

Consultative Authoritarianism and Its Limits

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cps**Rory Truex¹****Abstract**

Consultative authoritarianism challenges existing conceptions of nondemocratic governance. Citizen participation channels are designed to improve policymaking and increase feelings of regime responsiveness, but how successful are these limited reforms in stemming pressure for broader change? The article develops a new theoretical lens to explain how common citizens perceive the introduction of partially liberalizing reforms and tests the implications using an original survey experiment of Chinese netizens. Respondents randomly exposed to the National People's Congress' (NPC) new online participation portals show greater satisfaction with the regime and feelings of government responsiveness, but these effects are limited to less educated, politically excluded citizens.

Keywords

authoritarian, participation, consultative authoritarianism, survey experiment, social exchange theory, China, National People's Congress

When internet users offer their many practical suggestions and ideas online, the government and the country benefit greatly. During the 2012 “two meetings,” which hot and difficult issues do you care about most? What suggestions and comments do you have to give to the NPC and CPPCC deputies during the two

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sessions? What do you hope they do? By listening to the voice of the people, conveying public opinion, and building a platform for communication between the government and the people, the users' wise proposals can become widely disseminated.

Your opinion may be able to change China!

Quote from National People's Congress (NPC) "You Propose My Opinion" Portal

Reformers in democratic systems increasingly advocate public deliberation and participation as a means of improving policy legitimacy. Deliberative polls, which allow citizens to learn about and discuss specific policy issues directly with each other, have been shown to substantially shift the views of participants (Barabas, 2004; Farrar et al., 2010; Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell, 2002). Proponents argue that enhanced deliberation can increase citizens' faith in the democratic process, political self-efficacy, civic engagement, respect for opposing views, and the moral legitimacy of policy decisions (F. L. Cook & Jacobs, 1998; Delli Carpini, Lomax Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; Gastil, 2000; Manin, 1987; Ryfe, 2005; Thompson, 2008).¹

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is pioneering its own brand of "consultative authoritarianism" (He & Thogersen, 2010; He & Warren, 2011; Linz, 2000; Teets, 2013). While Chinese citizens cannot vote for CCP leadership or even their representatives in the NPC, the regime has introduced a series of new "input institutions" to increase public voice on specific policy issues (Nathan, 2003). Draft legislation before the NPC is now routinely posted for a period of public comment. Public opinion polls are conducted at all levels of the bureaucracy. Experts and common citizens are invited to legislative hearings and other policy debates to offer feedback. In the past year, the NPC has introduced several opinion-gathering portals, like the "You Propose My Opinion" website above. Different levels of government have even experimented with deliberative polls and participatory budgeting (He, 2011; He & Thogersen, 2010). Together, these mechanisms aim to foster the feeling among common citizens that their voices matter, without undermining the existing political system (He & Warren, 2011).

As defined by He and Warren (2011, p. 273), consultative authoritarianism is "a form of rule in which power holders use communication to collect the preferences of those their decisions will affect and take those preferences into account as information relevant to their decision-making." The very existence of formal participation channels within an authoritarian structure challenges our core assumptions of nondemocratic governance. Predominant frameworks posit a rent-maximizing autocrat that only chooses to fully

democratize in the face of an impending revolution (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003). Much of the research on authoritarian politics has focused on identifying the conditions that lead to revolutions or other abrupt shifts to democracy (Boix, 2003; Boix & Stokes, 2003; Geddes, 1999; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Houle, 2009; Muller, 1988; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; Ross, 2001; Teorell, 2010). In China and elsewhere, though, we observe something quite different—a regime gradually introducing a set of limited participatory channels with the hopes of stemming off pressure for more comprehensive change.

The word *limited* is important here. While China's legislative hearings, notice and comment procedures, expert argumentation meetings, and online comment portals allow an entry point for citizen input, many Chinese observers criticize current public participation procedures as "flower vases" that have little effect on policy change. In his discussion of price setting hearings for public utilities, Wang (2003) argues that the public is marginalized in the decision-making process. "Even if they put forward their opposing opinions and corresponding reasons toward the price adjustment plan, they usually will find that the final plan neither adopts their opinions nor gives any response towards those opinions."

A similar line of critique can be levied against the NPC online portals; while it is clear the government takes time to collect citizen opinions, it remains unclear how it processes these opinions and how they enter into the policy-making calculus.² This opacity is by design. It allows the regime to learn something from citizen suggestions, but to maintain complete control over the policy discourse. These participatory channels cannot be considered fully "deliberative," as the regime is not bound to actually incorporate citizen input in any way (He & Thogersen, 2010; He & Warren, 2011).

The puzzle, then, is whether such limited consultative measures have their intended effects (He & Thogersen, 2010; He & Warren, 2011). Do participatory channels improve assessments of an authoritarian regime? If so, what types of citizens are most receptive? More broadly, can partial reforms enhance legitimacy and stem off popular pressure for democracy? Does "consultative authoritarianism" work? This article develops and tests a theoretical framework that addresses these questions, and provides the first empirical test of the relationship between consultative processes and the legitimacy of an authoritarian regime.

Existing work in social psychology offers initial theoretical clues for considering the effects of participatory reforms in nondemocracies. Proponents of social exchange theory argue that people evaluate their interpersonal relationships in terms of the outcome they receive and their comparison level for

what an appropriate outcome should be. The key insight is that satisfaction with a relationship depends on more than just the quality of that relationship. A person in an abusive marriage may nevertheless have a high assessment of the relationship if she believes abuse to be a normal practice (D. Cook & Emerson, 1978; Emerson, 1976; Nye, 1979; Sabatelli, 1984; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

This article extends the social exchange view to consider how citizens view government reforms. I argue that citizens' assessments of government responsiveness will be driven by the quality of participation they experience and their expectations as to what the level of government performance and responsiveness should be. Because these two factors vary across different citizens, we should expect the introduction of new quasidemocratic participation mechanisms to have heterogeneous effects. For citizens with low levels of political access and low standards for democratic governance, the establishment of opinion channels represents a small but real improvement in the quality of political participation. Accordingly, we should expect to observe an improvement in satisfaction toward the regime, but only for this subpopulation. For citizens with high levels of political access, the new channels may not represent a meaningful improvement. For citizens with high comparison levels, the limited public participation mechanisms may fail to meet their standards for how they should be able to participate in politics. Partially liberalizing reforms should have minimal effects on the attitudes of these types.

To test the theory, I develop and implement an online survey experiment of more than 2,000 Chinese netizens that randomly exposes respondents to the NPC's new online participation portals. I find treatment effects consistent with the observable implications posed above. For less educated respondents without membership in the CCP—low expectations and low political access—exposure to new public participation channels brings large positive shifts in a number of measures of satisfaction, as well as crude measures of compliance. These effects disappear for respondents with either high education or CCP membership.

The results imply that authoritarian participation mechanisms buy the regime additional support, but there are limits to their efficacy. In the Chinese case, the majority of citizens are less educated and excluded from the CCP, and so the introduction of legislative hearings, notice and comment procedures, and online comment portals may increase goodwill toward the regime. In the longer run, these consultative mechanisms may fail to keep pace with citizen expectations, especially if education levels and access to uncensored news media continue to rise.

The article aims to make three contributions to the literatures on authoritarian politics, public participation, and public opinion in China.

First, it offers a starting point for understanding the consequences of partial reforms in authoritarian systems and highlights the need to further study “consultative authoritarianism.” Scholars of authoritarian politics have traditionally focused on identifying the conditions leading to democratization (see Boix, 2003; Boix & Stokes, 2003; Geddes, 1999; Haggard & Kaufman, 1995; Houle, 2009; Muller, 1988; O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski et al., 2000; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; Ross, 2001), but this approach overlooks important governance developments within the confines of an authoritarian system. In the Chinese case, the CCP has quietly undergone a governance transformation away from the “command authoritarianism” of the Mao era (He & Warren, 2011). The past three decades have seen the reinstatement of the people’s congress system; the establishment of the village elections system; and most recently, the proliferation of public participation mechanisms. These quasidemocratic reforms are important developments in and of themselves, and this article demonstrates that they can indeed engender regime legitimacy and possibly stem pressure for democratization.

