

Detecting Grassroots Bribery in an Authoritarian Society:
A Survey Experimental Approach

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Journal of Contemporary China, accepted and forthcoming in 2022.

Abstract: Drawing data from a national survey, this study relies on several embedded list experiments to examine the grassroots bribery that the survey respondents tried to hide due to social desirability. The findings from the list experiments are extracted to develop an innovative weighting technique to provide accurate estimations of grassroots bribery. It finds that the level of grassroots bribery of government officials is significantly higher than people would admit during China's anti-corruption campaign; that the reasons for bribery can be traced to the country's authoritarian public service distribution, the low risk of practicing bribery, and the rapid increase in disposable income. These findings suggest that China's anti-corruption campaign has been successful in deterring people from admitting, but nearly half of the survey respondents were still practicing bribery, and that grassroots bribery damages regime support and public trust of the government.

Keywords: Grassroots bribery; list experiment; statistical weighting; anticorruption; authoritarianism.