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ABSTRACT: Interest in politics has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of individual political participation across countries. As an addendum to studies of political culture, this research note proposes that citizens of democracies should be more interested, and more participatory, than their authoritarian counterparts because they have a greater say in the political process. After considering what it means to participate in politics according to scholars, democratic and authoritarian regimes, and citizens themselves, it is then suggested that this fairly intuitive assumption may not hold in the cases of democratic Taiwan and the “evolved authoritarian” People’s Republic of China. It is suggested that these fundamental assumptions and relationships be investigated by means of more dedicated surveys, interviews, and focus groups in Chinese polities.

Interest in Politics and Participation: A Study of Individual Chinese Citizens in Different Regimes

Introduction & Overview. A burgeoning multitude of pages has been written about voting, the primary act of political participation in democracies. Similarly, one of the enduring debates of political culture as it relates to the individual is whether democratic citizens are born universally, as Amartya Sen insists, or if they must be cultivated—implying that democracy just won’t work if citizens lack some essential civic values. While both topics are undoubtedly important, empirical studies have focused almost exclusively on democratic countries for their data, leaving out nearly half the world’s population in non-democratic and semi-democratic states.

Such exclusion has both practical and theoretical foundations: data is more difficult to obtain where researchers are less welcome, citizens in non-democracies have more “parochial” or “subject” orientations to their political institutions (which the leaders, culture, and institutions themselves actively perpetuate)¹, and many theories of political development suggest that since all states will eventually democratize, there is little incentive to study political cultures and non-participants who are “on the wrong side of history”. This research note contends, contrarily, that important empirical similarities and distinctions can and must be drawn between citizens in societies with “opposite” political cultures, especially as studies of participation in democracies expand beyond an overly narrow focus on the voting act itself. As Samuel Huntington noted long ago, voting is only one participatory act among many, but states which do not

¹ These terms are borrowed from Almond & Verba’s *A Civic Culture*.

provide their increasingly participatory populations with approved channels to do so risk not only their social stability but also the continuation of their regimes.

Events of recent decades have called into question many basic assumptions about the roles and powers of citizens in democratic and authoritarian regimes. Gone is the allegiant “civic culture” of post-war America, replaced with critical citizens who are increasingly dissatisfied with politics and their supposedly participatory political systems. What this note hopes to add to the discussion is that non-democracies are not completely insensitive to their citizens’ desire to have a say in the political process, and they have the advantage of lower expectations among their citizens—in many cases, any measure of direct accountability, or simply consultation, may constitute a significant and appreciated improvement. These pose challenges to the theoretical expectations that citizens of democracies must be interested in and informed about the political process, while most living in autocracies should for their own safety and the regime’s stability leave politics to the elites.

Are such challenges substantive or merely provocative? This note proposes to use surveys, interviews, and focus groups in two exemplary states in a region of growing global importance to test the hypotheses that 1. Citizens in democracies are more interested in politics than citizens in autocracies and semi-democracies (Interest in politics is higher where there are approved institutional channels for all citizens’ political participation, and these are seen to influence political outcomes). 2. Citizens will define political participation primarily in terms of what channels their polities provide and allow. 3. Citizens who are interested in politics are more likely to want to participate; conversely, all polities contain large numbers of uninterested citizens who may or may not participate but do not *want* to do so (for a variety of reasons). As these may be too many hypotheses to test in a single article, this will only propose how these factors may be measured among a particular population, ethnic Chinese in the PRC and Taiwan².

What follows will consist of discussing the central concept of political participation, how it has been studied in authoritarian and Chinese contexts, the methodology of this research note, the expected results and conclusions to be drawn from its application.

² APPENDIX D lists a wider range of ideal locations where citizens might be surveyed, solicited for focus groups, and interviewed, but as the primary concern of this note is differences between authoritarian and democratic states, it will focus on the expectations of results from the PRC and Taiwan.

Defining Political Participation. As a much-studied topic, scholars have devised numerous definitions of this study's key term. Fundamentally, all definitions involve designating *political actions* (as opposed to non-political actions) intended to influence the *process* of politics in one's polity of reference. These points pose immediate challenges for studies at the individual level of analysis because 1. What constitutes a *political* act often varies between the actor and whoever labels an action as such, and 2. Citizens who are not interested in politics or who lack a participant orientation to their institutions are likely to see politics as something quite other than a process.³

A political act is one which carries political meaning for the actor. This would unfortunately exclude most of Putnam's league bowlers and other builders of social capital and trust who don't think of such consequences. Another problem with this definition is distinguishing when everyday acts like "taking a stroll" in the contemporary PRC⁴, sitting in a particular area of the bus in the South in the 1950's, and other acts of civil disobedience.

Political scientists are above all guilty of seeing political meaning and consequences in acts where actors themselves do not see politics. This results in attributing an interest in politics where none may exist and the assumptions that everyone is naturally political or interested in politics. That league bowling and joining other non-political groups have effects on the quality of American democracy is a very important conclusion, supported by mountains of empirical evidence. The problem that most of these actors do not engage in these acts either with the slightest political purpose or consciousness is highly consequential, perhaps irresolvable, for this study's definition and the study of politics. In effect, authors like Putnam are depoliticizing politics by inscribing political consequences upon

³ For non-participants, politics might instead simply be something that elites decide, something on which one has no right, interest, or qualification to attempt to influence. I would argue that a large, under-acknowledged, and difficult to study "parochial" segment of humanity has little or no political consciousness whatsoever, only participating when politics directly threatens their immediate interests or if political issues are directly conceptualized and marketed so as to mobilize them as a political force (as in the case of Carmines and Stimson's "symbolic" or "easily simplified" issues). Additionally, there is a problem for gauging interest among the many citizens who see politics as simply "a dirty game" which everyone must play to get what they need and want—while being uninterested beyond what is explicitly demanded of them by the government, or the bare minimum to meet their own personal needs. The first group might be described as "non-participant subjects", the second as "reluctant participants"; despite the difference in levels of participation, neither should be classified as interested!