Second, the theoretical framework—particularly the idea that limited reforms have heterogeneous effects on the population—may have explanatory power beyond the Chinese case. There is a tendency in prominent theories of authoritarian politics to treat citizens as a homogeneous whole (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003; Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Silverson, & Morrow, 2003), but this analysis underlines the importance of considering how the regime is perceived by different segments of the population. Reform measures that placate one citizen group may fail to resonate with another, which may explain why some authoritarian systems fall even when they have rich participatory institutions (Boix & Svolik, 2013; Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007; Malesky & Schuler, 2010, 2011; Svolik, 2009; Truex, 2014a, 2014b; Wright, 2008).

Third, this article provides the first estimates of the causal effect of public participation channels on regime support, bringing together two lines of empirical research on Chinese politics. Numerous public opinion surveys, drawing on a range of subpopulations, time periods, and measurement strategies, have found that Chinese citizens tend to voice high levels of support for their government and political system (Chen, 2004; Chen & Dickson, 2008; Chen, Zhong, & Hillard, 1997; Lewis-Beck, Tang, & Martini, 2014; Li, 2004; Manion, 2006; Shi, 2000; Tang, 2005; Zhong, Chen, & Scheb, 1998).³ Similarly, survey research has demonstrated that Chinese citizens are regular political participants and use both formal and informal channels to advance their policy goals (Jennings, 1997; Landry, Davis, & Wang, 2010; Shi, 1997; Zhong et al., 1998). The analysis here suggests a relationship between these two patterns. Chinese citizens express high levels of support; they try to

participate in politics where they can; and as this experiment shows, the very presence of participation channels engenders that support.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The following section provides background information on the rise of public participation mechanisms in China and clarifies the concept of “consultative authoritarianism.” I then outline the theoretical framework and its observable implications. Next, I describe the data collection process and experimental protocol and assess the hypotheses empirically. The article concludes with a short discussion of the limitations of the inquiry and directions for future research.

Consultative Authoritarianism

There is no shortage of concepts to categorize nondemocratic regimes. Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2012) classify authoritarian systems by political organization, distinguishing between party-based regimes, military regimes, personalist regimes, and monarchical regimes. Levitsky and Way (2010) introduce the concept of competitive authoritarianism—hybrid regimes that allow opposition parties to participate in elections.⁴

The term “consultative authoritarianism” is used to describe a regime that creates formal channels for citizens to voice their policy concerns (He & Thøgersen, 2010; He & Warren, 2011; Linz, 2000; Teets, 2013). Consultative authoritarianism implies greater citizen influence and participation than “command authoritarianism,” and less influence and participation than truly “deliberative authoritarianism.” The majority of authoritarian systems are unfriendly to citizen input and fall into the former category. The latter implies a system where citizen input at least partially determines policy outcomes (He & Warren, 2011). As He and Warren (2011, p. 274) describe,

Whereas “consultation” implies that decision-makers ask for, and receive information from those their decisions will affect, “deliberative” implies that decision-makers will do more than solicit input; they will enable (or permit) space for people to discuss issues, and to engage in the give and take of reasons, to which decisions are then responsive.

The CCP has a history of public consultation. Even during Mao’s era of command authoritarianism, officials were socialized into the “mass line”—the belief that cadres should learn grievances directly from common citizens by hearing their experiences. China’s present-day consultative institutions began to take shape in the post-Tiananmen era, when CCP leadership began strengthening the country’s two representative bodies—the NPC and Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC)—as a means of restoring

legitimacy (O'Brien, 2008). Shortly thereafter, the term "public participation" entered the CCP lexicon, first used by leadership in a decision of the Party congress in 2003 (Horsely, 2009). Its origins relate to the participation of farmers in commune programs in the 1950s, but today, the phrase is used by regime officials and observers to describe a wide array of practices aimed at allowing citizens a limited voice in the policy process. These practices include legislative hearings on new laws or administrative regulations; notice and comment procedures; expert argumentation meetings or workshops; participatory budgeting; and online comment portals, among others (Horsely, 2009). The legal basis for public participation stems from the 2000 Legislation Law, which states that citizens have the right to "participate in legislation through various channels" (Legislation Law of the People's Republic of China: Article 5, 2000).

My analysis will focus on estimating the attitudinal effects of exposure to one new consultative channel, the NPC's set of online public participation portals. As the regime's primary representative institution, the NPC is a major force for increasing public participation and has grown more transparent and deliberative in its own processes in recent years (personal communication, BJ007, February 2012). NPC deputies primarily influence policy through the introduction of opinions and motions.⁵ These proposals are then submitted to different NPC working committees and may eventually become bills, or they may be incorporated into policies in more informal means after consideration by relevant ministries and agencies (Truex, 2014a, 2014b). For the first time, the 2012 NPC website allowed citizens to submit their own proposals on the "You Propose My Opinion" (*nitiwoyi*) page. Figure 1 shows a screen image from this website.⁶ The main text is translated at the beginning of the article.

The NPC website offers several additional participation platforms. Netizens can offer comments and express satisfaction/dissatisfaction about existing proposals on the "Everybody Discuss" (*dajia tan*) page. Users can also pose questions to their local officials and even former Premier Wen Jiabao (*wo you wenti wen zongli*).

These mechanisms represent a marked departure from "command authoritarianism," but short of the idealized "deliberative authoritarianism" described by He and Warren (2011), and well short of the participatory channels observed in most democracies. The phrase "your opinion may be able to change China" is progressive but may seem silly to some critical observers. It is unclear how the government actually processes citizen suggestions, and it is unlikely that a single citizen opinion could really bring a marked policy shift. As of the writing of this manuscript, the government has yet to release



Figure 1. Image from “You Propose My Opinion” website.

Figure shows a screen shot from the NPC’s “You Propose My Opinion” website, which was introduced prior to the 2012 session. This image was one of four images shown to respondents as part of the “public participation treatment.” The main text is translated at the beginning of the article.

any information as to what citizens are commenting about and how it has responded.

In short, there are deliberative elements in the Chinese system—some local governments are experimenting with participatory budgeting and even deliberative polling (Fishkin et al., 2010; He & Thøgersen, 2010)—but the current public participation channels do not really bind the regime to heed or even respond to citizen demands in any way. This is the definition of consultative authoritarianism. The next section considers the effects of these institutions on citizen attitudes and consequently, regime stability.

Theoretical Framework

My theory predicts that limited consultative reforms will have heterogeneous effects on the population, driven by differences in outcomes and expectations. This “government exchange theory” can be considered an extension of the well-known social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory was originally developed by social psychologists to understand the nature of interpersonal exchange, how people perceive their own personal relationships and decide whether to maintain them (D. Cook & Emerson, 1978; Emerson, 1976; Nye, 1979; Sabatelli, 1984; Thibaut &

Kelley, 1959). According to the theory, a person's assessment of a relationship can be understood in terms of three components:

$$\text{SAT}_{ij} = \text{OUT}_{ij} - \text{CL}_{ij},$$

The *outcome* (OUT_{ij}) term is simply a measure of the quality of the relationship j for individual i , the benefits of the social exchange minus its costs. The *comparison level* (CL_{ij}) is the individual's expectation for what she should receive in the way of benefits and costs for that type of relationship. Comparison levels are informed by both societal norms and previous relationships and are different for different people (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The *comparison level of alternatives*, or CLalt_{ij} is defined as the lowest level of outcome a person will accept from a relationship in light of available alternatives and the barriers to leaving (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If the outcome falls below this level, the person will choose to terminate the relationship.⁷

The framework posed here is grounded in the idea that citizens are in a similar exchange relationship with their governments. A citizen's assessment of her government is a function of the quality and inclusiveness of governance (outcome) and her comparison level for what government should be like. If governance falls below some threshold (comparison level of alternatives), the citizen may attempt to terminate the relationship. This may entail emigration or, in certain cases, the initiation of collective action aimed at regime change.

