Sources of Regime Legitimacy and the Debate over the Chinese Model

Yun-han Chu

Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica and Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University
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Contact Information
Asian Barometer Project Office
Department of Political Science
National Taiwan University
21 Hsu-Chow Road, Taipei, Taiwan 100

Tel: 886 2-2357 0427
Fax: 886-2-2357 0420
E-mail: asianbarometer@ntu.edu.tw
Website: www.asianbarometer.org
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Yun-han Chu
Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica and Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University

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I. Introduction

This paper re-examines the on-going debate over the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist regime through a rigorous analysis of a recent Asian Barometer Survey data from mainland China. It evaluates a variety of competing explanatory accounts for what constitute and sustain the CCP regime’s political support. We examine the empirical validity of these competing explanatory accounts within a synthetic framework that takes into account many relevant elements identified by existing literature that are supposed to motivate citizens in China to support (or reject) the incumbent regime and believe in (or suspect) the trustworthiness of the key political institutions under the current system of government.

The on-going debate over the issue of regime legitimacy is central to the intellectual discourse over the so-called Chinese model. The proponents of the Chinese model take the position that this ancient nation has traveled down on its own trajectory of anti-imperialist struggle, state-building, late industrialization and cultural revitalization and will continue to make its own history. The country not only has thus far carved out a unique (and presumably superior to other models of transition from socialism) path to economic modernization under the rubric of market socialism but also is poised to carve out an alternative path to political modernization. It is conceivable, desirable or even imperative that China will accomplish this by crafting and institutionalizing an effective system of government that fits the country’s historical context and social conditions as well as adequately addresses the functional requirements of voice and representation, accountability, conflict resolution, social integration, consensus-building and goal attainment. This China-specific political model can acquire its legitimacy without the standard institutional fixtures of a representative democracy (such as regular election,

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1 The mainland China survey (excluding Hong Kong and Macao) employed in this analysis is part of the second-wave Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), which was conducted between October 2006 and April 2008. All these interviews were conducted under standardized research protocols and survey instruments and based on stratified random sampling of the eligible voters. Data from the second-wave survey are publicly available upon request. Please visit the project website: http://www.asianbarometer.org/ for more information. As for the sampling and other technical information about the ABS Wave II China Survey, please refer to Appendix I.
multi-party competition and free media) as it will be buttressed by a set of shared symbolism and values that are embedded in the country own revolutionary legacy and cultural heritage and values built around individual freedom and rights. In a nutshell, China is well-placed to develop its own formula of political legitimacy in the context of a modern economy and globalized world without resorting to the model set forth by the Western liberal democracy.

The on-going debate over regime legitimacy involves a set of three related issues: First, it is about to what extent the Chinese communist regime enjoys a robust foundation of popular support or whether it is actually suffering from serious deficiency in regime legitimacy and rather fragile beneath the surface of political stability. Second, it is about what explains the level and intensity of political support that the regime has enjoyed so far or at least what might explain its seeming stability and resilience (if not legitimacy) since 1989. The third is about whether rapid socio-economic transformation and widening exposure to international society will steadily erode the legitimacy of the current system of government even if it does enjoy sufficient popular support on the basis of its policy performance up to this point. Or alternatively, it is about whether the regime is able to bank on its inherited revolutionary legacy and cultural heritage and its unique place in the global system to construct an alternative public discourse on political legitimacy (as well as the concept of democracy) and defy the transformative forces of modernization prescribed by the Modernization theorists.

Our empirical analysis does not privilege any of the competing explanations and rival prognoses mentioned above. It does however place emphasis on the subjective opinions, attitudes and values held by the regular citizens. No matter how experts and international organizations evaluate the legitimacy of any given regime, in the final analysis political legitimacy flows out of the heart of the people, who are the

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final judge on the extent to which their own political system is accepted as legitimate and its core institutions and incumbent elite deemed trustworthy.

II. The Great Debate

In the recent past, observers of Chinese politics have engaged in a heated debate over the question of the legitimacy of the CCP regime. Scholars looking through different theoretical and ideological lenses oftentimes disagree fundamentally over the question that to what extent the Chinese communist regime enjoys a robust foundation of popular support. Many China watchers in the West believe that the regime suffers from serious deficiency in political legitimacy and beneath the surface of political stability the one-party authoritarian system is very fragile. The alarmists even suggests that the CCP regime is already sitting on a simmering volcano and in the age of Internet revolution the lava of social unrest and political insurgency can overflow the dam of one-party authoritarianism at any point in time. They took note that there were 180,000 “mass incidents” – everything from strikes to riots and demonstrations – in 2010, twice as many as in 2006. They pointed out the astronomical costs of maintaining stability in China. The government has been devoting massive resources to public security -- 624.4 billion yuan to be spent in 2011, more than a quarter more than was spent in 2009. They also picked up the besieged mentality of the CCP ruling elite manifesting through its strong (or even hysterical) reaction to the Color Revolutions of 2005-2007 as well as the Jasmine Revolution of 2011 in the Arab World. Some insiders, such as Yu Jianrong, have also conveyed the worry among some senior cadres over the dire prospect of the outburst of large-scale social turbulence citing a growing range and severity of urban worker disputes and a greater number of disgruntled peasants who are directing blame at provincial and even central government due to the widening gap between the rich and poor, cumulated grievances stemming from environmental hazard, illegal lay-offs, land expropriation without proper compensation, a dysfunctional judicial system, extensive corruption as well as abuse of power by local cadre, and the brutality of law-enforcement apparatus. According to pessimists, even if the current

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3 For the most recent literatures on the topic, please refer to Deng Zhenglai and Sujian Guo eds. Reviving Legitimacy: Lessons For and From China, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011) and Journal of Chinese Political Science’s special issue on Legitimacy and Governance, Volume 16, Number 2 (June 2011).

4 “180,000 protests in 2010: China”s Spending on Internal Policing Outstrips Defense Budget,” Bloomberg News, 6 March 2011.


regime may not be considered on the brink of collapse yet, but with stability precarious at best the Communist regime is still facing a deep-going crisis of legitimacy and will soon be confronted with pent-up popular demand for democratization.