⁴ Dissidents use this as an un-censorable call to gather and protest. It also acknowledges the high costs of protesting in the PRC, as indeed the act of walking itself becomes political, a substitute for vocal dissent which, given the government's extreme response to "strollers" and Western media's obsession with them, has also become costly and unsafe. See the Anonymous calls for "Jasmine Revolutions" online for full texts of the incitements to "protest with one's feet".

actions the actor views quite apolitically, while other fields are eager to examine power and authority dynamics of inherently apolitical topics such as fashion and celebrity gossip⁵.

This study seeks to address the discrepancy between popular and scholarly definitions of what constitutes a political act by grounding the term in open-ended responses of citizens themselves. A central contention is that people who are more interested in politics will list a wider variety of political acts than those who are not. The question then arises why these self-definitions matter, especially if the field has come close to both standardization and operationalization for empirical study. This can be answered by noting that modes of participation cited by citizens are often a way to circumvent difficult institutional change which would make democracy more direct, implying that a vote for a representative every two years does not satisfy one's interest or doubts that such an official channel of participation is really influencing the political process to any observable degree. Especially in cases where an individual lists acts which do not please the regime, or in extreme cases illegal acts, these are evidence that citizens demands for a more participatory system are not being met.

A well-functioning democracy should be expected to foster interest in politics, which in turn sustains the democratic process, based on citizen participation. Books from the likes of Putnam, Norris, and Dalton continue to expand the scope and scrutiny of citizens' political activities, with the latter two finding that while traditional activities such as voting and joining civic groups has declined in post-industrial democracies, actions once only in the arsenal of activists, like petition-signing and protest, are being normalized. Given the influence of *Bowling Alone*, social capital revivalists of all ages may even share Putnam's all-inclusive participatory definition, joining cooking clubs, sports leagues, and online social networks with underlying motivations to stretch and strengthen our democratic backbone.

This section concludes that until a systematic study of citizens' own definitions is undertaken, scholars are essentially putting words in their mouths and thoughts in their minds which are influencing the subjects more than measuring them. These definitions are understandably colored by the fact that most studies employing them were

⁵ For a prime example of stretching power as a unit of analysis, see Goss' article on the Spanish "pink press", which parses out the potentially political consequences of celebrity gossip media by maintaining "gender surveillance". This is by no means a condemnation of interdisciplinarity, but by including everything with potential political consequences in one's analysis, the exploded distinction between the political and non-political invites a lot of inconsequential hot air. In terms of original intent and individual consumption, sometimes trashy entertainment media is just that, and bowling leagues are just something fun to do after work.

undertaken in democratic states, where citizens' input in governing is actively solicited and voting is an obvious act of participation. Even today, however, nearly half of the world's population lives in non-democracies or semi-democracies, and the topic of political participation in these areas begs to be studied more empirically.

Political Participation under Authoritarian Regimes. The theoretical expectations for individual political participation may be said to vary by regime type, with pure authoritarianism in an uncomfortable midpoint⁶. In the broadest of terms, if humans are naturally political (interested in politics and wishing to participate in the process), any regime which discourages or prohibits political activities which aren't explicitly approved by or supportive of the regime can enjoy only a very tenuous existence.

Despite what authoritarian regimes would prefer, however, the number of political issues on which an entire population can be either unanimous or apathetic is decidedly small. If any statement may be made about the political nature of humans, it is that when a policy is perceived to be against one's interests, it will be opposed. This is to say that approving citizens, essential in democracies to establish a mandate, need hardly participate at all in authoritarian states, except when their numbers are doubted or their object of approval comes under threat from dissidents. When dissent and alienation involve policies, there may be room for nuance and participation in forms similar to democratic deliberation; when their object is the regime itself, a citizen's choice becomes stark: be silent or revolt, risking life and limb.

If authoritarian states in general allow only political acts which express support for the regime and its policies, it would be useful to outline and incorporate what David Easton sees as the two primary types of support which may be expressed or withheld. Very briefly, diffuse support is said to be directed toward the regime, and specific support of

⁶ Specifically, according to an admittedly distant understanding of Brooker and Linz's books on the varieties of non-democracies, totalitarianism reserves an active role for the citizen, to spread and celebrate the political ideology among the masses, and one argument against compulsory voting in democracies is its prevalence in totalitarian states, albeit often with only one candidate on the ballot and "correct" answers for all referenda. Authoritarianism, especially its more evolved forms which are more accountable to citizens, is by definition elitist in expecting citizens to be apolitical and leave the complicated task of governing to the technocrats. As this is a micropolitics paper, these claims of regime type will not be examined critically and only provide a background for the state's expectations of citizens.

actual policies is a measure of citizen's satisfaction which may fluctuate more without threatening the regime's stability⁷. Both of these forms require at least some interest in politics, though perhaps when mobilized into shouting slogans on the street, the number and volume of supporters become more important than the depth or sophistication of support. An interesting comparison can be made with democracies by noting whether more supportive citizen participation will be observed (and self-defined) by citizens of authoritarian states than of democratic ones, as one of the major reasons why the latter are more critical is that they are *allowed* to be. This is to say that democratic citizens are likely to find authoritarian regimes wholly unacceptable, but this does not generally result in overt displays of diffuse support, as is common to an often spectacular and ridiculous degree in totalitarian states. Instead the democratic regime is more often criticized for the areas in which it falls short of citizens' democratic ideals.