The exchange view predicts that citizens in poorly governed contexts may nevertheless express high levels of satisfaction if they have "low standards," and citizens in well-governed contexts may express discontent if they have unreasonable expectations for what government should provide. This reconciles well with existing empirical findings. In a cross-national survey, King, Murray, Salomon, and Tandon (2004) find that on the same question, Chinese citizens will express higher levels of political efficacy than Mexican citizens, despite the fact that the Mexican system is substantially more open and inclusive. Further analysis shows that Chinese citizens actually have lower standards for what qualifies as "having a say." In the language of government exchange theory, Chinese citizens report higher assessments despite having lower outcomes, likely because they have lower comparison levels.

This framework offers some insights as to how the introduction of new participation channels will affect citizen assessments of an authoritarian regime. We can rewrite the assessment equation in terms of the potential outcomes framework:

$$\text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{C}) = [\text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{CL}_{ij}(\text{T})] - [\text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{C}) - \text{CL}_{ij}(\text{C})],$$

Here, $\text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{C})$ represents the unit-level effect of exposure to a new public participation channel (indicated by T). This effect is simply the difference in the outcome (OUT) and comparison level (CL) under the treatment (T) minus the difference under control (C).

For the purposes of this analysis, I will make two addenda to the basic assessment equation. First, I assume that the treatment exposure does not affect a respondent's comparison level for government performance: $\text{CL}_{ij}(\text{T}) = \text{CL}_{ij}(\text{C})$. The spirit of this assumption is that expectations for what government should be are not readily shifted in the very short run. In the same way that a person's comparison level for marriage is a function of a lifetime of experiences—the quality of her parents' marriage, her previous romantic relationships, various cultural experiences—a citizen's comparison level for government is formed over a lifetime of interactions—formal education, government propaganda, interactions with local officials, and so on. Comparison levels are not fixed, but they are unlikely to shift substantially after a short “public participation treatment” on a survey experiment.

As an additional addendum, I assume the magnitude of the shift in satisfaction will depend on whether the treatment outcome exceeds the citizen's expectations.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{C}) &= \text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{C}) && \text{if } \text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T}) \geq \text{CL}_{ij} \\ \text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{SAT}_{ij}(\text{C}) &= 0 && \text{if } \text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T}) < \text{CL}_{ij}. \end{aligned}$$

In words, the above statements hold that if the outcome under treatment fails to exceed the citizen's expectations $\text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T}) < \text{CL}_{ij}$, there will be no appreciable shift in assessment. A citizen with low expectations—who views a corrupt, coercive, and closed system as normal—may be more moved by the treatment than a citizen who demands a democratic government with richer avenues for participation.⁸

With this framework in mind, we can derive some testable implications. The above discussion suggests that exposure to the NPC's public participation website should yield heterogeneous treatment effects among the Chinese population. This heterogeneity will be driven by two factors: the change in perceptions of government performance on the participation dimension as a result of exposure to the new channel, $\text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T}) - \text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{C})$; and the perceptions of government performance under treatment relative to expectations on the appropriate level of citizen participation, $\text{OUT}_{ij}(\text{T})$ versus CL_{ij} .

With respect to the first factor, I expect that the NPC's new public participation channels represent an improvement in the participation outcome, but only for citizens with relatively low access to policymaking. For these political outsiders, the introduction of the "You Propose My Opinion" webpage and comparable channels represents a small but positive step in the way the CCP regime engages common citizens. In the language of the assessment equation, $OUT_{ij}(T) > OUT_{ij}(C)$ for this subset of the population. Conversely, political insiders already enjoy a level of access that exceeds the limited platform offered by the NPC website. New participation mechanisms do not represent an improvement in voice, rendering $OUT_{ij}(T) = OUT_{ij}(C)$.⁹

For the second factor, I expect that the effect will be limited to citizens with relatively low comparison levels or expectations for government performance. In the Chinese context, certain citizens have very high standards for how the CCP should behave—they more actively press for transparency, better participation channels, and policy responsiveness. For these respondents, exposure to the public participation treatment may do little to shift attitudes toward the regime, as the level of participation afforded by websites like "You Propose My Opinion" does not meet the standard of truly democratic, participatory, deliberative government. In the language of the amended assessment equation, $OUT_{ij}(T) < CL_{ij}$.

Figure 2 summarizes the logic and observable implications of the theory as it applies to this setting. It naturally divides the population into four subtypes based on two dimensions: expectations and access. For citizens whose level of access already exceeds that offered by the NPC's new website ($A > P$), the treatment does not appreciably improve the outcome ($OUT_{ij}(T) = OUT_{ij}(C)$), and thus the assessment remains unchanged as well. For citizens with high expectations, the new participation channel may still fall below the comparison level ($p < CL_{ij}$). Thus, the effects of the new public participation treatment should be greatest for citizens with both low access and low expectations. The next section describes the design for testing this idea.

Data and Research Design

Survey Information and Experimental Intervention

The data for this project comes from the China Policy Attitudes Survey (CPAS), an online survey conducted in October 2012 in partnership with a local marketing firm. In total, 10,000 survey solicitation links were sent out, yielding a sample of 2,270 responses.

It should be emphasized that the CPAS sample is by no means representative of the Chinese population—only 39.9% of citizens (538 million) had

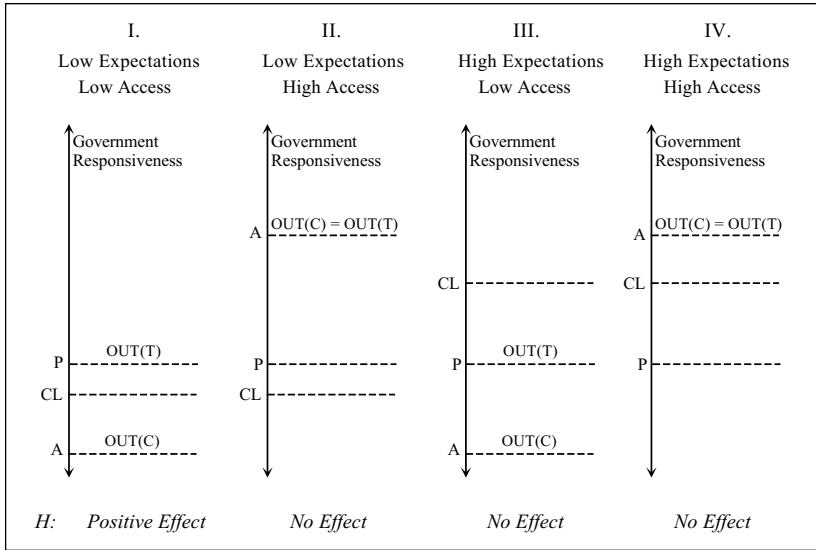


Figure 2. Observable implications.

Figure illustrates hypothesized effects of a public participation treatment on assessments of the regime using the government exchange theory access. “P” represents the level of government responsiveness represented by the public participation channel. “A” represents the citizen’s current level of access. For citizens with $A > P$, the public participation channel does not represent an improvement in access, and thus $OUT_{ij}(T) = OUT_{ij}(C)$. The treatment only has an effect when $P > A$ and $OUT_{ij}(T) > CL_{ij}$. *OUT* = outcome; *T* = treatment; *C* = control.

