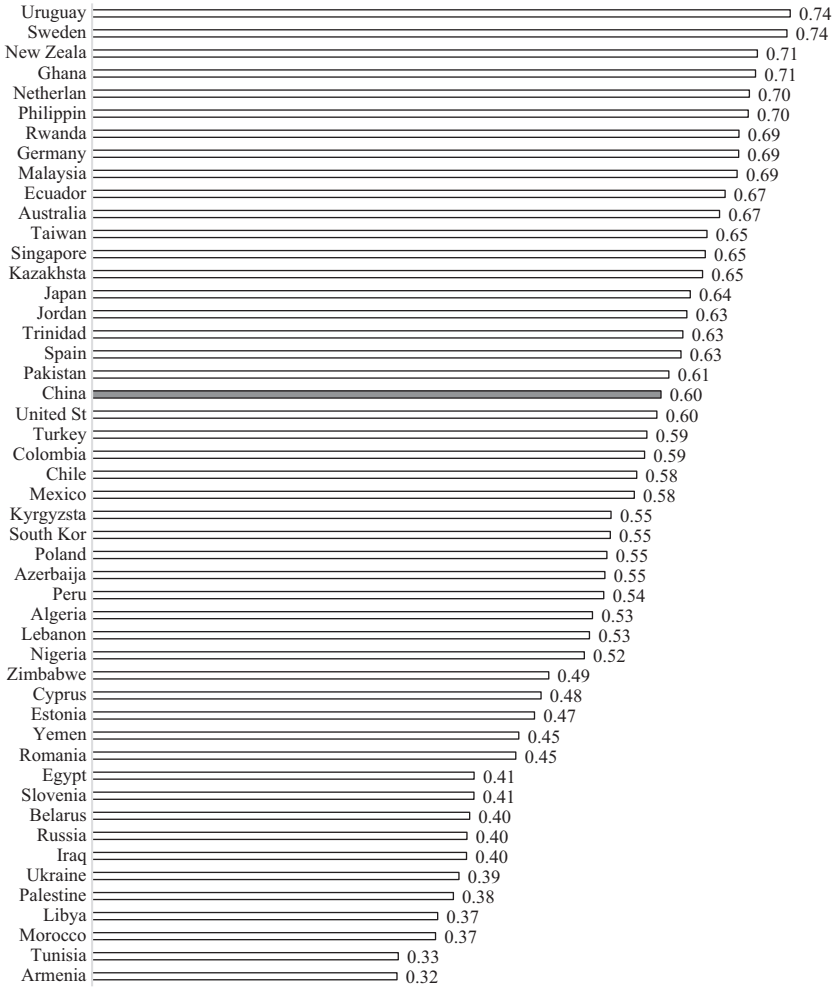


Figure 2.4. Satisfaction with Democracy in Selected Countries and Regions
 Source: World Values Surveys Wave 6.

rights and social justice as each having equal importance. Eighty-five percent and 77 percent thought election and individual freedom were essential, and 89 percent, 81 percent, 77 percent, and 62 percent valued gender equality, unemployment protection (help jobless), income equality (equal pay), and taxing the rich as important for democracy (Figure 2.5). It seems that both political rights and social justice are the essential components in the Chinese perception of democracy.

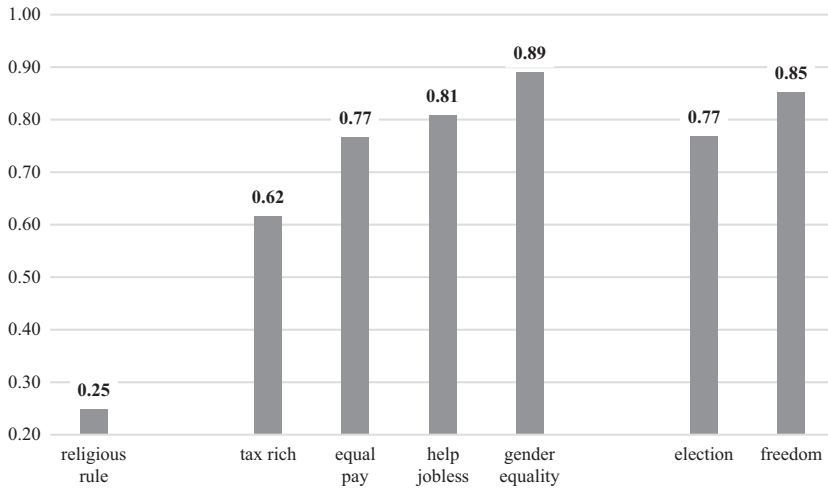


Figure 2.5. How Important Are These Items for Democracy?

Source: World Values Survey in China (2018).

So why are these elements, particularly elections and freedom, so important for the Chinese people when these elements do not exist in China in the eyes of the Western liberal elites? In the previous section, this study explained that Chinese survey respondents felt plenty of freedom in their everyday life and that the Freedom House ranking of freedom may be incomplete. One example of freedom of expression that the Freedom House reports missed is the fact that while the official media is indeed controlled by the Chinese government, citizens are allowed to express their opinions on social media, and such expressions frequently influence the government's decision-making.²⁰

While it is true that China does not have multi-party direct elections, it does have indirect elections where lower-level delegates vote for the legislators in the next level up.²¹ These elections are quite competitive among the candidates within the ruling Communist Party.²² In this context, it is not surprising that the Chinese public consider freedom and election as necessary components of their political system.