In the absence of challengers to authoritarian regimes, it may be preferable for nearly *all* citizens to be apolitical non-participants. As autocracies will always be challenged by globally prevailing democratic norms, however, both authoritarian and totalitarian political cultures have in the past century made space for citizen participation. Naturally, the kind explicitly supporting the regime, such as pro-regime parades, xenophobic rallies, and patriotic art shows are more meaningful than those which would "normally" challenge it in the event that elections in these countries determined political outcomes or unseated incumbents.

It is taken as uncontroversial that authoritarian states tend to be less accommodating of scholars who want to enter their countries to ask their citizens sensitive questions. However, neither this nor the theory-based assumption that citizens of non-democracies either don't want to participate or cannot participate in similar ways as democratic citizens is an excuse for the shortage of empirical studies of political participation in authoritarian regimes. Given the importance of China as a rising power and model of authoritarian development, there are at least a few studies on which to build. It is to these, and the thorn in the PRC's side, democratic Taiwan, that we now turn.

Chinese Citizens and Political Participation. Before launching into the two primary cases, a very simple observation about Chinese citizens' political participation in the U.S. is worth noting. If pressed to name Chinese-

⁷ What keeps authoritarian regimes vigilant most of the time is the potential for specific opposition to change rapidly, often in the face of non-responsiveness or incompetence at relieving discontent, into diffuse opposition. See CHART 1 in APPENDIX E for a proposed relationship between interest in politics, Easton's support types, and participation.

Americans serving in the U.S. government, most Americans would likely draw a blank, and this might feed into cultural arguments that most Chinese people, even when exposed to one of the strongest democratic political cultures, retain a subject orientation toward political leadership and may prefer an authoritarian system. In fact, if the proportion of Chinese-Americans in the total U.S. population, about 1%, is compared to the proportion serving in the highest levels of government (nationally and in the five most populous states), no clear conclusions can be drawn. The current presidential Cabinet counts two prominent Chinese-American members, including a former governor, and the House and Senate each have at least one Chinese member.⁸ That examples of Chinese-American politicians are not prominent enough to be recognized nationally facilitates stereotypes which the authoritarian PRC is all too willing to exploit.

The PRC and Taiwan offer a natural experiment to observe the effects of regime type on individuals' interest in politics, definitions and levels of political participation while holding cultural and socioeconomic variables constant⁹. A very large diasporic community whose individuals tend to retain Chinese self-identification for long periods—often multiple generations—wherever they have immigrated offers an almost unlimited pool of additional cases, should the initial study yield interesting results.

The government and media of the PRC have argued vociferously that “Western-style” democracy is unfit for the Chinese state and that its current regime is the most congruent with Chinese political culture¹⁰. For good measure, it also denigrates “so-called” democracy in Taiwan to the point where a majority of PRC citizens would probably claim that

⁸ See APPENDIX F for a small table of Chinese-Americans serving in government. What may be contended about the 1.7% of the “total” government being Chinese is that the majority of these either have origins in Taiwan or are at least one generation removed from China. Also, much of the higher than expected number may be attributed to California. Including all the states' senates and every city's mayors (much harder to compile data) would likely reduce the percentage in government to well below the 1% of the population they constitute. The base assumption that ethnic Chinese people can't work in democracy can nonetheless be rejected, and while provocative and perhaps interesting, we should not expect any study to judge whether Chinese-Americans elected to positions of power are more likely to use their positions in an authoritarian manner. Essentializing is offensive!

⁹ As the CCP regime is now considered to be at the forefront of “evolved authoritarianism”, a better experiment for maximizing variance between the two cases would be contemporary Taiwan and the PRC *before* village elections and urban People's Congress voting were implemented. On the other hand, the PRC of that time was also still decidedly on the totalitarian end of the spectrum, with the same high citizen participation expectations as democracies (though of course channeled into “revolutionary” activities).

¹⁰ For a recent example in Chinese and circulated in the media from authoritarian Singapore to the authoritarian PRC, see Xiang Zhang's article, typical of the argument that “Western-style” democracy is incompatible with the state's development up to now, likely to remain so for some time, but very very gradually (without benchmarks which would suggest it is a desirable or realizable goal) will come to China. Its title is provocative (“Will Inevitably Collapse China”), but its content is Party boilerplate and should be read more as a warning to Chinese citizens eager to democratize (“Will” should be “Would”) rather than a prediction of the future.

the PRC is *more* democratic than Taiwan. Is there a Chinese cultural argument to be made? If so, it is of *political* rather than ethnic culture¹¹.