Internet access as of June 2012—but it can be considered loosely representative of the online population. These citizens tend to be younger, wealthier, better educated, and more likely to live in urban areas. Table 1 compares the CPAS sample with the Internet-active sample from the 2008 China Survey, which represents the state of the art in terms of sampling quality. The China Survey researchers employed multistage probability spatial sampling to reduce coverage bias, and the final sample is arguably one of the most representative draws of the full Chinese population to date.¹⁰ The demographic variables in the CPAS were purposely coded to match those in the China Survey to facilitate this sample quality comparison.

The CPAS sample proves relatively close to the China Survey internet-active sample on basic demographic and professional covariates. Note that we should not expect the two samples to perfectly match, as they were drawn 4 years apart. The CPAS sample has relatively more urban, male, Han, CCP

Table 1. Sample Comparisons.

Variable	China survey		CPAS	Comparison (2) - (3)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	
	Full	Internet	Full	
Demographic				
RURAL	0.7538	0.2954	0.2161	0.0793
FEMALE	0.5176	0.5062	0.3979	0.1083
MINORITY	0.1261	0.0666	0.0322	0.0344
AGE	45.98	31.72	31.85	-0.13
MARRIED	0.8175	0.6154	0.6656	-0.0502
CCP	0.0858	0.2045	0.2872	-0.0827
Professional				
FARMER	0.6018	0.1052	0.0049	0.1003
GOVEMP	0.035	0.1345	0.0733	0.0612
LABORER	0.1221	0.1637	0.0360	0.1277
CLERK	0.0928	0.2631	0.2844	-0.0213
Year	2008	2009	2012	
<i>n</i>	3,989	397	2,270	

Table compares means for demographic and covariates across the China Survey and CPAS samples. The composition of CPAS sample proves loosely comparable with that of the China Survey sample for the subset of China Survey respondents with Internet access. CPAS = China Policy Attitudes Survey.

member respondents, and fewer farmers/laborers. The age distributions reconcile quite well. The fact that the discrepancies on these observable covariates are not terribly severe gives more credibility to the online panel although we should always be cautious when inferring from the experimental population to the full online population.

The CPAS uses a series of questions and embedded experiments to elicit opinions on politics and policy in China. Toward the end of the survey, respondents were randomly assigned to the public participation treatment and control groups. Respondents in the treatment condition viewed a series of four images of the NPC’s new public participation platform, including the image displayed in Figure 1. Respondents in the control condition viewed no images.

This treatment was designed to simulate authentic exposure to the new participation channel, and to provide information about new government

efforts to increase citizen voice. A stronger intervention would have been to directly refer the respondents to the actual website, but this was eschewed for two reasons. First, this process resulted in substantial attrition during informal pilots, as respondents seemed to “get lost” in the actual comment portal. Second, referrals to the NPC website would make the treatment condition less standardized, as respondents would explore different webpages and links. The image treatment used in the experiment is a less substantial intervention, but as we will see, it was still substantial enough to produce the hypothesized effects.

Although it is possible that some subset of the experimental population might have been exposed to the website prior to the survey in a manner that could affect the results, this seems unlikely given the low visibility of the channels at the timing of the survey. As of October 2012, very few citizens had actually seen or used the survey portals, which had been launched just a few months prior. For example, on the “Everybody Discuss” page, most proposals had received only a few hundred ratings. Given that the full online panel is about 2 million netizens, and China’s online population exceeds 500 million, it is highly unlikely that there were a substantial number of “pre-treated observations” in the CPAS sample.

Mapping Concepts to Variables

After being exposed to their treatment condition, respondents proceeded to a short series of questions designed to assess attitudes toward the regime. Rather than limit the analysis to a single dependent variable, I assess the effect of the public participation treatment across four measures of regime satisfaction, as well as two crude measures of compliance.¹¹ To strengthen the design, the analysis will also consider one placebo outcome—satisfaction with local government officials.¹² The survey questions for these measures are displayed in Box 1.

The theory predicts heterogeneous treatment effects driven by differences in political access and expectations about the appropriate level of government responsiveness. These traits will be measured using CCP membership and education levels, respectively. Although there are certainly non-CCP members with policy access, and less educated citizens with high standards for government, these two simple measures reasonably capture the constructs of the theory. We can divide the sample into four subgroups based on two dimensions (*CCP* and *LOWED*). For the purposes of the analysis, respondents were deemed “low education” (*LOWED*) if they had not received anything beyond secondary education. This decision was made prior to conducting the analysis to ensure that the four subgroups are of reasonable

Box 1. Dependent Variable Definitions.

- M1. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating *strongly disagree* and 5 indicating *strongly agree*, how much do you agree with the following statements?
- SATPOLICIES—M1.1. I am generally satisfied with government policies.
 VOICE—M1.2. The government cares what people like me think.
- M2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning *very satisfied* and 1 meaning *not satisfied at all*, how satisfied are you with the following?
- SATNPC—M2.1. The National People’s Congress
 SATCENTRAL—M2.3. Central government officials
 SATLOCAL—M2.4. Local government officials (placebo outcome)
- M5. There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is *not at all important* and 10 is *very important*, how important is it
- TAXES—M5.2—Never to try to evade taxes
 MILITARY—M5.2.—To be willing to serve in the military at a time of need

size. There are 530 (24.3%) Type I ($LOWED = 1, CCP = 0$) respondents, 104 (4.7%) Type II ($LOWED = 1, CCP = 1$) respondents, 985 (45.2%) Type III ($LOWED = 0, CCP = 0$) respondents, and 560 (25.7%) Type IV ($LOWED = 0, CCP = 1$) respondents. Table 2 shows some relevant covariates across the four types.

We can find support for this concept measurement strategy using existing survey research. As Lipset (1959) argues, more educated citizens are more likely to espouse democratic ideals. The 2008 China Survey asks respondents how seriously they perceive several societal issues, including democracy and freedom of speech, on an increasing scale from 0 to 10. Figure 3 shows the densities of responses to these questions across low education and high education respondents. As we would expect, more educated Chinese citizens seem to also express higher standards for the quality of participatory government, viewing the democracy and freedom of speech issues as more serious.

In terms of access, CCP membership confers numerous benefits and additional channels through which to influence policy. Not all CCP members have advantages in the NPC’s national-level policy implementation, but China scholars would agree that CCP members are more likely to participate

Table 2. Subgroup Comparisons.

Variable	Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV	¬ Type I	Full
	LOWED = 1	LOWED = 1	LOWED = 0	LOWED = 0		
	CCP = 0	CCP = 1	CCP = 0	CCP = 1		
Demographic						
RURAL	0.335	0.260	0.175	0.165	0.177	0.215
FEMALE	0.431	0.240	0.432	0.331	0.386	0.397
MINORITY	0.043	0.019	0.024	0.039	0.029	0.033
AGE	32.1	37.4	31.4	31.5	31.8	31.9
MARRIED	0.587	0.817	0.661	0.735	0.696	0.669
CCP	0.000	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.403	0.305
HIGHINC	0.081	0.077	0.231	0.271	0.235	0.198
LOWED	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.063	0.291
Professional						
FARMER	0.013	0.000	0.001	0.005	0.002	0.005
GOVEMP	0.026	0.125	0.056	0.143	0.090	0.074
LABORER	0.106	0.096	0.010	0.004	0.013	0.036
CLERK	0.366	0.269	0.288	0.211	0.261	0.286
<i>n</i>	530	104	985	560	1,649	2,179

Table compares means for demographic and professional covariates across the four different subgroups. CCP = Chinese Communist Party.

in politics and have better access to policymakers in general (Jennings, 1997; Shi, 1997). As Jennings (1997) writes,

Party membership has a very strong influence on participation . . . Countries vary enormously in terms of their mass membership rates but in few of them would party membership carry the duties, expectations, and clout that it does in China. (p. 369)

CCP members have advantages in seeking government employment and are more likely to be nominated as deputies to the people's congress system (O'Brien, 1994; Truex, 2014a). In rural areas, village-level party meetings give members some direct input into the policy process (Jennings, 1997). The China Survey data also shows that CCP members are more likely to know government officials and to make complaints/suggestions to them, as depicted in Figure 4. Only around 15% of non-CCP member respondents personally know an official, compared with around 45% of CCP members. In the CPAS survey, CCP members are more likely to agree "government cares about people like me," as will be shown in Figure 5.