To further confirm that political rights and social justice are essential in the Chinese understanding of democracy and in assessing the quality of China's political system, it is necessary to perform a multivariate analysis on the impact of these two elements in people's interpretation of democracy, while controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors, including gender, age, education, social class, Party membership, urbanization, ethnicity, religiosity, media consumption, and geographic region.

In models 1–3 of Table 2.1, both political rights (*electfreekey*) and social equality (*equalitykey*) have statistically significant positive effects on the respondents' desire for democracy (*demoimp*), as well as on their satisfaction with the actual level of democracy (*demorightsat*) and with China's political system as a whole (*systemsat*). These findings suggest that political rights and social equality are part of the definition of democracy and part of the reasons for people's satisfaction with China's existing political system.

Some of the individual level differences in Table 2.1 are also worth mentioning. In general, older age groups tended to value (*demoimp*) and be more satisfied with democracy (*demorightsat*) and with China's political system (*systemsat*) than the younger groups. Education increased both need for democracy and satisfaction with the political system. Social class played a positive role in improving satisfaction with both democracy and political system. Urban residents, the ethnic Han majority, and atheists were less satisfied with China's political system than rural residents, ethnic minorities, and those who practice religion.

One of the more interesting findings concerns the role of media. While the official media (*mediagov*) expectedly helped increase people's

Table 2.1. Multivariate Analysis of Chinese Political Orientations (OLS Regression)

	<i>demoimp</i>	<i>demorightsat</i>	<i>systemsat</i>	<i>govsurveillance</i>	<i>strongleader</i>
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>electfreekey</i>	0.208***	0.065***	0.086***	0.083**	-0.026
<i>equalitykey</i>	0.145***	0.057**	0.083**	0.128***	0.128***
Female	0.007	0.020***	0.008	-0.005	0.027***
age23–30	-0.026*	-0.054***	-0.031*	0.023	0.068***
age31–40	0.021	-0.054***	-0.012	0.011	0.068***
age41–50	0.032**	-0.042***	0.007	-0.027	0.055***
age51–60	0.030*	-0.023	0.035*	0.004	0.051**
age61–70	0.038**	0.006	0.059***	0.035	0.029
Education (yr)	0.005***	-0.001	0.002*	-0.003*	-0.001
Social class	-0.019	0.081***	0.096***	-0.033*	0.011
CCP	0.015	0.021	0.020	0.025	-0.024
Urban	-0.008	-0.007	-0.017*	0.011	-0.015
Han	-0.006	-0.009	-0.055***	-0.066***	0.067***
Atheist	-0.012	0.004	-0.021*	-0.003	-0.023
<i>mediagov</i>	0.056***	0.097***	0.089***	0.076***	-0.052**
<i>mediasoc</i>	0.041***	-0.029*	-0.032*	0.002	-0.037

Table 2.1. (Continued)

	<u>demoimp</u>	<u>demorightsat</u>	<u>systemsat</u>	<u>govsurveillance</u>	<u>strongleader</u>
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	0.460***	0.595***	0.563***	0.537***	0.484***
Observations	2,917	2,897	2,913	2,903	2,857
R-squared	0.143	0.090	0.085	0.057	0.058

Source: Seventh World Values Survey in China (2018).

Notes: * p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01. Regions (provinces) are controlled but not shown. See Appendix for the summary statistics of the variables in this table. The variables in the tables are based on the following definitions:

demoimp: How important is it for R to live in a democratic country?;

demorightsat: factor index of R's satisfaction with China's level of democracy and with respect to human rights;

systemsat: R's overall satisfaction with the functioning of China's political system;

govsurveillance: factor index of R's support for surveillance in public space, in private email, and for collecting personal information without one's awareness;

strongleader: factor index of R's preferences for a strong leader not limited by fixed terms, and for expert rule;

electfreekey: factor index of support for free elections and for individual freedom;

equalitykey: factor index of support for gender equality, unemployment protection, equal pay, and taxing the rich;

mediagov: obtained social and political information through government media; and

mediasoc: obtained social and political information through social media.

desire for democracy and their satisfaction with democracy and with the political system, social media (mediasoc) decreased their satisfaction with democracy and with the political system. This is perhaps caused by the negative information that is more likely to be circulated on social media but censored in the official media.

Some studies have found the different meaning of democracy in China by showing the paternalistic relationship between the state and society.²³ The available evidence in the World Values Surveys does not seem to show any drastic difference from the standard Western definition of democracy, at least not in the definition of social democracy. The findings in this section suggest that political rights and social equality are closely associated with people's understanding of democracy in China, although elections and human rights may carry different meanings in China than in the Western liberal world.

Human Rights

Human rights is another concept frequently mentioned in the Western liberal democratic paradigm. In the sixth wave of World Values Surveys, there is a question regarding people's satisfaction with human rights in

their respective societies (Figure 2.6). The highest level of human rights satisfaction is .91 (Qatar) and the lowest is .30 (Egypt). China's score is .67, which is above the average score of .55 among the selected countries and regions in Figure 2.6. When the perceived human rights satisfaction scores in Figure 2.6 are compared with the Freedom House rankings in Figure 2.1a, the correlation coefficient is $-.32$ ($p < .05$). The higher the "objective" democracy score by Freedom House, the lower the subjective satisfaction with human rights in a country or region. One explanation for the inconsistency between the two supposedly similar sets of scores is that people's understanding of human rights is different or even opposite from Freedom House's definition of the concept.