The pessimist view however does not resonate well with mounting empirical evidences suggesting the opposite. Surveys after surveys the empirical data show that the regime actually has enjoyed substantial popular support. Most of the published English work on the subject utilized surveys not only organized by local scholars or research institutions but also credible international collaborative survey projects, such as Asian Barometer and World Values Survey. All these surveys taped into the legitimacy of Chinese political system. By now scholars familiar with the field have virtually arrived at a consensus: The degree of legitimacy of the Chinese political system is rather high. There is little doubt that the large majority of Chinese consider the current political system to be the appropriate system for their country.\(^7\) For example, according to the 2008 Asian Barometer China Survey, 74% of our respondents gave a positive answer to the statement, “Whatever its faults may be, our current system of government is still the best for the country”. On this widely used measure of diffuse regime support, China is ranked the 4\(^{th}\) highest among the 13 countries and territories covered by the second wave of Asian Barometer Survey. China’s level of diffuse regime support is slightly lower than Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia but substantially higher than Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.\(^8\)

So the focus of debate should be shifted to the second and the third issue: what constitute the legitimacy of China’s one-party authoritarian regime and whether the


\(^8\) While some pessimists still raised questions about the credibility of survey data collected in China, most experts in the field are confident about the validity of their survey results because most surveys have had some built-in design to check the validity and consistency. Also survey results and been corroborated with alternative methodology such as focus group discussion and in-depth interview. As a matter of fact, the Chinese authorities themselves have been commissioned public opinion surveys frequently to monitor the social pulse.
Chinese communist regime will be able to maintain its political supremacy without introducing Western-styled democracy over the long run while charting a unique path to economic rise on the world stage.

On the second issue, the received view to which many China watchers subscribe is quite straightforward: The legitimacy crisis of the CCP regime has been so far only prevented by a combination of economic development, nationalism, and tolerance with regard to social and economic freedom. Harry Harding is undisputedly a predecessor of this line of argument. He identified more than twenty-year ago China’s political reforms since 1978 as the transformation of the regime’s legitimacy from charismatic to rational-legal authority. The regime’s substantial legitimacy is, in turn, increasingly being based on the concepts of modernization and nationalism rather than on Maoist ideology. Underlying this popular argument is the assumption that the regime’s legitimation foundation remains fragile because it is not morally justifiable and/or not sustainable over the long run.

This received view has been challenged recently by scholars applying two alternative theoretical perspectives – institutionalist and culturalist explanation. The former emphasizes the institutional adaptation and innovation of the regime and the later the cultural foundation for the moral justification of one-party rule.

Andrew Nathan pioneered the idea that the CCP regime derived its resilience from institutionalization. More specifically, he identified four important aspects: first, the increasingly norm-bound nature of its succession politics; second, the increase in meritocratic as opposed to factional considerations in the promotion of political elites; third, the differentiation and functional specialization of institutions within the regime; and fourth, the establishment of institutions for political participation and appeal that strengthen the CCP’s legitimacy among the public at large. The institutionalist recognize that policy performance and nationalist zeal matter. They nevertheless argue that superior economic performance, effective provision of internal and external stability, and meaningful effort to address the popular aspiration for recovering the nation’s past glory have been a result of the regime’s institutional capacity, in particular its capacity in learning, adaptation and innovation so that it has been able to constantly retool and re-invigorate its governing capacity.

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to meet the multiple challenges as well as emerging popular needs brought about by rapid socio-economic transformation, increasing enmeshment with the global economy, digital revolution, and climate change.\textsuperscript{13} The regime does simply respond to the popular needs and demands; rather, the regime oftentimes steers the direction of economic development and guide the society it governs as it is also equipped with the institutional capacity to foster consensus over national priorities. The party-state plays a central role in guiding the society to pursue national priorities including the popular yarning for restoring China’s preeminence on the world stage while accommodating divergent expectations and specific local needs.\textsuperscript{14} Also following the institutionalist approach, Gunter Schubert calls our attention to the micro-processes of political reform in China and proposes a new research program for investigating the Chinese regime’s legitimacy that focuses on identifying and studying “zones of legitimacy” that emerge from specific political reforms and the public’s response to them. The regime’s legitimacy has been steadily strengthened by its cautious attempts to reconfigure the relations between state and society. Through incremental political reform the CCP has introduced meaningful -- albeit limited by Western standard -- mechanisms of political participation and accountability.\textsuperscript{15} The new modes of political participation and accountability include grassroots democracy, practice of deliberative democracy, incorporation of emerging stakeholders via corporatist arrangements and consultative mechanisms, policy feedback mechanisms through opinion polls, limited intra-party pluralism, and serious efforts to make the public authority at all levels fair and just by strengthening the rule of law and horizontal accountability.\textsuperscript{16} The culturalist approach challenges the received view in a more fundamental way. They argue that most of existing works apply Western concepts of legitimacy, such as those of Max Weber or David Beetham to the politics of China.\textsuperscript{17} These


\textsuperscript{14} Heike Holbig, Bruce Gilley, “In Search of Legitimacy in Post-revolutionary China: Bringing Ideology and Governance Back In,” *GIGA Working Papers*, No 127 (March 2010).


intellectual exercises overlook Chinese indigenous conceptions of legitimacy which have impacted on the Chinese political system for over two thousand years. The culturalist, such as Tong Yanqi and Daniel Bell, argue that the current regime legitimacy is maintained because of the historically rooted moral bond between the state and society and the societal expectation that the state would be responsible for the wellbeing of the population.\(^1\) The regime legitimacy in China has three overlapping layers: The basic layer is the morality of political elite. The crucial part of the morality is the benevolent governance which specifies that the government has to be compassionate to the people. Ideally, the government is morally obligated to look after the people much in the same way as parent look after their children. The government should be caring, responsive and sensitive to the needs and wants of the ruled but not guided by popular mood. Next, the key component of a benevolent government is the state responsibility to the welfare of the people. It is desirable to have an omnipotent government that bears the all-compassing responsibility for the people’s wellbeing, not just materialist wellbeing but their ethical and intellectual development as well. This runs counter to the Western liberal notion of limited government and division of power. The third component is the meritocratic rule. An ideal society would need to be governed by leaders of superior virtue and political talent. A key function of a legitimate political system is to select, recruit and groom these talented and public-spirited people, i.e., scholar-officials, to take up governing responsibility at different levels while offering everyone equal opportunity for education and upward mobility. This “government by virtue and talent” earn its right to rule (i.e., the mandate of the heaven) from fulfilling its moral responsibility of benevolent governance and in the final analysis by winning the heart (rather than the vote) of the people. These ancient ideas of political legitimacy can be boiled down to the great Chinese tradition of minben, the people-centric doctrine or outlook.\(^2\) In simple terms, the minben doctrine requires governing elite to look after the welfare of their people, take care of the people’s interests and listen to the people’s voices and concerns.