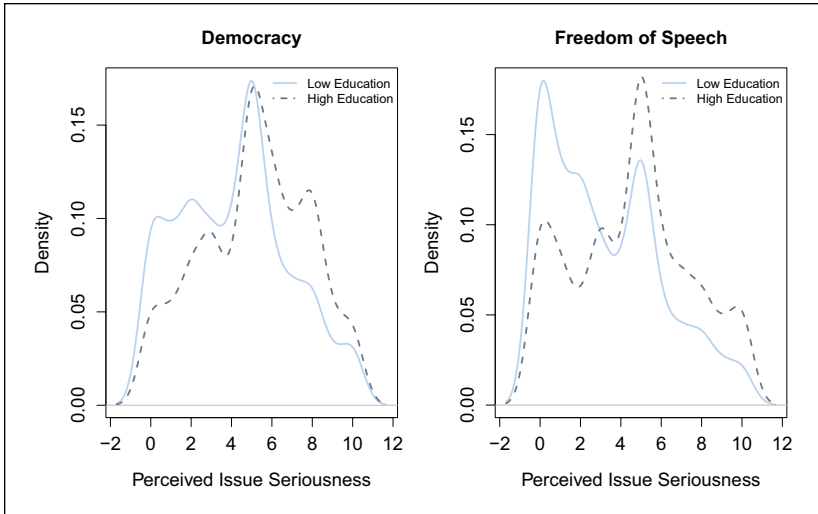


Figure 3. Relating education to participation expectations.

Source. Data drawn from the 2008 China Survey.

Figure shows the perceived seriousness of the democracy and freedom of speech issues for low education and high education respondents.

Education and CCP membership are imperfect proxies for expectations and access. We see empirically that there are plenty of less educated respondents who have strong concerns about the quality of democracy and plenty of non-CCP members who seem to have access to policy channels. Nevertheless, these two variables do prove strongly associated with the concepts of interest, and they also allow us to consider how the public participation treatment might affect the full Chinese population.

Analysis

Primary Analysis

I expect that exposure to the NPC’s new public participation channel will have positive effects on the various satisfaction measures, but only for non-CCP members with low education. Given the computer randomization of the treatment assignment, evaluating this hypothesis is relatively straightforward. After dividing the sample into the four subgroups (see Table 2), we can estimate the conditional average treatment effects (CATE) for each type (see Gerber & Green, 2012). A CATE is simply an average treatment effect for a

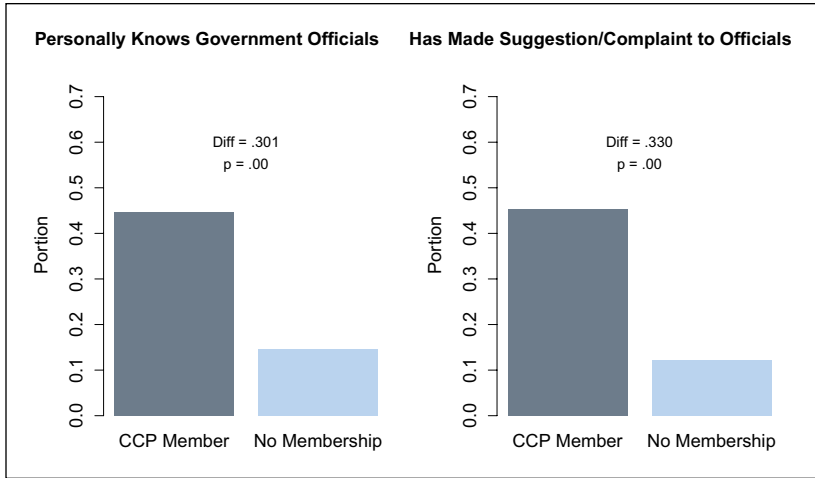


Figure 4. Relating party membership to political access.

Source. Data drawn from the 2008 China Survey.

Figure shows variation in political access across CCP and non-CCP member respondents.

subpopulation of interest. Confirmation of the theory would require three conditions to be met:

1. $CATE[Type\ I] > 0$: The treatment has a positive and statistically significant effect for Type I respondents.
2. $\neg(CATE[\neg\ Type\ I]) > 0$: The treatment does not have a positive and statistically effect for respondents who are not Type I.
3. $CATE[Type\ I] - CATE[\neg\ Type\ I] > 0$: The difference in treatment effect between Type I and not Type I respondents is positive and statistically significant.

Figures 5 and 6 show estimates of the CATEs for the four subpopulations for each of the four regime satisfaction questions, the CATE estimate for the \neg Type I respondents, as well as the ATE estimate for the whole sample. All p values reflect a one-sided test and employ nonparametric randomization inference to avoid making assumptions about the sampling distribution (Gerber & Green, 2012, p. 63).¹³ The figures show a consistent story across all four measures. For citizens who are less educated and lack membership in the CCP, exposure to the NPC's participation channels increases general

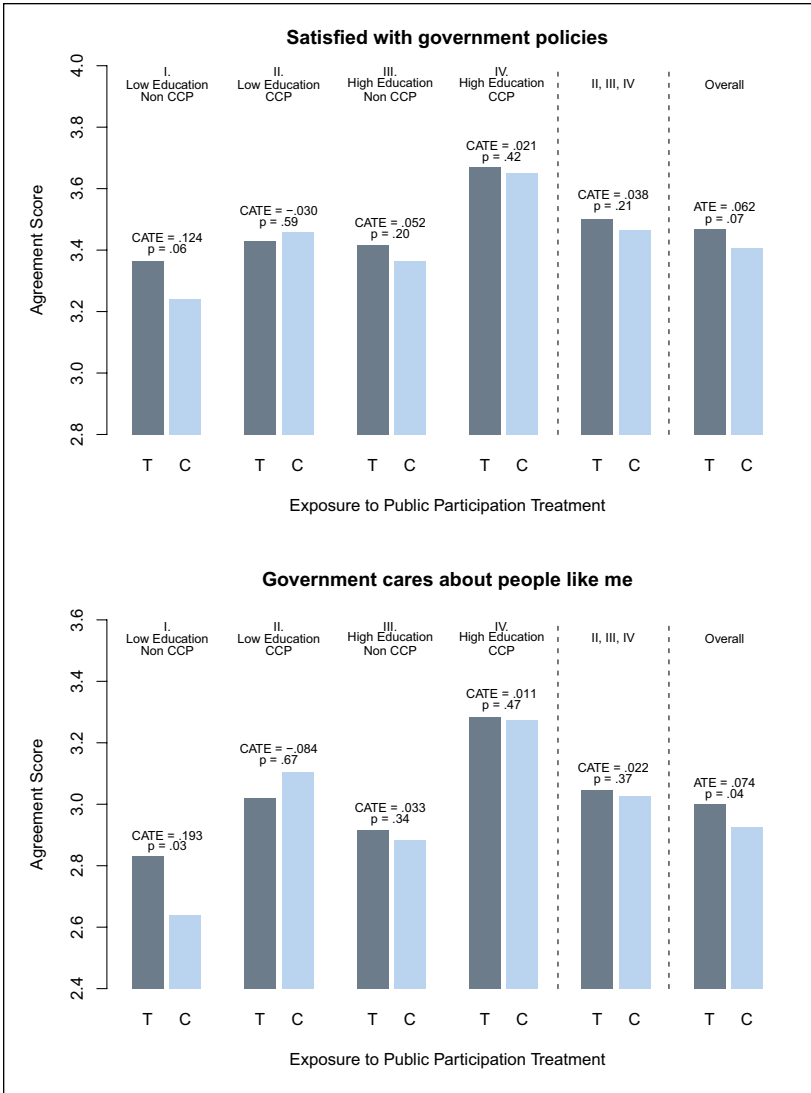


Figure 5. Effects of public participation treatment on assessment measures (1/2). Figure shows CATE estimates of the public participation treatment on two regime assessment measures for the four subgroups of interest. All p values reflect one-sided hypothesis tests and are calculated with randomization inference. The dependent variable is the agreement score (from 1 to 5) with the title statement. CATE = conditional average treatment effects.