Of critical importance to the study of political participation in the PRC is a precise description of what kinds of acts are explicitly allowed. Jie Chen's 2004 book, *Political Support in Urban China*, outlines two main categories, the first of which, voting in local elections, is at first glance contradictory to the authoritarian nature of the Chinese Communist Party's regime. O'Brien's article on rural elections also finds voting to be the most common form of citizen participation, where it is allowed. What both authors also note, however, is that candidates in all PRC elections are usually selected by the Party itself, scarcely if ever deviate from the Party Line, and have very little observable influence on policies, usually disappearing after being voted in and heard from again only in the next election cycle. The system is, in short, a quasi-democratic ploy which legitimizes claims that the PRC *is already* a democracy. In any case, it suffices, along with a tradition for caring members of the central government to consult with the people, to qualify the PRC as the leading example of what Bueno de Mesquita calls "evolved authoritarianism".¹² The second "behavioral consequence of political support", contacting behavior, is relatively rare, most likely because citizens in the PRC are quite similar to other countries in that they usually contact their officials to complain or voice opposition to something. As mentioned previously, expressing any kind of opposition in the authoritarian PRC requires a naïve evaluation of its costs and benefits, including the likelihood that it will be heard by receptive officials.

One of the best predictors of political participation for citizens of the PRC, perhaps even better than interest in politics as described in the following section, is membership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹³ Indeed, there is little linguistic difference between "joining" and "participating", and becoming a loyal Party member is probably the

¹¹ The current debate in China over "universal" (i.e. democratic) values versus "authentically/uniquely Chinese" (i.e. elite guardian) values is well summarized in *The Economist* article: The Debate over Universal Values. Few countries today can or do make the argument for elite guardianship as forcefully as the PRC, based on "5,000 years of continuous civilization" and Confucian virtue among elite rulers (even those who were anti-Confucian, as in the early to middle People's Republic), described by Balazs and updated in Hua and Wasserstrom's volumes.

¹² See Bueno de Mesquita's *Foreign Affairs* article from 2005, which remains quite timely.

¹³ See Shi and both of Chen's books, especially the sections on voting in the local People's Congresses.

most beneficial means of political participation available to individuals. Joining the Party is not only allowed but encouraged, and rising among its ranks is seen as the surest route to material prosperity.¹⁴

In closing, the concept of a loyal opposition is worth examining briefly in the context of ethnic Chinese in the PRC and Taiwan. As with most authoritarian countries, the concept is anathema to the one-party state, but portrayal of the opposite side by Taiwan's Kuomintang and DPP would also make the currently divided society of the U.S. look civil—the acrimony frequently is phrased in terms of the survival or demise of the state itself. It is fortunate that the political climate of the PRC has at least changed to the extent that although “the opposition” to the CCP remains disorganized and very unlikely to make its presence felt in public, its members are increasingly willing to speak in private and to researchers.

Methodology. This study will use multiple methodologies, both for purposes of rigor and to compensate for a lack of resources and potential gatekeeper issues. It is hoped that each sample and focus group will have a mix of strong supporters and opponents of the current administrations, but capturing the views of citizens on the extremes of interest and indifference toward politics will make the results much more interesting.

After much discussion of political participation, a few words on interest in politics are also in order. By “interest in” is meant a much different concept from one’s “political interests”—that the latter is far more often studied, usually in terms of rational choice, has frustrated this note’s attempt to compile a literature review. This study seeks to examine the fact that interest in politics has been empirically shown by Chen and others to be the best predictor of individual political participation, across countries and different regimes. The Human Development Theory espoused by Inglehart and Welzel leads us to believe that interest in politics should be a choice for individuals favoring self-expression, merely one leisure activity among an infinite many, while for citizens of less economically and politically developed countries, there should only be serious interest among those directly affected by government policies, and

¹⁴ Many even argue that most join, a very popular choice as the world’s largest political party of 78 million members (5.6% of the total population), not for having any affinity for Marxism or Maoism but instead mostly for economic reasons and prestige. And semantically, the two words in question are 参加 can jia VS. 参与 can yu... join (as in The Party, a club, or activity). Join = voluntary, Participate = greater expectations, Take Part = one’s role really matters.

then only in a deeply personal rather than general sense. As mentioned previously, citizens of the PRC and Taiwan do not appear to fit these predictions, and political participation, whether in specific or diffuse support or opposition, appears strong in both states.

The full World Values Survey data for interest in politics should be here¹⁵, but other studies have also used interest in politics as a central variable, specifically in comparisons across Chinese polities and with regard to participation. Taiwan & China's scores in the World Values Survey¹⁶, like most cultural areas, show similarities, but in few other cultural pairs are the political cultures so divergent. Kuan and Lau's 2002 study in particular has concluded that "while political interest exerts the most influence on the level of political participation, its impact is far more pronounced in Taiwan and Hong Kong than in the Mainland." Before concluding that those interested in politics in the PRC are also more likely to prefer costly acts which show their opposition to the authoritarian system, it is important to note also that participation among the rising entrepreneurial class is lower than expected and more supportive of a communist single-party regime than face validity would normally allow.¹⁷ In short, empirical studies generally support the view offered by the regime that most of the population is satisfied with the economic progress of the past 30 years and are satisfied to leave governing to the technocrats.¹⁸

The survey form proposed in APPENDIX A inquires about individuals' interest in politics more deeply than others which are burdened by a larger battery of questions and should give a better idea of where politics ranks among most citizens' priorities. To supplement the surveys, archetypal individuals which seem to embody one or more of the hypotheses would be called back for interviews or focus groups intended to tease out the finer points of the connection

¹⁵ Ran out of time for playing with SPSS; the next edition of this note will certainly include them.

¹⁶ This refers mostly to Inglehart & Welzel's book based on the surveys.

¹⁷ See Chen and Dickson's *Allies of the State*, which firmly denies any signs that entrepreneurs, as the bulk of the new PRC middle class, will be at the vanguard of democratization.