There are some anecdotic as well as empirical evidences to suggest that these indigenous conceptions of legitimacy might have played an ever more important role in sustaining the popular support for the CCP regime as the party’s revolutionary ideology faded. First of all, from Jiang Zeming to Hu Jintao, the third and the fourth-generation CCP leadership has vigorously upheld the idea that all ranking CCP cadres should be competent, compassionate and approachable and at the same time exemplify the virtue of unselfishness, frugality and self-discipline in ways that has


been enshrined by the tradition of Confucian meritocracy. Hu Jintao’s motto of “new three people’s principles (sange weimin)” represents a conscious effort to redefine the raison d’être of China’s socialist democracy by way of reconnecting the Communist party’s mass line tradition with the ancient doctrine of minben.

Tianjian Shi and Lu Jie demonstrated with empirical data that in China the popular understanding of the concept of “democracy” does not match the meaning defined in the liberal democracy discourse; rather, it is based on the guardianship discourse. There is a widely shared view among ordinary Chinese people that “democracy” means government for the people (and by elites), rather than government by the people. They explain this is the reason why, as long as the Chinese government “serves the people,” it is deemed “democratic” and legitimate.

This cultural heritage, however, is not unique to China. According to Tu Weiming, “the Confucian scholar-official still functions in the psycho-cultural construct of East Asian societies.” More recently, based on the findings of the Asian Barometer Survey, Doh Chull Shin found that the majority of East Asians in other countries with a Confucian legacy also tend to be attached to “paternalistic meritocracy”, prioritize economic well-being over freedom, and define democracy in substantive (rather than procedural) terms.

Both the institutionalist and culturalist arguments are central to the debate over the third issue over China’s political future. On the one hand, most Western observers and the liberal-minded intellectual inside China believe that if history is of any guide there are limits to the sustainability of China’s developmental autocracy. They believe that there exist an intrinsic contradiction between rapid market-oriented socio-economic transformation on the one hand and persistent authoritarianism on the other. A political regime must open up in the long run in order to master the rising complexities of economic and social development by establishing rule of law, accountable and responsive political institutions, feedback channels of communication between the state and its citizens, and inclusive modes

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20 On March 18, 2003, a day after assuming the presidency, Hu Jintao proposed what have been known as “new three people’s principles” (xin sanmin zhuyi or sange weimin): to use the power for the people (quan weimin shuoyong), to link the sentiments to the people (qing weimin shuoji), and to pursue the interest of the people (li weimin shoumo).
25 Minxin Pei, China’s Trapped Transition: The limits of developmental autocracy (Harvard University Press, 2006)
of participation. So it is unavoidable that in the long run China’s political system will be forced to open up either through a rupture of bottom-up social revolt or self-initiated democratic reform. So it is just the question of when and how.

On the other hand, the institutionalist and culturalist arguments provide enough intellectual ammunition to the school of China exceptionalism (or proponents of the Chinese model), which believes that there are limits to the heuristic value of Modernization theory or any variant of “end of history” thesis which is intrinsically Western-centric and temporal-spatially bounded. If the CCP regime’s legitimacy is both institutionally based and culturally embedded, it is conceivable that China might be able to defy the force of gravitation toward liberal democracy and travel down on an alternative path to political modernization – institutionalizing a functional and sustainable one-party system with a robust foundation of political legitimacy.

III. An Empirical Analysis of Sources of Regime Legitimacy

In the following, I report the results of an empirical test of these competing explanations as well as rival prognoses with regard to the issue of regime legitimacy. My analysis will proceed in three steps. First, I provide an operational definition of my two key dependent variables – diffuse regime support and trust in regime institutions -- as well as the independent variables. Second, I offer some simple frequency distribution of the three items that constitute our diffuse regime support measure across different levels of education and age cohorts. Third, I present the result of a series of regression analysis that evaluates the relative explanatory power of all the theoretically relevant independent variables. Fourth, I draw some preliminary conclusion about the implications of my empirical analysis for the on-going intellectual debate.

Operational Definition

I approach the concept of regime legitimacy from two analytical angles. First, I follow David Easton’s original definition of political support. Easton defines political support as an attitude by which a person orients oneself to a political system positively or negatively. He distinguishes between three components of political system: political community, regime and authorities. Since here we are concerned

26 Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert, “Political Reform and Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China,” ASIEN 99 (April 2006), S. 9-28

with citizen’s orientation toward the Communist regime, I shall focus on the last two components – regime and authorities. In the second-wave China ABS, we employed one item measuring the supportive attitude toward regime in terms of the current political system and two items measuring the supportive attitude toward authorities in terms of either the government in general or incumbent officials in general. Conceptually regime and authorities are two different components of a political system but empirically they are symbiotic in the context of China’s one-party rule. On this basis, I construct a three-item scale of diffuse regime support. The specific wording of these three items can be found in Appendix II.

Next, I follow the insights of some recent literature that builds upon Easton’s conceptual distinction between different components of political support to construct a multiple-item scale of trust in regime institutions. People like Pippa Norris, Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann all place emphasis on support for regime institutions, attitudes toward actual institutions of government such as national government, parliament, courts, political parties, bureaucracy and the military. Trust in regime institutions is viewed as an important pillar of regime legitimacy. In the context of China, my trust in regime institutions scale is defined as the average of the level of trust in eight concrete institutions – national government, local government, courts, the CCP, the National People’s Congress, ordinary government officials, the PLA, and the Public Security Bureau (i.e., the police). The specific wording of the institutional trust battery can also be found in Appendix II.

The theoretically relevant explanatory variables included in my synthetic framework belong to three categories: indicators of national and personal conditions, indicators of the quality of governance, and political values and attitudes. The indicators of national and personal conditions reflect popular evaluation of the policy performance of the regime. The indicators of quality of governance reveal popular assessment of the characteristics of the political institutions and process. Political values and attitudes define the key attributes of the mass political culture of the present-day Chinese society.

Our multivariate analysis starts with three indicators of economic conditions:

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28 Pippa Norris, “Introduction: The Growth of Critical Citizens?” and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, “Mapping Political Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis,” in P. Norris, ed. Critical Citizens. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; Dalton, Russell J. Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Although all the trust indicators are positively correlated, the level of institutional trust in China varies a lot across different levels or sectors of government. Trust in the Chinese Communist party, People’s Liberation Army, and national government remains extremely high with more 86% of our respondents answering “a great deal of trust” or “quite a lot of trust”. Trust in local government is substantially lower with 52% of our respondents choosing “a great deal of trust” or “quite a lot of trust”. Trust in bureaucracy is even lower (at 46%)

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evaluation of the country’s current economic condition, evaluation of the change in the country’s economic condition over the last few years, and evaluation of the family’s current economic condition.