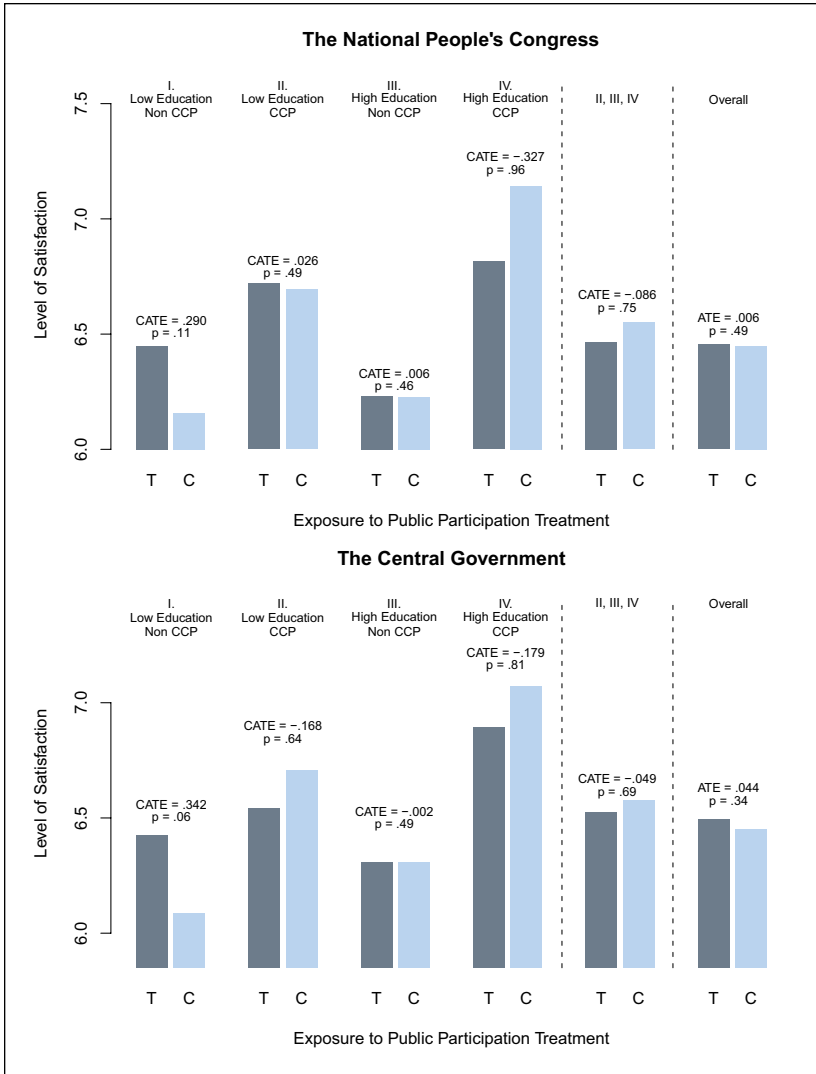


Figure 6. Effects of public participation treatment on assessment measures (2/2). Figure shows CATE estimates of the public participation treatment on two regime assessment measures for the four subgroups of interest. All *p* values reflect one-sided hypothesis tests and are calculated with randomization inference. The dependent variable is the level of satisfaction (from 1 to 10) with the actor in the title. CATE = conditional average treatment effects.

approval of the regime—satisfaction with government policies, perceptions of government responsiveness, assessments of both the NPC and the central government. For this subpopulation, the estimate of the treatment effect is positive and reaches conventional levels of significance for three of the four dependent variables.

This pattern stands in contrast to the CATE estimates for the other three subpopulations, as well as the grouped \neg Type I estimate. Across all four assessment measures, the participation treatment does not result in a substantively or statistically significant positive change. The estimate for the treatment effect on satisfaction with the central government actually proves slightly negative for the other three subgroups.

Together, these results meet Conditions 1 and 2 above—positive effects for low education, non-CCP member subgroup, and no discernible effects for the other three types. These tests are summarized in Table 3. As Gerber and Green (2012) suggest, the most important test for a heterogeneous treatment effect hypothesis is not whether the CATE emerges as significant for some portion of the population and not others, but whether the difference in the treatment effect estimates themselves is actually significant. For this analysis, this entails testing whether $\text{CATE}[\text{Type I}] > \text{CATE}[\neg \text{Type I}]$, the Condition 3 above.¹⁴ Table 3 summarizes the results of this exercise. For all four assessment measures, the difference in treatment effects ($\text{CATE}[\text{Type I}] - \text{CATE}[\neg \text{Type I}]$) is positive, and it emerges as statistically significant for every measure except “satisfied with government policies.”

Note that the when we conduct the same analysis for our placebo outcome, we do not observe any significant results. As expected, the public participation treatment does not significantly increase satisfaction with local government (*SATLOCAL*), even for Type I respondents.

Combined, these tests give support for the central implication of the theory. Exposure to new authoritarian public participation mechanisms increases general satisfaction with the regime, but only for citizens with low access and low expectations, as measured by CCP membership and education. The theoretical expectations are well supported by the data.

Additional Analysis and Robustness Checks

As an additional test of the theory, we can assess whether consultative participation channels have effects on expressed willingness to comply with government regulations, an effect frequently asserted by their proponents. Horsely (2009) argues that the movement toward public participation in

Table 3. Analysis Summary.

Dependent variable	CATE					ATE	Diff in CATE
	Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV	¬Type I	Full	Type I – ¬Type I
Regime satisfaction							
SATPOLICIES	0.124 (.062)	-0.030 (.588)	0.052 (.203)	0.021 (.423)	0.038 (.209)	0.062 (.067)	0.086 (.169)
VOICE	0.193 (.027)	-0.084 (.667)	0.033 (.338)	0.011 (.468)	0.022 (.365)	0.074 (.040)	0.171 (.047)
SATNPC	0.290 (.114)	0.026 (.491)	0.006 (.455)	-0.327 (.962)	-0.086 (.749)	0.006 (.449)	0.376 (.081)
SATCENTRAL	0.342 (.060)	-0.168 (.640)	-0.002 (.492)	-0.179 (.807)	-0.049 (.689)	0.044 (.340)	0.391 (.059)
SATLOCAL	0.094 (.334)	0.044 (.492)	-0.008 (.536)	-0.054 (.615)	-0.004 (.516)	0.016 (.445)	0.097 (.339)
Compliance							
TAXES	0.339 (.038)	-0.204 (.722)	0.016 (.475)	0.088 (.302)	0.029 (.395)	0.100 (.146)	0.309 (.083)
MILITARY	0.336 (.057)	-0.143 (.658)	0.075 (.332)	-0.089 (.705)	0.016 (.447)	0.096 (.346)	0.319 (.084)

Table shows CATE and difference in CATE estimates of the public participation treatment on the six outcome measures for Type I and ¬ Type I respondents. All *p* values are shown in parentheses and reflect one-sided hypothesis tests, calculated with randomization inference. CATE = conditional average treatment effects; ATE = average treatment effect.