¹⁸ Yanqi Tong's 1994 article phrases the lack of interest in politics among the majority of the PRC's population particularly well, in terms of forming a "critical realm" which requires a foundation of interest in politics and a tolerant regime: "For most people, the provision of greater economic benefits outweighs the continued restraints on political participation. For the majority, the emergence of a noncritical realm, in which they can manage their own social and economic affairs autonomously but not engage in politics, may be completely acceptable. However, politics has always been the preoccupation [interest] of a minority. For them, being restricted to a noncritical realm and being prevented from developing a political public sphere are not satisfactory... In the end, it is this minority that shapes the political evolution of state socialist societies. The enlarged social and economic autonomy provides this minority with the basis to strive for the creation of a critical realm, even in defiance of the state's preferences." (pg. 341-2) What is most remarkable besides how apt this description remains some 15 years later is that the new economic class is largely being co-opted rather than demanding political change. In short, the PRC's "critical realm" remains highly constrained and usually all but invisible.

between their interest in politics and desire to participate in the politics of each site. Preliminary question forms for these may be found in appendices B and C. As these represent a first draft of questions, full justification of each question's inclusion, expected responses, and direct implications for specific hypotheses will not yet be provided here.

The survey itself contains closed and open questions. The closed section is intended to provide a measure of individuals' interest in politics compared to other topics, and may be expected to have comparable use across a wide range of countries. The open questions solicit what it means to participate in politics, in the citizen's own words, then to assess whether the definitions and desire to participate are correlated. Demographic variables are naturally also included, though again one's interest in politics is expected to produce the strongest correlations with the number of acts which constitute political participation, the likelihood that some are challenging rather than supportive of the regime, and perhaps also whether the individual respondent has engaged in the activities s/he lists in the past or regularly. That Tianjian Shi's data come from the tumultuous 1980's in Beijing is a compelling explanation for why his assessment of citizens' willingness to participate in activities expressing diffuse opposition, such as mass protests, is much exaggerated, compared to Chen's data from the 1990's and finding that only about 1% would participate in an event which challenged the CCP.

Expected Findings and Conclusion. My expectation is that the different regime types will affect the ease of research more than individuals' opinions. More specific expectations in the terms defined in this note follow.

What this study will illuminate most uniquely is the understudied phenomenon of participants who are not very interested in politics but who feel obliged to vote or otherwise take part because important issues are perceived to be at stake. In the case of the PRC, it will probe the issue of participation in the strictest sense of regime support, where patronizing the approved participatory institutions, regardless of turnout, is guaranteed to have virtually no impact on policies. Protest non-voters in democracies have made similar arguments for some time, but if voters in elections which are obviously inconsequential turn out in comparable numbers to those which actually determine political outcomes, perhaps there is something about the voting act itself which perfectly complements the limited interest in politics possessed by most voters.

If political culture is less important than regime type and levels of “human development”, citizens in the PRC should define political participation as supporting or joining the Chinese Communist Party; Taiwanese citizens should have definitions no different from any other consolidated democracy. In a successful and popular authoritarian regime like the PRC’s, there should be little interest in politics among citizens because they themselves have little direct impact on political outcomes. Their policy preferences are rarely, if ever, directly solicited, and the assumption that they have little interest feeds the impression that, being uninterested and uninformed, they are not worth consulting.

Among the poor of both countries, I do expect to find many parochial citizens, for whom asking questions about how often they participate in the political process would not differ much from asking how often they visit the moon. Highly supportive citizens in PRC who view participation exclusively in terms of actively supporting the authoritarian CCP may also turn up in the data in sufficient numbers to merit their own classification as “participant subjects”. Unless conducted in an election year in Taiwan, however, I don’t actually expect to find great differences in political interest or definitions of participation with the PRC. The expectation that most people maintain high interest in politics on a day-to-day basis is a popular myth created in the public education systems of liberal democracies, and despite a wealth of empirical studies by more realistic political scientists, it cannot and perhaps should not be dispelled.

It may be more fruitful to situate the expectations of this study within those with actual evidence, rather than continue speculating. Throughout Inglehart & Welzel’s highly influential and generally persuasive *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy*, comparing the PRC and Taiwan often seems to contradict their central findings. Several of their scatter plots list the less-developed PRC’s citizens as more secular/rational than Taiwan’s traditional citizens, and the former also score slightly higher than the latter in terms of self-expression values.¹⁹ As China gradually opens itself to more contentious research agendas, I would argue that it is shown to be increasingly ideographic, in need of the kind of scholarly attention and care that only old-fashioned area specialists can administer.²⁰ Given the Mainland’s radically different definition(s) of democracy, which may or may not extend ethnically, large-N studies of

¹⁹ See Inglehart & Welzel, especially their “cultural groupings” plot on pg. 63, China’s extreme outlier status for its income level and interpersonal trust on pg. 72. How much of these unexpected findings are cultural, related to individual values, current regime type differences, and the legacy of communism or its firm rejection are all variables worthy of attention.

²⁰ For another example of how special China is regarding its political culture, see Xu’s 2010 article, pointing out how social capital in rural China doesn’t have the same trust-building effects as theorized and proven elsewhere.

cultural effects on democracy such as theirs may not be entirely appropriate. This study would go a long way toward establishing how wide such conceptual gaps are regarding fundamental political terms.