Unlike the liberal definition of human rights that emphasizes the individual's political rights, the Chinese concept of human rights prioritizes the right to survival over political rights, and the right of majority over the right of the minority (see also Chapter 1 in this volume). Such a definition of human rights provides the Chinese Communist Party with the legitimacy to focus on economic development before political decentralization, as well as the justification to suppress individual dissidents in the interest of the majority's economic well-being. More importantly, this means that Chinese survey respondents likely understand human rights as a broader concept that contains both economic and political rights.

As shown in Figure 2.6, the Chinese seem to accept and feel content with such a description of human rights. Another way to test the Chinese people's acceptance of their government's definition of human rights is to examine their attitude toward government surveillance, both of individual behavior in public spaces and in private life. There are three statements in the 2018 World Values Survey in China that measure this. The survey asks: "Do you think the government should have the right to do the following:

1. Keep people under video surveillance in public areas;
2. Monitor all emails and any other information exchanged on the internet;
3. Collect information about anyone living in China without their knowledge."

The first statement is more related to surveillance in public spaces, while the other two are more about surveillance in private life. The Chinese survey respondents were generally supportive of all the three measures.

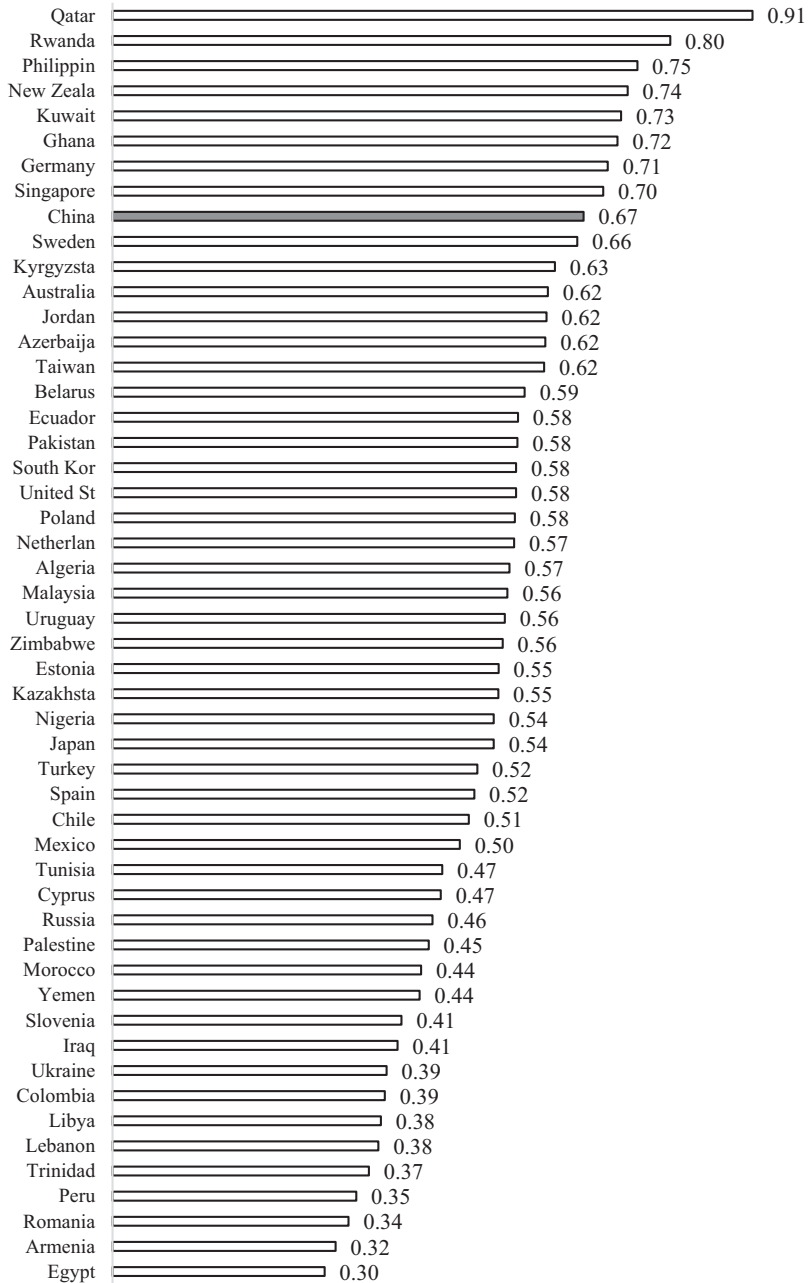


Figure 2.6. Satisfaction with Human Rights in Selected Countries and Regions
 Source: World Values Surveys Wave 6.

Perhaps it reflects the public acceptance of the official definition of human rights that stresses public interest at the expense of individual privacy.

What is more interesting is the gap between support for public space surveillance and private space surveillance. While a clear majority of the survey respondents (73 percent) supported government surveillance in public areas, only 57 percent and 51 percent said that they supported monitoring private emails and collecting private information without people's knowledge (Figure 2.7). The support for public surveillance was 16–22 percent higher than the support for government surveillance of private activities.