For the evaluation of other aspects of national conditions, our analysis includes the following three indicators:

1. Public order
2. Gap between rich and poor
3. Freedom to participate in religious activities

For each of the three aspects, we asked our respondents the place the current condition of the country on a ten-point scale with 10 representing the most satisfactory and 1 the least satisfactory.

For the quality of governance, we employ 10 indicators that cover all the desirable characteristics of good governance, including provision of social equality, extensiveness of corruption, freedom, rule of law, citizen empowerment and government responsiveness.

The ten indicators are:
1. Corruption at local government
2. Corruption at central government
3. Corruption of bureaucracy
4. Provision of social Equality
5. Freedom of expression and association
6. Rule of law
7. Judicial independence
8. Individual political rights
9. People like me can influence policy
10. Government Responsiveness

For political values and attitudes, we employed several batteries that are designed to capture the psycho-cultural construct of East Asian societies. More specifically, they include minben conception of democracy scale, paternalist orientation scale, belief in benevolent government scale, belief in state primacy scale.

For constructing a minben conception of democracy scale, we presented respondents with a series of paired contrasting statement, one stemming from the Western notion of democracy and the other from Chinese tradition of minben ideas. For each pairing, the respondents are asked to choose one statement that they think should be more important to democratic politics. The three pairings read: 1) “People enjoy the freedom of speech when criticizing government” or “Government pays

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30 The way the ten indicators are constructed varies. Some are based on single item; others are composite index. Some are measured with ten-point scale; other with labeled response grid. Please see Appendix II for details.
close attention to people’s opinions;” 2) “Majority rule through popular vote” or “Government takes the majority’s interest into consideration when making decisions;” 3) “More than one political organization exists in society to compete for power” or “Government pays attention to other political organizations’ suggestions and opinions.” This scale is an abridged version of a five-item scale originally designed by Tianjian Shi. Tianjian Shi observed that under the influence of traditional minben ideas the prevailing public discourse on democracy in China today resembles the guardianship model of governance recognized by Robert Dahl as a ““perennial alternative to democracy”. 31

Next, we construct a paternalist orientation scale on the basis of our respondents’ approval or disapproval to the following two questionnaire items:

1. The relationship between the government and the people should be like that parents and children.
2. The people should treat the government like they would treat their parents.

A belief in benevolent (and omnipotent) government scale is constructed on the basis of our respondents’ approval or disapproval to the following four questionnaire items:

1. The government should decide which ideas are allowed to circulate in society
2. Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions
3. When judges decide important cases, they should accept the view of the local government
4. If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything

Next, a belief in state primacy scale is composed of the following two items:

1. A citizen should always remain loyal only to his country, no matter how imperfect it is or what wrong it has done.
2. For the sake of the nation, the individual should be prepared to sacrifice his/her personal interest

The political culture variables also include two widely used batteries: national pride scale, and political efficacy scale.

The national pride is included to evaluate the relative importance of nationalism in sustaining the regime legitimacy.

Lastly, in my synthetic model, I also include four socio-economic background variables – education, age, subjective social status, and an international exposure scale. The international exposure scale is composed of the following three behavioral items:

1. How often do you use the internet?
2. How closely do you follow major events in foreign countries/the world?
3. Have you traveled abroad before? If you have, how often do you travel abroad?

This is a very important indicator measuring a respondent’s knowledge about foreign countries and access to foreign (and alternative) sources of information and ideas. A popular assumption among Western China watchers about the regime’s fragility is its heavy reliance on media censorship and cyberspace firewall in order to brainwash Chinese citizens with official propaganda. If this is the case, then one would predict the higher the international exposure the less supportive of the regime.

A Glimpse of the Level of Political Support

Our scale of diffuse regime support is composed of three layers of political support – support for regime, support for government in general and support for government officials in general. Before we proceed to the causal analysis, it is necessary to take look at the statistical profile of the three components separately. In Figures 1a and 1b present the frequency distribution of the respondents who answered “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” to the statement, “Whatever its faults may be, our political system is still the best for country’s current condition,” across age cohorts and levels of education. What we found is that for this particular question the level of support is not only rather high but also vary very little across age cohorts and different levels of education. The lowest level that is found among old aged people or the illiterate is simply due to the fact that a higher percentage of them answered “don’t know”. At the same time, the intensity of support is not very strong, a great majority answered “somewhat agree”, rather than “strongly agree”. This implies that while the political system enjoying a bedrock of popular support most people in China do not indulge the regime with a blind faith.

[Figures 1a and 1b about here]

Figure 2a and 2b present the frequency distribution of the respondents who answered “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” to the statement, “Even if we don’t agree with the government’s specific policy, once the decision is made we should still support the government,” across age cohorts and levels of education. The two figures show that the level of supportive attitude toward the government is

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32 We include all valid cases in our analysis and bring in respondents answering “don’t know”, “cannot choose,” or “decline to answer” whenever possible.
almost as high as that of regime support shown in the previous figures. Also, the level of support does not go down as level of education goes up. In fact, it is among the respondents with college education, we found the highest frequency (14%) answering “strongly agree”. Generally speaking, the variation among people with different levels of education is not that significant. The variation across age cohorts is slightly more noticeable. The younger the generation the less supportive they become. It is among the youngest (18-29), we found the highest frequencies (17%) of “somewhat disagree”. However, the variation is only within a small range and even among the youngest a three-quarter majority expressing supportive attitude.

Figures 3a and 3b present the frequency distribution of the respondents who answered “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” to the statement, “You can trust the people who run our government always to do what is right,” across age cohorts and levels of education.\(^{33}\) The two figures clearly show that once we change the target from “government” to “people who run our government”, ordinary Chinese citizens become much more judicious and critical. Many people don’t always trust the government officials to do the right things. Also, there is a strong linear relationship between age (for that matter education as well) and wholehearted support for government officials. The younger or the better educated are substantially less likely to place blind trust on government officials. In the two younger age cohorts (18-29 and 30-39), the people answering “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree” outnumber those giving positive answers. Among those with college education, more than three-fifth disapprove the statement (with 57% expressing “somewhat disagree” and 5% “strongly disagree”). Apparently they have all learned that sometimes people who run the government made mistakes and in some instances in a big way.