Much recent literature on political participation in democracies focuses on political acts undertaken by citizens *other* than voting. Similarly, others have pointed out the democratic consequences of everyday acts like league bowling, which hardly anyone had previously considered political. What this note has suggested is that citizens in authoritarian countries should not be presumed to favor their non-democratic regimes, that political participation shares many forms and intentions across regime types. Regardless of whether citizens are allowed to vote, any act can become political if it is infused with such meaning—interpreted in terms of its consequences on political culture. It is notable that in a country where all public events require an application with the government—and protest is thereby effectively prohibited—the simple act of “taking a stroll” on Sundays is the most observable political act of dissent²¹, one which may be misinterpreted both within and outside the PRC unless empirical academic studies are allowed.

The Economist recently noted that closer economic relations with the Mainland over the past few years have made Taiwanese less likely than ever to favor reunification, attributing the unexpected change to their increased awareness of their comparative prosperity and freedom²². Preferring democracy over authoritarianism is no surprise, but Taiwan’s highly contentious politics and continuing global attention to it may well lead to political fatigue among the citizens themselves. Most Taiwanese I’ve met treat politics like a secularist might treat religion—as a private matter they’d rather not discuss. All one need do to engage supposedly docile Mainlander subjects, by contrast, is to mention any of a long and growing list of conflicts China has with the West, and their participatory side springs into the foreground. If being a strong democracy doesn’t make people more interested in politics than citizens in a poorer authoritarian country, something is wrong with our most basic assumptions.

²¹ See the numerous media reports calling for a “jasmine revolution” in the PRC, inspired by the demonstrations in the Middle East. All note that no actual protests have been observed, but the government, being extremely sensitive to such events, has reacted to citizens calls to “take a stroll” with an increased police presence and presumably a great deal of vigilance.

²² See *Economist*, 2011.

APPENDIX A: Individual Survey Form (to be translated into 中文)(以后翻译到中文)

Surveyed individuals are to be invited to take a survey about “what interests them” (openly declaring the survey to be about politics might deter apolitical people and add to the potential troubles of surveying PRC citizens).

Sampled Location: _____

Demographics: Male ___ Female ___ Age (or Zodiac Animal) ___

Occupation: _____

Monthly Income: <\$50 ___ \$50-\$100 ___ \$100-\$500 ___ \$500-\$1000 ___ \$1000-\$2000 ___

Greater than \$2000 ___

Education: Illiterate ___ Did not finish primary school ___ Finished primary school (5th grade) ___ Finished middle school (8th grade) ___ Finished high school (12th grade) ___ Some college but no degree ___ College graduate ___ More than a college degree ___

A. How interested are you in the following subjects?

0= not at all interested, 1= almost no interest, 2= minimally interested, 3= not very interested, 4= slightly interested, 5= somewhat interested, 6= interested, 7= quite interested, 8= very interested, 9=greatly interested, 10= extremely interested (this is THE most important part of my life)

Sports: ___ Literature: ___ Music: ___ Film & Television: ___

History: ___ Politics: ___ Friends & Family: ___ Fashion: ___

Food & Cooking: ___ Business/Making Money: ___ Religion: ___

A1. Was the subject you are most interested in appear in that list? If not, what in life are you most interested in?

A2. How much time do you spend per week thinking, doing, or engaged with your strongest three interests? 1. ___ 2. ___ 3. ___ How much time per week do you think about politics? _____

B. What does it mean to participate in politics? (If further prompting is needed, ask, “What can a person like you do to participate in politics?)

C. How much do you want to participate in politics?

D. Do you participate in politics? If so, how much?

(For contrast, the World Values Survey's questions on individual interests:

For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life. Would you say it is (*read out and code one answer for each*):

Very important Rather important Not very important Not at all important

V4. Family 1 2 3 4

V5. Friends 1 2 3 4

V6. Leisure time 1 2 3 4

V7. Politics 1 2 3 4

V8. Work 1 2 3 4

V9. Religion 1 2 3 4

(NOTE: Code but do not read out-- here and throughout the interview): **-1 Don't know**

-2 No answer

-3 Not applicable

) Kuan & Lau's measure used in 2002 study of Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong:

Interest: sum of responses to the following three statements (range from -3 to 3):

'Do you often discuss politics with others?'

'How interested would you say you are in politics?'

'When you get together with your close friends, how often do you discuss political affairs?'

APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Form(to be translated into 中文)(以后翻译到中文)

Questions to be asked of individuals 1-on-1. Selected at random or based on survey response?

1. Should everyone participate in politics?
2. Is it okay for some people to be completely apolitical? Most people?
3. What made you interested in politics?
4. Would you describe politics in your country as a process you can influence or policies which just "happen" as a result of elite decisions?
5. What are the costs and benefits of participating in politics?
6. Would you like to work for the government? Why/why not? When does a person stop being a "regular citizen" and become a politician? An activist?
7. Can a person be participating in politics (i.e. influencing it) without realizing that s/he is? Are there political consequences of our everyday actions?

APPENDIX C: Focus Group Form (to be translated into 中文)(以后翻译到中文)

Questions to be asked in focus groups. Selected at random or based on responses to individual interviews?

1. What does it mean to participate in politics here?
2. How much should a citizen of ___ participate in politics?
3. Is voting the most important political act a citizen can do to influence the political process? Why/why not?
4. Are some people apolitical? Why?
5. Is participation in politics more like religion (a choice/passed down by family) or education (told in school what to do and how to do it)?

6. Would you ever participate in a protest? Why/why not?
7. What are some differences between protesting against a foreign country, against a corrupt individual leader, and against general corruption?
8. Does talking like this or with friends and family constitute a political action? Are we participating in politics now?
9. Do you think the country benefits, is not affected, or is threatened by discussions like this? Do you think the government agrees with your assessment?