In the multivariate regression analysis in Table 2.1, when the three questions related to government surveillance were combined into a single factor index (govsurveillance, model 4, Table 2.1), the desire for political rights and social equality continued to play a positive role in promoting support for government surveillance. Those who valued political rights and social equality trusted that government surveillance would protect their political rights and social justice. This finding may seem contradictory, since surveillance could be understood as a violation of individual rights. In the Chinese context, the government is the provider of public goods, which the government describes as the guarantee of the Chinese version of human rights that emphasize the right to survive (also discussed in Chapter 1). Perhaps this narrative is a likely reason for this seemingly conflicting finding.

As shown in Table 2.1, other factors that significantly affected people's attitude toward government surveillance included education, social

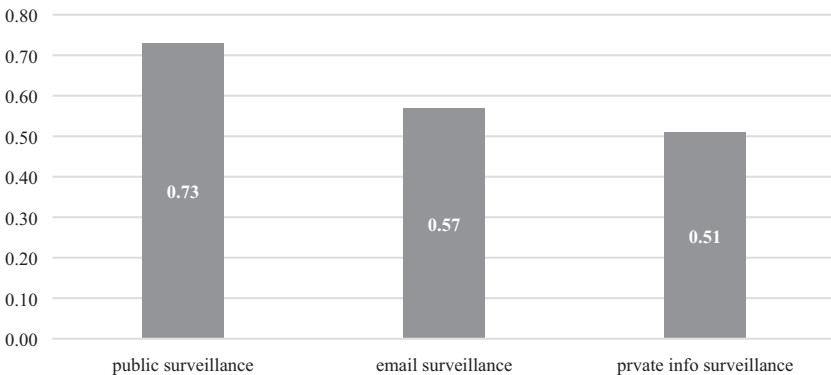


Figure 2.7. Support for Government Surveillance

Source: World Values Survey in China (2018).

class, ethnicity (han), and government media consumption (mediagov). The more educated, those in the upper classes, and the Han majority were more right-conscious and less likely to support government surveillance. Understandably, relying on the official media for social and political information helped promote support for government surveillance.

In short, the most interesting finding in this section is the clear distinction in people's understanding of public space versus private space, where their support for public monitoring is significantly stronger than for the monitoring of private life. The awareness of privacy may be somewhat surprising to those who expect Chinese citizens to whole-heartedly accept the official line of human rights that downplays the importance of individual privacy.

Democratic Authoritarianism

In the previous sections, this study has shown that the Chinese people hold a strong preference for democracy and freedom. This section will examine the tendency toward authoritarianism in the Chinese political orientation.

As the reader may remember from Figure 2.2, while the Chinese respondents demonstrated the strongest preference for democracy (83 percent), they were not turned off by a strong leader (54 percent), military rule (53 percent), or expert rule (52 percent). Further analysis shows that preferences for strong leader, military, and expert rule are positively correlated. For example, the correlation coefficient for strong leader and expert rule is $r=.29$, and $r=.18$ for strong leader and military rule.

When the Chinese preference for a strong leader is compared historically (Figure 2.8), it shows a steady increase from 37 percent in 2000 (fourth WVS), to 43 percent in 2008 (fifth WVS), to 46 percent in 2012 (sixth WVS), and finally to 53 percent in 2018 (seventh WVS). When the Chinese preference for a strong leader in 2018 is compared cross-societally, China ranks in the top eleven of the fifty-two countries and regions where data were available in the sixth World Values Surveys (Figure 2.8), suggesting a relatively strong authoritarian orientation in China.

When “strong leader” and “expert rule” are combined into a factor index in the multivariate analysis in model 5, Table 2.1 (strongleader), it generated some very interesting results. Desire for political rights had a weak and statistically insignificant negative effect on support for a strong