In a nutshell, our data show that many Chinese citizens today don’t place blind trust on government officials. They are ready to scrutinize the quality of specific decisions made by government officials. At the same time a great many of them are willing to lend support to the government and the system as a whole and this kind of

\(^{33}\) In designing the ABS Wave II questionnaire for China, for this particular question we intentionally used “always” instead of “generally”, which is the standard expression used in other surveys, to increase this questions’ discriminant power. The results reported here shows that this decision which traded away some degree of cross-national comparability pays off.
diffuse support is rather extensive and evenly distributed across age cohorts and levels of education.

**Results of Regression Analyses**

To evaluate the relative explanatory power of all the theoretically relevant independent variables, I apply multiple regression analyses to our two dependent variables – *diffuse regime support* and *trust regime institutions*. I apply the regression model not just to the national sample but also to two sub-national samples separating the rural and urban population. The preliminary results are shown in Tables 1a and 1b. In the following I provide a non-technical account of the main findings arising from our regression analyses.

The most significant findings that can be extracted from Table 1a are as follows:

First, the synthetic framework is adequate as all three models fit the data reasonably well especially if one takes into account the magnitude of measurement errors that naturally comes with a cognitively demanding survey.

Second, the most important elements in sustaining the level of *diffuse regime support* are values and beliefs anchored on traditional Chinese ideas of political legitimacy, especially *belief in benevolent government*, *paternalist orientation*, and *belief in state primacy*. They are the most important explanatory sources for both urban and rural population. Their explanatory power is significantly higher than any other variables in the two other categories, namely policy performance and quality of governance. Among the three value orientations, *belief in benevolent government* is the most important pillar in sustaining the diffuse regime support especially among the rural population. In addition to the three value orientations, sense of *national pride* is also a significant variable explaining the level of diffuse regime support among the urban population but not the rural people. However, the *minben*

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34 For constructing the *diffuse regime support* scale, I use Mplus 4.12 to formulate a factor scale with the function of missing-value imputation. Except for the cases in which none of the questions have a valid answer, each factor scale will generate a score for the latent trait behind the measuring items. The factor score is derived as a posterior Bayesian estimate given the independent and dependent variables, which is commonly called “the regression method”. Please see B. O. Muthén. *Mplus Technical Appendices*. Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén (1998-2004), pp.47-48. Similar treatment is also applied to *Minben concept of democracy*.

35 Since both *diffuse regime support* and *trust in regime institutions* approximate interval-scale variables, OLS regression model is applied. All regression coefficients reported in the two tables are standardized beta.

36 Technically speaking, the regression models presented here can be substantially streamlined by taking out independent variables without significant explanatory power. However, for shedding light on the on-going debate, identifying irrelevant variables is just as meaningful as locating important explanatory variables.

37 Among the rural population, the distribution of sense of *national pride* is too lopsided to generate any meaningful variation.
conception of democracy does not seem to have much an impact on diffuse regime support.

Third, among the policy performance variables only the evaluation of current national economic condition has a significant impact on level of diffuse regime support. As expected, the more favorable their evaluation the higher the support for the regime. For the urban population, two other economic indicators do not exhibit any significant effect once the evaluation of national economic condition is taken into account. For the rural population, evaluation of the family’s economic condition still carries some small but statistically significant impact after the effect of national economic condition being held constant.38 In any case, the data does not support the view that the CCP regime’s legitimacy hinges primarily or exclusively on its outstanding economic performance. Assessment of the national condition in three other aspects – public order, religious freedom and gap between rich and poor -- does not seem matter much.39

Fourth, among the quality of governance variables, only the provision of social equality carries a significant impact on regime support for both the urban and rural population. Two other relevant factors have somewhat different effects between the urban and rural population. Perceived government responsiveness can motivate the rural people to support the regime but carries little weight among the urban population. On the other hand, a favorable evaluation of the freedom of expression and freedom of associational life that they have experienced tend to enhance the regime legitimacy among the urban people but it matters little among the rural population. This reflects the difference in the psychological needs between the urban and rural as well as the fact that the rural resident depends more on the government for the delivery of key social services. The most surprising findings is that neither the epidemic problem of corruption nor the regime’s weak record on rule of law, judicial independence and political participation have any observable impact on level of diffuse regime once other factors being accounted for.40 This is not because that our respondents consider government officials are mostly clean. As a matter of fact, when they were asked “How widespread do you think corruption is among officials in

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38 In terms of bivariate relationship, all three economic indicators are significantly and positively correlated with diffuse regime support. Consistent with our regression analyses, the evaluation of national economic condition exhibits the strongest bivariate correlation (.193) among the three.

39 Assessment of the gap between the rich and poor exerts a weak negative impact on regime support among the urban population. This counter-intuitive finding probably suggests that the urban population might have a higher tolerance toward the gap between rich and poor or at least don’t blame the political system for its worsening. In terms of bivariate relationship, the assessment of the gap between the rich and poor shows a flimsy positive correlation (.082) with diffuse regime support.

40 In terms of bivariate analysis, the three indicators on corruption all exhibit negative correlations with level of diffuse regime support as expected. However, their impacts are taken away by other more powerful factors in a multivariate model.
local governments?”, people expressing “most officials are corrupt” or “almost everyone is corrupt” outnumbered those choosing “hardly anyone is involved” or “not a lot of officials are corrupt”. This is probably because most people still believe that the top leadership is relatively clean and serious about cracking down corruption. So their discontent with the extensive corruption among local cadres does not generate a negative spill-over effect dampening diffuse support for the regime.

Last, the socio-economic background variables no longer exhibit much direct explanatory power once all the intermediary factors are taken into account. In the mean while, we have demonstrated earlier that level of regime support and government support, the first two indicators of the diffuse regime support, do not vary much even across age cohorts and levels of education in context of bivariate analyses (before bringing in intermediary variables). This implies that the transformative force of socio-economic modernization has thus far not visibly eroded the regime’s popular foundation. Table 1.a further shows that international exposure also fails to be a meaningful predictor for people’s diffuse regime support. It suggests people who have better access to alternative sources of information and opinions and not captive to state-controlled media do not necessarily withdraw their support from the regime.

![Table 1.a about here](image)

The most significant findings that can be extracted from Table 1b are as follows:

First, the synthetic framework provides a good fit to the data, better than the previous model. The dependent variable in this case enjoys higher discriminant power and higher degree of measurement reliability due to more component indicators and somewhat higher degree of internal consistency. Many more explanatory variables that are not statistically significant in explaining diffuse regime support but become very highly relevant. When the target is shifted from the system or government as a whole to the more concrete institutions rather, policy performance and quality of governance matter more in shaping people’s political trust.