APPENDIX D: Sampling Notes

- A. Proposed locations (12). 1. PRC: A. Beijing or Shanghai, B. Xining, Qinghai C. Zhangye, Gansu, D. Yixing, Jiangsu, E. (Village w/ elections), F. (Village w/out elections). 2. Taiwan: A. Taipei, B. Mid-sized city, C. Village. 3. Hong Kong. 4. Macau 5. Singapore.
- B. Sample Sizes. 100 as a minimum for each location, but as many as possible. Perhaps 5-10 interviews, 1 focus group of 5-10 individuals at each site.
- C. Practical considerations. The randomness of the sample will be affected by matters of gatekeepers, budget and other resources. Simultaneity of the survey may not be possible.

APPENDIX E: Sprawling Charts of Proposed Relationships

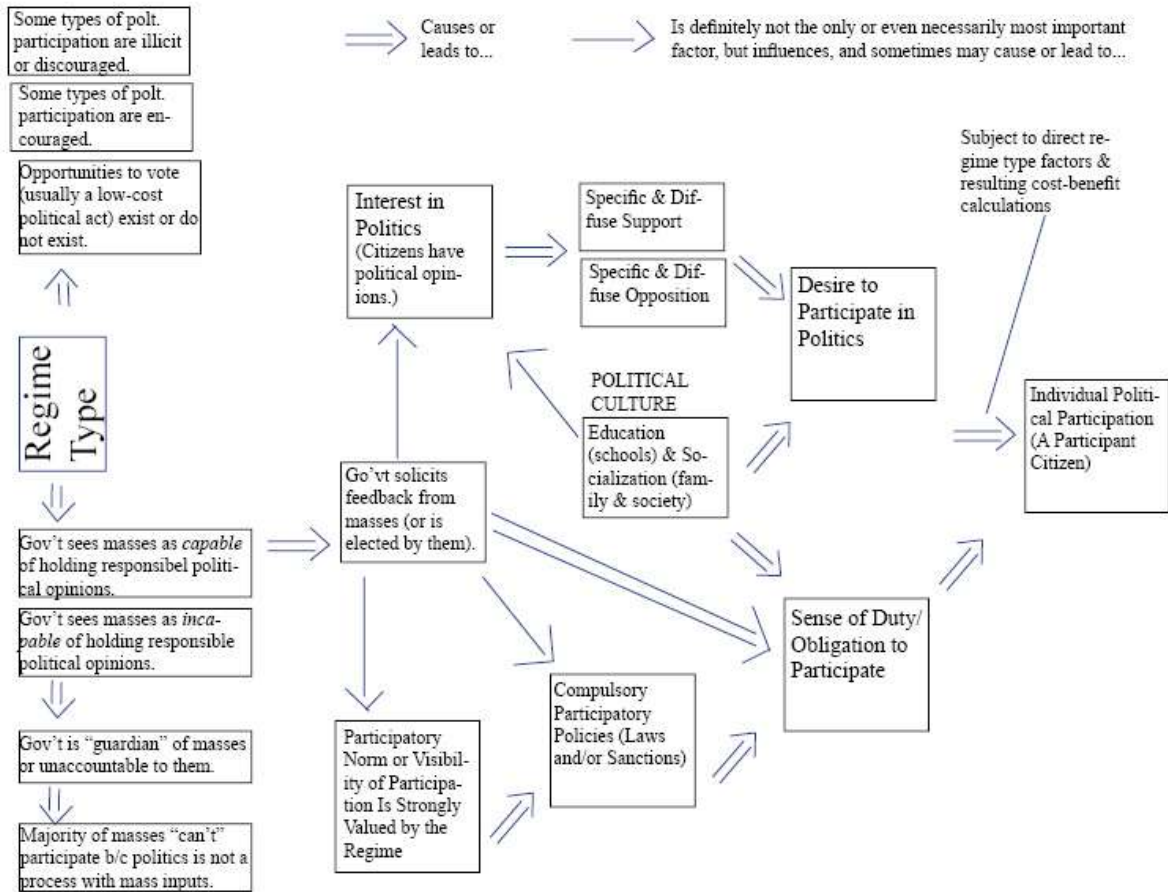


CHART 1: Factors causing an individual to participate in politics. Note that participation here is any act intended by the actor to influence politics.