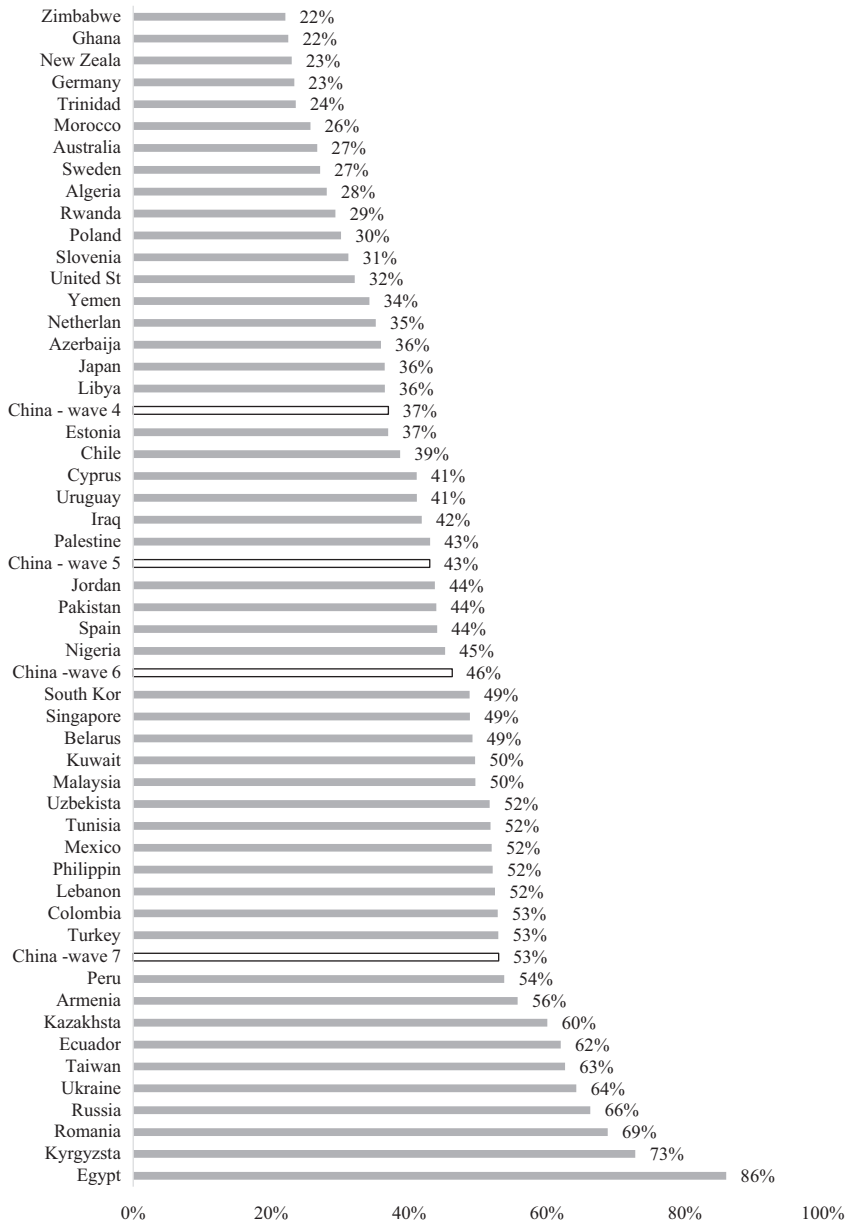


Figure 2.8. Support for “Having a Strong Leader Who Does Not Have to Bother with Parliament and Elections”

Sources: World Values Surveys Waves 4 (China only), 5 (China only), 6 (all countries/regions) and 7 (China only).

leader. Desire for social equality played a strong and statistically significant positive role in promoting strong leader support. In the minds of the Chinese survey respondents, perhaps it was unclear if the strong leader would provide them with more political rights, but they would for sure provide more social equality.

The middle-aged groups were more supportive of a strong leader than the youngest (16–22) and the oldest (70+) groups (Table 2.1). These middle-aged groups were in their working ages and likely see the benefits of having a strong leader who would promise them improved social welfare benefits.²⁴ The Han majority was more supportive of a strong leader than were the ethnic minorities, perhaps because the strong leader represented the nationalistic tendency in the trade war between China and the United States since Donald Trump became the U.S. president in 2017.

Finally, as seen in Table 2.1, the official media did not meet the expectation of promoting support for a strong leader. It actually showed a negative effect on strong leader support. One possibility may be the overexposure of Xi Jinping on the official media, causing an averse public reaction. Similarly, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members were not enthusiastic about strong leader rule, with Party membership having a negative and statistically insignificant effect. One reason for the weak support among the Party members could be that Xi Jinping, China's current strong leader, is a populist leader whose style is to directly reach out to the Chinese society while bypassing both Party members and the media. Another explanation is that Xi's decision to remove his term limit from the Chinese Constitution in early 2018 may have been met with reluctance among the Party members, although it was supported by the general public. In either case, Chinese public opinion suggests a populist authoritarian tendency,²⁵ where the strong leader often reaches out to the public directly during site visits to rural areas, factories, urban neighborhoods, and so on, while circumventing Party members. As a result, the strong leader enjoys strong public support.

Conclusion

This study has found that there is a strong desire for and a high level of satisfaction with freedom, democracy, and human rights among the Chinese public. They think China's political system is democratic, which they define as satisfying people's political rights and social justice. In

the meantime, this study also found there is stronger support for government surveillance in public space than in private life. Finally, this study discovered that there is a lot of support for a populist authoritarian leader who can promote social equality for the ordinary people in China.

These findings point to at least three conclusions. First, they suggest that the Western liberal elites (WLEs) intentionally or unintentionally know very little about non-Western political cultures. Their perception of other political systems is vastly different from how people see their own political systems. When people's perceived freedom, democracy, and human rights are combined into a single index in selected countries and regions (Figure 2.9), these scores show no statistically significant relationship with the Freedom House rankings in Figure 2.1a when weighted by population.²⁶

This finding calls for a need to include public opinion if organizations such as Freedom House want to make an honest and objective endeavor to understand the world.²⁷ This may not be possible, since these organizations have a strong ideological agenda to change how other countries and/or the world is run according to their values and beliefs. In this case, this study can still serve as a warning about the inaccuracy of certain Western-centric portraits of the world.

The second conclusion of this study is that concepts such as freedom, democracy, and human rights need to be more inclusive than how they are defined in the existing literature. Rather than showing that these concepts are missing in China, the findings in this study suggest that democracy, freedom, and human rights are common ideas in the Chinese political language. One should not simply disqualify China from being democratic just because it has a different political system than Western liberal democracies. Democracy is similarly defined in the Chinese mind as requiring elections and freedom.²⁸ Only by taking a closer look at the meanings of election and freedom one can see how differently these concepts are understood in the Chinese context. WLEs may argue that these definitions cannot be used to describe elections and freedom, but that will be a highly subjective and ideological decision with limited credibility.