China “reflect[s] a growing appreciation of how greater openness and consultation can result in better legislation and policies and elicit increased public support and compliance.” The survey data allow for a preliminary test of these relationships. Because the effects of participation on support seem limited to citizens with low access and low expectations, we would expect a similar pattern for measures of compliance.

The CPAS questionnaire asks citizens whether they believe it is a citizen’s duty to (a) never evade taxes and (b) to be willing to serve in the military in times of need. Please refer to Box 1 for the full question wordings. Of course, these questions are only loose measures of compliance, and future research could investigate whether exposure to public participation measures has effects on actual behaviors.

The summary results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. As with general regime satisfaction, it seems that the positive effects of the NPC’s new public participation channels are limited to less educated citizens without CCP membership. Within this subgroup, respondents exposed to this treatment reported an average agreement level of 8.27 with respect to tax

evasion, compared to 7.93 for the control group. A similar difference emerges for the question measuring willingness to serve in the military. The bottom rows in Table 3 shows that the difference in CATE estimates (CATE[Type I] – CATE[¬ Type I]) is positive and statistically significant for both variables, in line with the Condition 3 above.

One concern with the analysis might be that education and CCP membership—which are aimed to proxy for expectations and political access—are associated with other attributes that are ultimately driving the results. For example, it is possible that less educated respondents are simply older, and their age makes them more impressed with the NPC website. Indeed, when we revisit Table 2, we see that there are substantial covariate imbalances across the subgroups. Compared to other respondents, Type I respondents are more likely to be from rural areas; minorities; low income; single; farmers; migrant workers; and work in the service industry.

To assess this possibility, we can reformulate the analysis in terms of a regression model with interactions and individual-level covariates (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006):

$$SAT_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 LOWED_i + \beta_3 CCP_i + \beta_4 T_i \cdot LOWED_i + \beta_5 T_i \cdot CCP_i + \beta_6 LOWED_i \cdot CCP_i + \beta_7 T_i \cdot LOWED_i \cdot CCP_i + \gamma \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Here, SAT_i represents the measure of satisfaction; T_i represents the public participation treatment; CCP_i and $LOWED_i$ represent indicators for CCP membership and low education; and \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of individual-level covariates ($RURAL_i$, $FEMALE_i$, $MINORITY_i$, AGE_i , $MARRIED_i$, CCP_i , $HIGHINC_i$, $FARMER_i$, $GOVEMP_i$, $LABORER_i$, and $CLERK_i$). The model also includes all possible interactions between the treatment, education, and CCP membership, which will allow us to recover the CATEs for the different subpopulations. For example, CATE[Type I] is $\beta_1 + \beta_4$, CATE[Type II] is $\beta_1 + \beta_4 + \beta_5 + \beta_7$, and so forth. All models are estimated with ordinary least squares.

Including the vector of individual covariates does not appreciatively change the substantive story or statistical results. Table A1 in the appendix shows the CATE estimates and p values for the different subtypes, which prove comparable to those in Table 3. As before, the treatment effect proves positive and significant for respondents with low education and no CCP membership, and negligible for different types of respondents. This gives us more confidence that the results are not due to the imbalances across the subgroups.

Conclusion

This article presents the first survey experiment that measures the effects of consultative participation channels on citizen attitudes toward an authoritarian regime. While some observers dismiss the NPC's new online citizen voice mechanisms, the data reveal that even such limited reforms may shift attitudes toward the regime in the positive direction. Consistent with the implications of the exchange theory, the analysis shows that exposure to images from the "You Propose My Opinion" website and other portals increases satisfaction with the regime, feelings of government responsiveness, and expressed willingness to comply with regulations, but only for citizens with low political access and low expectations for government performance.

This suggests that the introduction of new public participation mechanisms is a mixed success for the CCP regime and perhaps other regimes in similar circumstances. If exposure increases, the short-term effect of consultative channels on regime satisfaction is potentially quite large. Even though the boost in support seems limited to less educated, politically excluded citizens, the vast majority of the population falls into this subgroup. Recall that for the analysis above, anyone without a college degree was deemed "lower education." According to 2008 data from the China Survey, roughly 86.7% of the overall population falls into the Type I group ($LOWED = 1$, $CCP = 0$). The population still has relatively low comparison levels and low participatory outcomes, and could therefore be swayed by the introduction of limited participation mechanisms and other quasidemocratic legislative reforms.

Of course, we should be wary of generalizing too far from a single experiment. The analysis suggests that a subset Chinese netizens exposed to the NPC's new online public participation channels immediately voice higher levels of support for their authoritarian government. We do not know whether consultative participatory reforms in other contexts yield similar effects, nor whether this channel has support and can improve regime legitimacy in the longer run.

With respect to generalizability, the surest path forward is through repeated replication (Gerber & Green, 2012). The CCP is relatively sophisticated in its engineering of limited public participation in the policymaking process, but other regimes have adopted similar mechanisms to foster legitimacy and perceptions of responsiveness. The phrase "consultative authoritarianism" has already been applied to the regimes in Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam (He & Warren, 2011; Rodan & Jayasuriya, 2007). For example, in preparation of the 2001 city development Concept Plan, the government

of Singapore allowed for an extended period of public consultation, including focus groups, online feedback channels, public discussion forums, and an open dialogue with the Minister for National Development (Soh & Yuen, 2006). Even the Saudi regime—considered quite closed by most governance metrics—now boasts various online e-participation portals for the purpose of “enabling citizens to participate in making all decisions and in formulating all development plans at all Government Agencies for the welfare of the whole Community” (“Saudi e-Government National Portal,” n.d.). Researchers can utilize and extend the basic research design presented here and apply it to these types of consultative reforms throughout the authoritarian world.

My hypothesis with respect to the second issue is that the benefits of these reforms might be somewhat transitory. As Huntington (1968) argues, stability arises only when the citizenry’s aspirations for political participation are met with an appropriate level of political institutionalization. Some citizens may be initially moved by the introduction of participatory reforms, but if they become accustomed to an environment where they have some voice in the policy process, this may gradually raise their expectations as to how responsive their government should be. To survive, the regime would then need to introduce additional political reforms. He and Warren (2011) note this dynamic in parts of rural China where other consultative reforms have been introduced. Officials in Zeguo, a small township that has experimented with deliberative polling, now receive complaints when deliberative polls are not used for making decisions (Fishkin, He, Luskin, & Siu, 2010).

This feedback mechanism is illustrated in Figure 7, which shows government responsiveness (OUT), citizen assessments (SAT), and citizen comparison levels (CL) over time. In response to low satisfaction levels in time t_0 , the government introduces some measure of political reform in t_1 that improves voice. This produces a short-term boost in satisfaction in t_1 , but in the longer term, it raises comparison levels. By t_2 , expectations have risen, reducing satisfaction back to pre-reform levels. Observing low satisfaction in t_2 , the government adopts an additional reform in t_3 , which sets off the same chain of events. Over time, voice and responsiveness continue to improve, but without lasting shifts in satisfaction.