Second, many aspects of the quality of governance become the most important factor shaping people’s trust in regime institutions. Among them, rule of law and provision of social equality surged to the top. Perceived government’s responsiveness is also quite important especially among the rural population. The perceived extent of corruption among local government officials has a clear corrosive effect on people’s institutional trust. In addition, corruption of bureaucracy also dampens urban residents’ trust in regime institutions. Experiences with freedom of expression
and association have some positive impact but it is relevant primary among the rural population. On the other hand, not all the functioning aspects of the system matter. Citizen empowerment, in terms of individual political rights or people like me can influence policy, does not have much an impact. Judicial independence exerts a weak but statistically significant impact only among urban population. These findings mean that essentially the regime has to deliver rule of law, provide legal and social protection of the weak and poor, crackdown on corruption at rank and file, and stay responsive to the people’s need to sustain the high level of popular trust in key political institutions.

Values and beliefs anchored on traditional ideas of legitimacy still matter but their effects are no longer uniformly important. They are still very important among rural population but much less so among China’s urban population. Furthermore, their explanatory power is overtaken by people’s assessment of different aspects of the quality of governance. More specifically, Belief in state primacy and sense of national pride tend to enhance people’s trust toward political institutions for both urban and rural population. Belief in benevolent government remains very important in shaping institutional trust among the rural population but it ceases to be relevant in explaining urban population’s trustful attitude toward concrete political institutions. Minben view of democracy helps strengthen rural people’s institutional trust but has no visible effect among urban residents.

Surprisingly, indicators of policy performance now come in the third place. Overall speaking, maintaining Public order is more important than evaluation of economic conditions, especially among the urban residents. Evaluation of the current national economic condition matters only among the rural people. People’s evaluation of the state of religious freedom has a weak but somewhat different effect on institutional trust. In urban area it enhances trust in regime institutions but in the rural sector it has an adverse effect. This is probably has something to do with the proliferation of underground Christian churches, i.e., more religious freedom, which have generated a lot of social tension in the countryside and oftentimes within a village. In addition, the assessment of the gap between the rich and the poor also exerts some weak but positive impact on institutional trust. It means if the gap is not widening, the more trust on regime institution. In both cases, however, the effect is rather weak.

Last, after the explanatory power of the all the intermediary variables – behavioral, attitudinal, evaluative – is taken into account, people’s level of education still exerts some lingering negative impact on level of institutional trust. Just like in most other societies, more educated people (especially among the urban residents) tend to be more critical and less likely to place blind faith on political institution.
Again, contrary to the conventional wisdom, people with more *international exposure* do not trust political institutions less.

[Table 1b about here]

**Implications for the intellectual debate**

Our empirical analyses paint a rather complex picture about what account for the legitimacy of China’s one-party system and what the future holds for the CCP regime. Many elements that are identified by Western China watchers – such as economic performance, provision of social stability and nationalist sentiment – are shown to be statistically significant explanatory factors. However, their explanatory power is not as strong as many Western China watchers would expect. There is no strong evidence to suggest that the regime’s popular foundation is highly or exclusively dependent on its superior economic performance or its manipulation with nationalist zeal.

There are clear evidences to support the culturalist argument about the prevailing influence of the traditional concepts of political legitimacy. The regime’s overall legitimacy is embedded in these widely held traditional values, such as a paternalist orientation toward the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, a belief in benevolent governance (as well as the preference for entrusting the government with all-encompassing responsibility), and belief in the priority of the state (as the custodian of the nation’s collective wellbeing) over individual rights and interest. They are all shown to be more powerful explanatory variables than either policy performance or quality of governance in accounting for the regime’s overall legitimacy.

Our empirical analyses also lend strong support to the institutionalist argument about the importance of perceived characteristics of the political system. Unlike the political system as a whole of which legitimacy is more culture-based and less dependent on performance, the regime’s concrete institutions have to earn their popular trust with tangible outcomes. The regime’s demonstrated desire and capability to protect the poor and the weak and guarantee them with basic necessity, its incremental political reform to strengthen the rule of law, and its perceived responsiveness to people’s need have been the most important elements in sustaining people’s trust in regime institutions. These perceived characteristics stem from the regime’s capacity in keeping up its governing capacity with the changing times and complex environments and in replenishing its human resource with talents with the right aptitudes, expertise and experiences. While the regime has been
criticized by Western media for its suppression on political freedom and meaningful participation, these two domains do not seem to be the sources of popular discontent. Perhaps the regime’s introduction of grassroots democracy, incorporation of stakeholders into the consultative mechanisms, and limited experiment with deliberative democracy have been so far adequate in addressing the popular need for voice and representation. In the eye of the Chinese citizens, the area where the regime suffers a clear deficiency is the epidemic corruption among local-level officials and bureaucrats, something the CCP’s top leaders also openly recognized and worry about.

Our empirical data also suggests that a full understanding of the culture-based regime legitimacy in China has to be calibrated within its multi-level structure of political support and popular trust. The level of political support is very high for the system as well as the government as the whole but become substantially lessened when the target becomes the office-holders. In a similar vein, the level of trust tends to increase towards the political institutions at national level but decrease toward local governments. The ordinary citizens tend to blame their dissatisfaction with corruption and abuse of power on lower-level cadres or local governments while maintaining trust in the top leadership and central government. This differentiated level of trust contributes to strengthening moral legitimacy of the highest central leaders and establish the political-psychology basis for the overall legitimacy of the political system. Local governments at different levels act as buffer zones that protect the center from the people’s dissatisfaction and cushion the CCP regime from potential legitimacy crises.41

IV. By Way of Conclusion

The on-going debate will not end with my empirical analysis. The debate over the three issues – first, to what extent the CCP regime is facing a legitimacy crisis, second, what factors help sustain the regime’s political support, and third, whether the regime can defy the force of gravitation toward liberal democracy in the process of rapid socio-economic modernization – will continue in the foreseeable future. It is a debate not just about competing empirical evidences and theoretical perspectives but also divergent ideological orientation. At the same time, no one with a sound intellectual sense can assert with confidence that he or she holds a definitive answer to these questions. Even among the subscribers to the Modernization theory, there is

41 Yangqi Tong, “Morality, Benevolence, and Responsibility: Regime Legitimacy in China from Past to the Present.”
little agreement over whether the CCP regime will be sooner or later facing up a deep-rooted legitimacy crisis. There are wide-ranging different views over the question of when and how this legitimacy crisis will unfold.\textsuperscript{42} The more sanguine variant suggests that the Chinese Communist regime might be able to travel down a path of "muddling through" for quite a while. The most benign variant suggests that the CCP elite might eventually be able to engineer a peaceful and gradual transition from one-party authoritarianism to democracy along the model set out by the KMT on Taiwan.\textsuperscript{43}

There is little doubt that the CCP regime is facing with the daunting task of retaining the party’s hegemonic presence in society with a dwindling capacity for ideological persuasion and social control, co-opting the newly emerged social forces that came with a rapidly expanding private economy and diversifying social structure, accommodating the growing popular demand for political representation and participation, and coping with the political consequences of economic opening. In many ways, the political challenges that the CCP incumbent elite is facing today is quite comparable to what the KMT had experienced decades ago. While the KMT had managed to retain its political hegemony and elongate the process of gradual political liberalization over a long period of time, but the process of authoritarian demise was only slowed down but not stopped or reversed. So some observers argue that if the history is of any guide, a resilient developmental authoritarianism with all its organizational omnipotence and adaptability will eventually become the victim of its own success.