The third and final conclusion is that the Chinese political attitude has a populist authoritarian nature. Chinese public opinion seems to strongly support a populist version of democracy, going against a Western-style institutional version. They demand a technically capable strong leader who can provide social justice and protection of social welfare, a point that echoes the Confucian political culture elaborated on

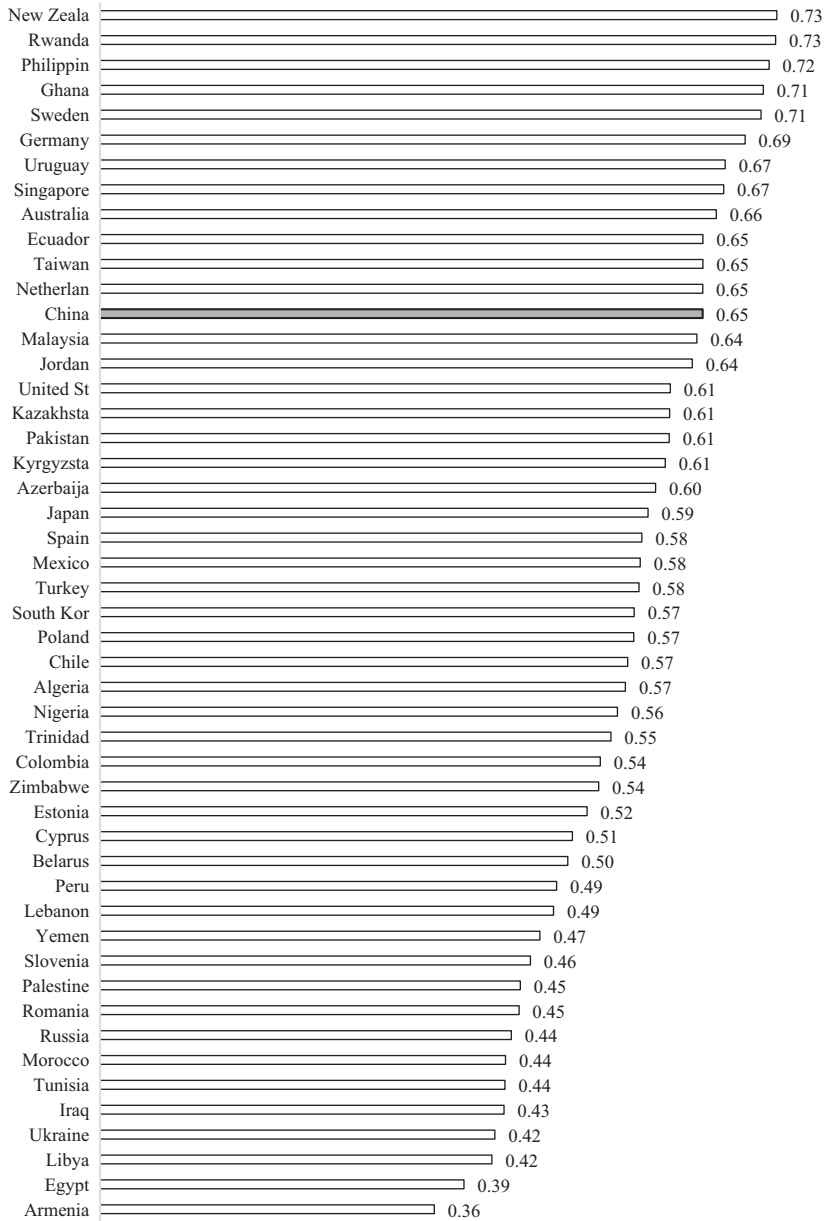


Figure 2.9. Support for Combined Index of Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights in Selected Countries and Regions

Source: 6th Wave World Values Surveys.

in the introductory chapter.²⁹ Before the WLEs tell us what the world should be, it is important to develop an accurate understanding of what the world is.

Notes

1. The authors wish to thank Eva Jialei Zhou for her research assistance.
2. See “Board & Leadership,” <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us/board-leadership>.
3. See https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/74/8c/748c68ad-f224-4cd7-87f9-8794add5c60f/dr_2021_updated.pdf.
4. The correlation coefficient is .27 ($p < .10$) without weighting, but .16 ($p = .2633$) with weighting.
5. *Economist*, “The 1.4bn-People Question: Apparatchiks and Academics Alike Struggle to Take China’s Pulse. Pollsters Have to Use Roundabout Ways to Find Out What People Are Thinking,” October 24, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/china/2020/10/24/apparatchiks-and-academics-alike-struggle-to-take-chinas-pulse>; Jidong Chen and Yiqing Xu, “Why Do Authoritarian Regimes Allow Citizens to Voice Opinions Publicly?” *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 3 (2017): 792–803.
6. See, for example, <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c199/200508/a5c12fb1d6934d65984a4bf407e341d7.shtml>.
7. Dieter Fuchs, “The Political Culture Paradigm,” in *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2007), 161–84; Richard Rose, “Perspectives on Political Behavior in Time and Space,” in *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2007), 283–304.
8. Weighted.
9. R. Truex, “Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability by Wenfang Tang, Oxford University Press,” a book review in *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2016): 617–18.
10. Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, Andrew J. Nathan, and Doh Chull Shin, eds., *How East Asians View Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
11. Lily Tsai, *Accountability Without Democracy: Solidarity Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
12. Jie Chen and Bruce Dickson, *Allies of the State: China’s Private Entrepreneurs and Democratic Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
13. Jie Chen, *Popular Political Support in Urban China* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2014).
14. Bruce J. Dickson, *The Party and the People: Chinese Politics in the 21st Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).
15. Wenfang Tang, “The ‘Surprise’ of Authoritarian Resilience in China,” *American Affairs* II, no. 1 (2018): 101–17.
16. Fred Deveaux, *Democracy Perception Index–2020* (Dalia Research & the Alliance of Democracies, 2020), <https://www.allianceofdemocracies.org/initiatives/the-copenhagen-democracy-summit/dpi-2020>; J. Peder Zane, “Democracy and the Challenges Imposed by Freedom,” *The New York Times*, September 14, 2015.