If this logic is true, it would suggest the CCP regime may ultimately be playing a game it cannot win. Limited participation channels may temporarily increase stability and buy some support among citizens with low expectations. In the long term, however, such reforms may raise expectations that must be satisfied with further reform. This is nothing more than speculation, of course, but if this article leads other researchers to think critically about

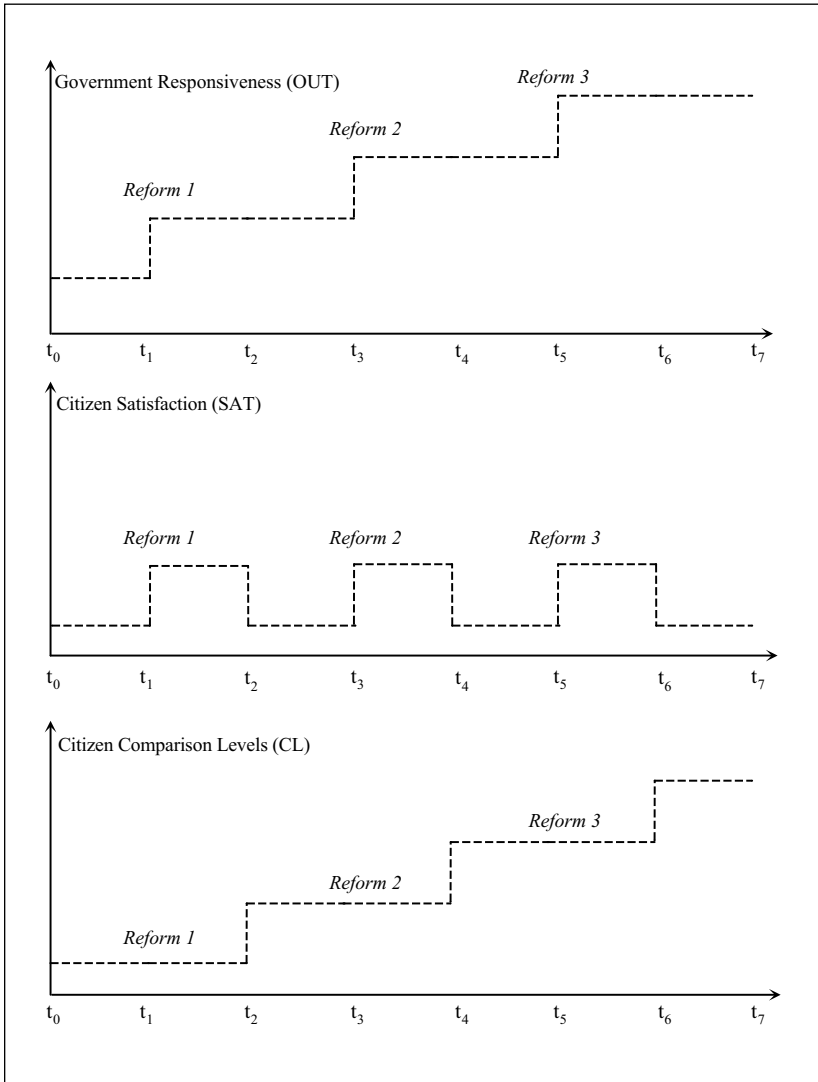


Figure 7. Possible feedback mechanism.

the dynamics of consultative authoritarianism, it will have achieved its purpose.

Appendix

Table A1. Analysis Summary: Linear Model With Individual Covariates.

Dependent variable	CATE			
	Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV
Regime satisfaction				
<i>SATPOLICIES</i>	0.117 (.076)	-0.058 (.615)	0.057 (.176)	0.033 (.327)
<i>VOICE</i>	0.189 (.017)	-0.139 (.741)	0.038 (.284)	0.031 (.368)
<i>SATNPC</i>	0.308 (.079)	-0.111 (.586)	0.003 (.491)	-0.302 (.944)
<i>SATCENTRAL</i>	0.339 (.062)	-0.297 (.741)	-0.008 (.521)	-0.160 (.796)
Compliance				
<i>TAXES</i>	0.348 0.034	-0.289 0.764	0.028 0.420	0.113 0.256
<i>MILITARY</i>	0.338 0.051	-0.241 0.727	0.086 0.282	-0.062 0.648

Table shows CATE and difference in CATE estimates of the public participation treatment on the six outcome measures for Type I and - Type I respondents using the linear model with individual covariates. All *p* values are shown in parentheses and reflect a one-sided hypothesis test, using the formulas in Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006). Analysis is directly comparable with that in Table 3. CATE = conditional average treatment effects.

Author’s Note

Any remaining errors are the author’s responsibility.

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Notes

1. Empirically, the consequences of particular deliberative interventions seem to be context specific. See Delli Carpini, Lomax Cook, and Jacobs (2004), Ryfe (2005), and Thompson (2008) for reviews.
2. The Hainan Provincial People's Congress has instituted similar portals and provides detailed, publicly available responses to each citizen opinion, but this norm has yet to take hold at the national level.
3. As Li (2004) demonstrates, support for "the Center" seems particularly strong, and citizens distinguish between a beneficent, well-intentioned central government and corrupt, venal localities.
4. As has been well-documented, many authoritarian systems incorporate elections at different levels of government as a means of allowing some semblance of citizen choice; gauging and demonstrating support; and perhaps even identifying pockets of poor governance at the local level (Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006). Citizens may choose to abstain from voting as a form of protest (Karklins, 1986), but recent research has suggested that citizens will attempt to advance their policy goals when confronted with even nominally competitive elections (Chen & Zhong, 2002; Landry, Davis, & Wang, 2010; Shi, 1999; Zhong & Chen, 2002).
5. Motions are short policy proposals, often calling for new legislation, that require the signatures of 30 or more deputies. Deputies may also individually file formal opinions, which tend to be shorter and less developed. Deputy motions rarely become bills directly, but their language is often combined with other motions and incorporated into draft legislation (personal communication, NH001, December 2011).
6. The website can be visited at <http://forum.china.com.cn/china/tianyian/nitiwoyi/>
7. Empirical research on marriage has found that women who were raised in abusive homes—a low comparison level—and had few resources of their own—a low comparison level of alternatives—are more likely to stay with an abusive spouse (Gelles, 1976; Sabatelli, 1984).
8. Existing research in psychology confirms the importance of exceeding expectations. Huang and Zeelenberg (2012) find that investors display regret when made aware of more profitable foregone investments but only when the realized investment fails to exceed the expected result.
9. Note that here the term *outcome* refers directly to the quality of participatory avenues, not other outcomes like the level of income, air quality, control of corruption, and so forth. I am not suggesting that using the "You Propose My Opinion" portal brings immediate or tangible benefits to citizens on these other fronts.
10. The China Survey was conducted in April through June 2008 with collaboration

between Texas A&M and the Research Center for Contemporary China at Beijing University. The survey used multistage probability sampling to obtain a nationally representative sample of 3,989 adults. More information is available on the project website, <http://thechinasurvey.tamu.edu/html/home.html>

11. The question wordings for these measures were taken directly from the China Survey.
12. A placebo outcome is simply a dependent variable that we expect to be unaffected by experimental intervention. This is a means of testing the strength of the design. Because the National People's Congress (NPC) public participation channels are a central initiative, we would not expect the intervention to have any tangible effect on the respondent's attitudes towards his or her local government. This is also consistent with Li's (2004) argument that Chinese citizens make sharp distinctions in the trustworthiness of different levels of government.
13. Note that for this analysis, the parametric approach and randomization inference yield similar p values because of the relatively large sample size. The randomization inference proves slightly more conservative and occasionally gives larger p values.
14. As before, this hypothesis can be tested using randomization inference. This involves the following steps: forming a full schedule of potential outcomes by assuming a constant average treatment effect (ATE) of 0, randomly assigning the respondents to treatment and control, calculating the difference between the two estimated conditional average treatment effects (CATEs), and repeating the exercise 10,000 times to get a distribution of possible (CATE[Type I] – CATE[-Type I]) estimates. With this distribution in hand, we can derive an exact p value by seeing how likely we are to observe a difference in CATEs greater than the one actually observed in the data (Gerber & Green, 2012).

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