On the other hand, one might argue that China is poised to construct an alternative public discourse on political legitimacy and carve out its own path to political modernization due to its cultural heritage, revolutionary legacy and unique place in the world. At least the CCP has a much better chance of defying the force of gravitation toward liberal democracy than the KMT in Taiwan. As compared the KMT of the 1980s and 1990s, the CCP today enjoys much more breathing space because it is navigating in rather different external environment and domestic conditions. In the case of Taiwan, Western ideas and values had long established its hegemony in the ideological arena before the authoritarian opening. The KMT was also constrained by its own ideological commitment to eventually become a full liberal democracy as prescribed in the R.O.C. Constitution. Furthermore, the KMT was highly susceptible to the international influences and pressures especially from the United States.

In contrast, the CCP regime is relatively free from the kind of ideological or


\textsuperscript{43} Thomas Heberer and Gunter Schubert, “Political Reform and Regime Legitimacy in Contemporary China,” \textit{ASIEN}, 99 (April 2006), S. 9-28
institutional commitment that had constrained the KMT elite. The CCP has committed itself to the development of “socialist democracy”, not Western-styled liberal democracy. Next, in the ideological arena Western ideas and values have never established their hegemonic presence in the mainland Chinese society, not even in the intellectual community. They are facing two strong ideological counterweights. First, the CCP’s socialist legacy has been reinvigorated by the so-called New Leftists who are critical of the neo-classical and neoliberal economics, compare American democracy to a plutocracy, and advocate a stronger role of the state in response to the growing social inequality, regional disparity, and rampant corruption and injustice in the process of privatization. Second, with the support of the regime, there has been a resurgence of Chinese cultural identity, philosophy and worldview, in particular Confucianism which is promised to offer a compelling alternative to Western liberalism as the country retreats from communism.

Furthermore, China, due to its sheer size and history of anti-imperialist struggle, is least susceptible to the sway of the United States or the industrialized democracies as a whole. On the contrary, China enjoys an ever growing strategic and economic capability to create a more hospitable external environment, especially within its own orbit of political and economic influence. In addition, China today is navigating in a different time as compared to Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s. The global tidal wave of democratization has receded and the developing world today is entering a period of what Larry Diamond has dubbed “democratic recession”. Even the advanced democracies of the West democracies, long admired by China’s liberal-minded intellectual elite, are steadily losing their attractiveness as the fiscal crises in Europe deepens and the political paralysis in Washington lingers in the wake of Great Recession.

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Appendix I: Sampling and Technical Information about ABS China Survey

This survey was conducted in 2008 in Mainland China, in cooperation with the Research Center of Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University. The survey sample represents the adult population over eighteen years of age residing in family households at the time of the survey, excluding those living in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The sampling frame was based on the information collected by the Sociological Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) for a 2006 nationwide representative survey.

A stratified multistage area sampling procedure with probabilities proportional to size measures (PPS) was employed to select the sample. The Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were districts (qu) in metropolitan areas and counties (xian) in other areas. All PSUs were stratified according to their population and economic features. Altogether, 37 strata were identified and 212 PSUs were selected. The Secondary Sampling Units (SSPs) were street councils (jiedao) in urban areas and townships (xiang) in rural areas, and the third stage of sampling was geared to resident committees (juweihui) in urban areas and administrative villages (cun) in rural areas. A total of 424 SSUs and 848 TSUs were selected. Within each selected family household, a Kish table was used to select an eligible respondent.

The survey scheduled interviews with 7,293 people. For various reasons, e.g., invalid address, no eligible candidates, and migration, 583 prospective respondents could not be located. 5,098 of the prospective respondents completed the questionnaire and the response rate was 75.98 percent. Post-stratification techniques were used to adjust sampling errors.
Appendix II: Wordings of Questionnaire Items Used

Dependent Variable 1: Diffuse Regime Support scale

1. Whatever its faults may be, our country’s political system is still the most suitable in China’s current situation
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

2. People should always support the decisions of their government even if they disagree with them
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

3. You can trust the people who run our government always to do what is right
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

Dependent Variable 2: Trust in Regime Institutions

I’m going to name a number of institutions. For each one, please tell me how much trust do you have in them? Is it a great deal of trust, quite a lot of trust, not very much trust, or none at all?

1. National Government
   1 None at all
   2 Not very much trust
   3 Quite a lot of trust
   4 A great deal of trust

2. Courts
   1 None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

3. Local government (in urban areas), Village government (in rural areas)
1. None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

4. The Communist Party of China
1. None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

5. The National People's Congress
1. None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

6. Ordinary government officials
1. None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

7. The People's Liberation Army
1. None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

8. Public Security Bureau
1. None at all
2. Not very much trust
3. Quite a lot of trust
4. A great deal of trust

Economic Condition

1. How would you rate the overall economic condition of our country today?
   1. Very Good
2 Good
3 So so (not good nor bad)
4 Bad
5 Very bad

2. How would you describe the change in the economic condition of our country over the last few years?
   1 Much better
   2 A little better
   3 About the same
   4 A little worse
   5 Much worse

3. As for your own family, how do you rate your economic situation today?
   1 Very Good
   2 Good
   3 So so (not good nor bad)
   4 Bad
   5 Very bad

Evaluation of Current Condition on Key Indicators

If 10 represents the most satisfactory and 1 the least satisfactory, where would you place our country on the following issues?