17. Qing Yang and Wenfang Tang, "Exploring the Sources of Institutional Trust in China: Culture, Mobilization, or Performance?" *Asian Politics & Policy* 2, no. 3 (2010): 415–36; Yingnan Joseph Zhou, Wenfang Tang, and Xuchuan Lei, "Social Desirability of Dissent: An IAT Experiment with Chinese University Students," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 25 (2020): 113–38.
18. Tang, "The 'Surprise' of Authoritarian Resilience."
19. $R=.15$, $p=.3283$
20. Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (2013): 326–43.
21. National People's Congress, "Constitution of the People's Republic of China (Adopted at the Fifth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress on December 4, 1982)," <https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/A1%21en.assist.pdf>.
22. Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction, and Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
23. Jie Lu and Tianjian Shi, "The Battle of Ideas and Discourses before Democratic Transition: Different Democratic Conceptions in Authoritarian China," *International Political Science Review* 36, no. 1 (2015): 20–41.
24. Frederick Solt, Yue Hu, Kevan Hudson, Jungmin Song, and Dong "Erico" Yu, "Economic Inequality and Class Consciousness," *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 3 (2017): 1079–83.
25. Wenfang Tang, *Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
26. $R=-.09$, $p=.5281$, weighted by 2012 population.
27. Some WLEs are more cool-minded. For these people, China is a threat to the Western system precisely because the Chinese government is capable of rallying public support (Brooks 2019).
28. Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, Andrew J. Nathan, and Doh Chull Shin, *How East Asians View Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
29. Also see Ronald Inglehart, "Postmaterialist Values and the Shift from Survival to Self-Expression Values," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

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Appendix Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
demoimp	3,013	.863628	.185059	0	1
electfreekey	2,964	.815447	.1947479	0	1
equalitykey	2,967	.8055372	.162474	0	1
demorightsat	2,985	.7070152	.1915891	0	1
systemsat	3,001	.7283128	.2174793	0	1
strongleader	2,936	.5257174	.2700958	0	1
govsurveil-e	3,003	.5859616	.2681293	0	1
female	3,036	.5490777	.4976675	0	1
agroup1	3,036	.0816864	.2739315	0	1
agroup2	3,036	.1261528	.3320762	0	1
agroup3	3,036	.1959816	.3970198	0	1
agroup4	3,036	.2318841	.4221049	0	1
agroup5	3,036	.1818182	.3857581	0	1
agroup6	3,036	.1824769	.3863007	0	1
edyr	3,036	10.08531	4.415746	0	21
class	3,006	1.293081	.7969985	0	3
ccp	3,036	.0958498	.2944336	0	1
urban	3,036	.4041502	.4908077	0	1
han	3,036	.9463109	.2254402	0	1
atheist	3,036	.8577075	.3494074	0	1
mediagov	3,036	.4009387	.2270535	0	1
mediasoc	3,036	.5089139	.3095417	0	1
Shanghai	3,036	.0194335	.1380655	0	1
Yunnan	3,036	.0204216	.1414608	0	1
Inner Mongolia	3,036	.0197628	.1392073	0	1
Beijing	3,036	.0197628	.1392073	0	1
Jilin	3,036	.020751	.1425731	0	1
Sichuan	3,036	.0503953	.2187952	0	1
Tianjin	3,036	.0204216	.1414608	0	1
Ningxia	3,036	.0191041	.1369134	0	1
Anhui	3,036	.0405138	.1971935	0	1
Shandong	3,036	.1083663	.3108936	0	1
Shanxi	3,036	.0362319	.1868974	0	1
Guangdong	3,036	.083004	.2759336	0	1
Guangxi	3,036	.0408432	.1979595	0	1
Jiangsu	3,036	.0365613	.1877129	0	1

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Jiangxi	3,036	.0167984	.1285367	0	1
Hebei	3,036	.0125165	.111193	0	1
Henan	3,036	.1399868	.3470305	0	1
Zhejiang	3,036	.0385375	.1925217	0	1
Hainan	3,036	.0200922	.1403389	0	1
Hubei	3,036	.0408432	.1979595	0	1
Hunan	3,036	.0217391	.1458545	0	1
Gansu	3,036	.0210804	.143676	0	1
Fujian	3,036	.0378788	.1909345	0	1
Guizhou	3,036	.0200922	.1403389	0	1
Liaoning	3,036	.020751	.1425731	0	1
Chongqing	3,036	.0115283	.1067669	0	1
Shanxi	3,036	.0204216	.1414608	0	1
Qinghai	3,036	.020751	.1425731	0	1
Heilongjiang	3,036	.0214097	.1447697	0	1

Source: Seventh World Values Survey in China (2018).

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languages including Chinese, and his theories have been analyzed and studied in most global and regional contexts.

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Revisions for Chapter 2

By Reviewer #1

Chapter provides a wide array of surprising and counter-intuitive findings. In previous works, Tang has made influential and engaging analyses of political values and behaviors in China. But in this chapter, the constant criticism of “Western Liberal Elites” feels lazy. Almost like a straw man argument, and it weakens the overall impact of the author’s perspective. At a minimum, some representative examples of WLE bias, not just Freedom House, are necessary so support this perspective. Who do you have in mind?

I added another example of V-Dem to show that FH is rather typical but not an isolated case, see below. I turned down the references to WLE in conclusion.

Throughout the chapter, Tang criticizes the “Western Liberal Elite” definitions of democracy, freedom, and human rights, based on the Freedom House assessment of China. FH is frequently criticized for its liberal democratic (i.e., US) bias. If he used different measures, like V-Dem or Polity, would China’s score be comparable to Freedom House? Zhong and Inglehart in ch. 8 suggest they are all highly correlated. Since they use different criteria to arrive at the same conclusion, the bias in FH cannot be the only factor. Perhaps the relative lack of democracy, freedom, and human rights in China is the reason that these different databases have such similar findings. Or, given Inglehart’s body of work, the Chinese definition of human rights is materialist, and Western definition is post-material?

I added another example on p. 3 about V-Dem and how similar it is to FH. The reviewer says China must lack democracy, freedom and human rights because FH and V-Dem use different criteria to reach the same conclusion. I don’t think I deny this fact, but I try to show and explain why the Chinese public feel otherwise. If V-Dem and FH are highly correlated as the reviewer says, their measures must be similar if not exactly the same. Again, it suggests that they are similarly biased.

Throughout the chapter, he mostly limits the data to means and bivariate correlations. Given the richness of the WVS dataset, why not look at changes over time as other chapters do? WVS 7 is a snap shot, but the other chapters show significant changes in the different waves of the survey. Are democratic values rising, falling or staying the same? Ditto for freedom, and human rights?

In figure 9, I did show the change over time for strong leader support in China from Wave 4, Wave 5, and Wave 6 to Wave 7. In addition to means and bivariate correlations, I draw important inclusions from the multivariate regression analysis in table 1.

Most chapters note an abrupt change in the 2018 wave toward more conservative/traditional values, with some attributing the shift to Xi’s conservative policies. Is that also seen in the data for this chapter?

Yes, in table 9, support for strong leaders noticeably increased overtime.

31-32: it may have felt good to write this paragraph, but does not really belong in a book like this I changed the tone of the sentence to make it less cynical but I am not sure I want to delete this paragraph if you are talking about the reliability of survey results from China. It is an important justification of figure b1 about feeling free.

46: the middle paragraph is confusing. Not clear what "official media" means in this context. Also, CCP members are not equivalent to the political elite. Real elites are probably not represented in the survey. The fact that CCP is consistently not statistically significant indicates they are typical of the population. Added a sentence about official media on p. 20. Also changed "political elites" to "party members".

How does Xi "answers to the public directly"? Changed the sentence to directly reaches to the public during his site visits, p. 20

Remarkable that Zhong and Ingelhart spend so much time criticizing this chapter in their ch. 8, but do not similarly critique the other chapters. I am not aware I am being attacked from behind. Would be nice if they show some courtesy by letting me know and giving me a chance to respond.

By Reviewer #2

This is a well written, and very interesting (yet provocative) chapter.

Need to define and operationalize democratic support. Need to answer the question of why you used the criteria and survey instruments you were using, theoretically and empirically. Any earlier studies that tackled the definition and operationalization of the concept of democratic support, and presented findings of such support in the Chinese setting (e.g., Chen and Dickson 2010; Chen 2014)? What are the differences between your definition and operationalization of the concept and theirs, and why?

Added Chen and Dickson 2010, Chen 2014, and more literature on p8, as examples of how these studies point to democracy with Chinese characteristics. For definition and operationalization, I am following the WVS instruments (empirical) which are consistent with the FH definitions (theoretical). In a way, the paper is about how to define these concepts. By using the different instruments and the findings, I am trying to show the reader the similarities and differences between FH and China.

"Unlike the liberal definition of human rights that emphasizes the individual's political rights, the Chinese concept of human rights takes the priority of the right to survive over political rights, and the right of majority over the right of the minority. Such definition of human rights

provides the Chinese Communist Party with the legitimacy to focus on economic development before political decentralization, and the justification to suppress individual dissidents in the interest of the majority's economic well-being (p. 40)." So, is the concept of "democracy" just an empty shell which can be used to cover any thoughts shared by a people, as long as the mere label, "democracy" or "human rights," is used?

These may be empty shells as shown by the FH scores, but as I suggest, they do contain the Chinese understandings, such as a strongman protecting people's welfare, the right to survival, etc. Added a sentence at the end of paragraph on p17 to show this point.

"Concepts such as freedom, democracy and human rights need to be peeled through further than the existing literature (p. 47)." But we did not see much mention of "existing literature" in the Chinese context (see a comment above) in the chapter.

Added more references throughout.

"Only by taking a closer look at the meanings of election and freedom one can see how different these concepts are understood in the Chinese context. WLEs may argue that these definitions cannot be used to describe election and freedom, but that will be a highly subjective and ideological decision, not an academic one (p. 49)." We might need to admit that the original concept of democracy is derived from Western experiences, and it is subjective, ideological, and academic—all of the above.

Changed to "subjective and ideological with limited credibility".