1. Public order
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Gap between rich and poor
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Freedom to participate in religious activities
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Political Culture

Minben Conception of Democracy Scale
1. Among the following characteristics, which one do you think is the most important for
democracy?
1. People enjoy freedom of speech when criticizing the government
2. Government pays close attention to people’s opinions

2. Among the following characteristics, which one do you think is the most important for democracy?
1. Majority rule through popular vote
2. Government takes the majority’s interest into consideration when making decisions

3. Among the following characteristics, which one do you think is the most important for democracy?
1. More than one political organization exists in the society to compete for power
2. Government pays attention to other political organizations’ suggestions and opinions

Paternalist Orientation scale
1. The relationship between the government and the people should be like that between parents and children.
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
   3. Somewhat disagree
   4. Strongly disagree
2. The people should treat the government like they would treat their parents.
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
   3. Somewhat disagree
   4. Strongly disagree

Belief in Benevolent Government scale
1. The government should decide which ideas circulate in society
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
   3. Somewhat disagree
   4. Strongly disagree
2. Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
   3. Somewhat disagree
   4. Strongly disagree
3. When judges decide important cases, they should accept the view of the local government
1 Strongly agree
2 Somewhat agree
3 Somewhat disagree
4 Strongly disagree

4. If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

Belief in State Primacy Scale
1. A citizen should always remain loyal only to his country, no matter how imperfect it is or what wrong it has done.
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

2. For the sake of the nation, the individual should be prepared to sacrifice his/her personal interest
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

National Pride Scale
1. How proud are you to be a citizen of China?
   1 Very proud
   2 Somewhat proud
   3 Not very proud
   4 Not proud at all

2. Given the chance, how willing would you be to go and live in another country?
   1 Very willing
   2 Willing
   3 Not willing
   4 Not willing at all

Assessment of Governance
**Corruption**

How widespread do you think corruption is among the following officials?

1. **Local government officials**
   1. Hardly anyone is involved
   2. Not a lot of officials are corrupt
   3. Most officials are corrupt
   4. Almost everyone is corrupt

2. **Central government officials**
   1. Hardly anyone is involved
   2. Not a lot of officials are corrupt
   3. Most officials are corrupt
   4. Almost everyone is corrupt

3. **Civil servants**
   1. Hardly anyone is involved
   2. Not a lot of officials are corrupt
   3. Most officials are corrupt
   4. Almost everyone is corrupt

**Provision of Social Equality Scale**

1. **Everyone is treated equally by the government**
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
   3. Somewhat disagree
   4. Strongly disagree

2. **People have basic necessities like food, clothes, and shelter**
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
   3. Somewhat disagree
   4. Strongly disagree

**Freedom of Express and Association Scale**

1. **People are free to speak what they think without fear**
   1. Strongly agree
   2. Somewhat agree
3 Somewhat disagree
4 Strongly disagree

2. People can join any organization they like without fear
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

**Rule of Law Scale**
1. How often do government officials withhold important information from the public view?
   1 Always
   2 Most of time
   3 Sometimes
   4 Rarely
2. How often do national government officials abide by the law?
   1 Always
   2 Most of time
   3 Sometimes
   4 Rarely
3. When the government breaks the laws, there is nothing the legal system can do
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

**Judicial Independence**
If 10 represents the most satisfactory and 1 the least satisfactory, where would you place our country on the following issues?

1. Independent judiciary not subject to government interference

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Citizen Empowerment**
If 10 represents the most satisfactory and 1 the least satisfactory, where would you place our country on the following issues?

1. People like me can influence government policies
Government Responsiveness scale

1. Does our government attach importance to public opinion when making policy?
   1 Attaches no importance
   2 Attaches little importance
   3 Attaches some importance
   4 Attaches great importance

2. In your opinion, does the government pay attention to the needs of the people?
   1 Always
   2 In most cases
   3 Sometimes
   4 Never

Political Efficacy Scale

1. In our country, people have many ways to influence government decisions
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

2. People like me don’t have any influence over what the government does
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

3. Like the majority of people, I have a good understanding of the government and political issues.
   1 Strongly agree
   2 Somewhat agree
   3 Somewhat disagree
   4 Strongly disagree

International Exposure Scale
1. **How often do you use the internet?**
   1. Almost daily
   2. At least once a week
   3. At least once a month
   4. Several times a year
   5. Hardly ever

2. **How closely do you follow major events in foreign countries/the world?**
   1. Very closely
   2. Somewhat closely
   3. Not too closely
   4. Very little
   5. Not at all

3. **Have you traveled abroad before? If you have, how often do you travel abroad?**
   1. A few times a year
   2. Almost once a year
   3. Just a few times in my whole life
   4. Just once in my whole life
   5. Never

**Subjective Social Status**
People sometimes think of the social status of their families in terms of being high or low. Imagine a ladder with 10 steps. At step one stand the lowest status and step 10 stand the highest. Where would you place your family on the following scale? (SHOWCARD)
Whatever its faults may be, our political system is still the best for country’s current condition.

Figure 1a: Level of Regime Support and Age

ABS China Survey 2008 (N=5098)

Figure 1b: Level of Regime Support and Education

ABS Survey 2008 (N=5098)
Figure 2a: Level of Support for Government and Age

ABS China Survey 2008 (N=5098)

Even if we don't agree with the government's specific policy, once the decision is made we should still support the government.

Figure 2b: Level of Support for Government and Education

ABS Survey 2008 (N=5098)

Even if we don't agree with the government's specific policy, once the decision is made we should still support the government.
Figure 3a: Level of Support for Government Officials and Age

ABS Survey 2008 (N=5098)

You can trust the people who run our government always to do what is right.

Figure 3b: Level of Support for Government Officials and Education

ABS Survey 2008 (N=5098)

You can trust the people who run our government always to do what is right.
Table 1a: OLS Regression Models for Diffuse Regime Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanatory Variables</th>
<th>All China</th>
<th>Urban China</th>
<th>Rural China</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Current National Economic Condition</td>
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<td>.060***</td>
<td>.031***</td>
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<td>National Condition over the last five years</td>
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<td>-.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Family Economic Condition</td>
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<td>-.013</td>
<td>.016**</td>
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<td><strong>Rating of National Condition over Key Indicators</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Public order</td>
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<td>.009</td>
<td>.003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gap between rich and poor</td>
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<td>-.017***</td>
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<td>Religious freedom</td>
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<td>.002</td>
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<td>.036**</td>
<td>.033***</td>
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<td>Freedom of Expression and Association</td>
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<td>.044***</td>
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<td>Judicial independence</td>
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R Square .274 .355 .245
N 3109 1082 2027

Legend: *** p<.001 ** p<.01 * P<.05
### Table 1b: OLS Regression Models for Trust Regime Institutions

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