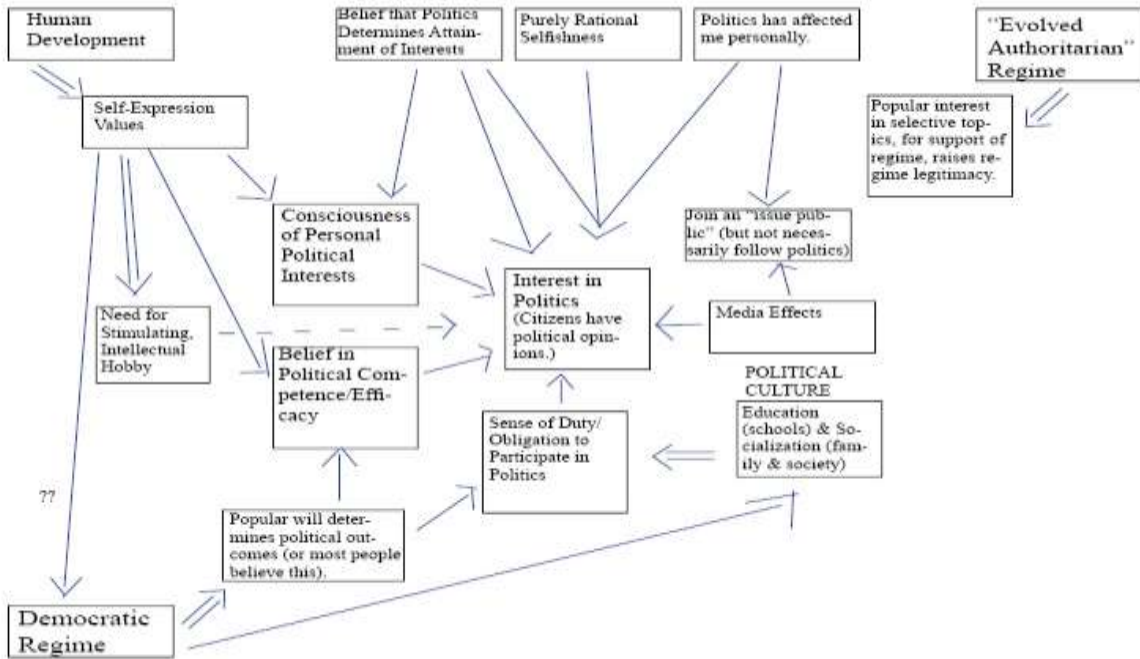


CHART 2: Factors which cause an individual to be interested in politics.

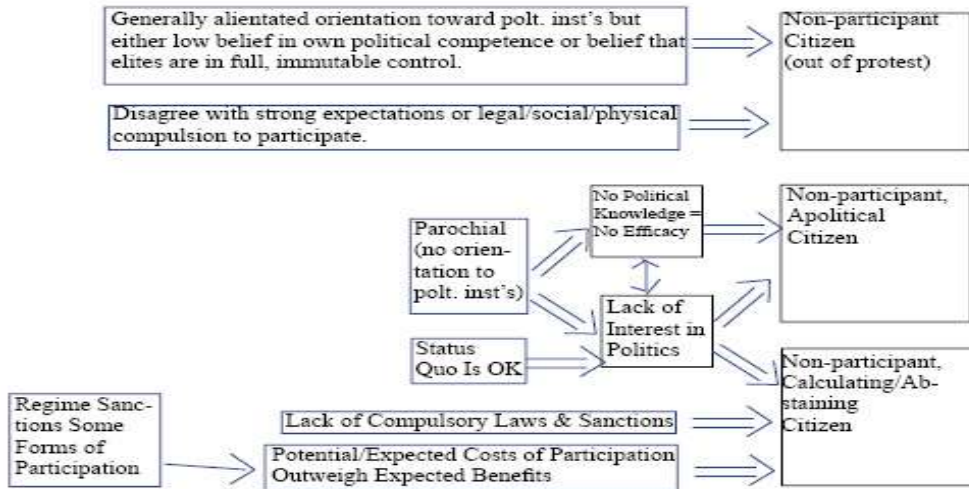


CHART 3: Three types of non-participant citizens.

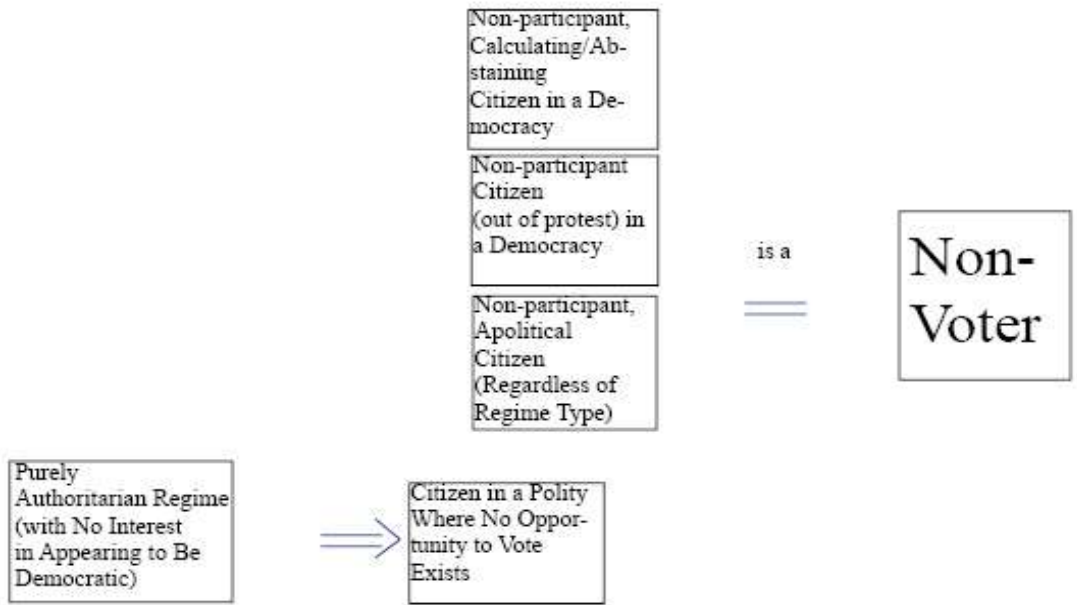


CHART 4: Non-

participants are necessarily non-voters. (All voters are participants. Not all participants are voters. Not all non-voters are non-participants. Not all voters are interested in politics; not all voters are motivated by interest in politics to vote. Citizens not interested in politics may still vote or otherwise participate out of duty, because they are personally affected, or simply because they are 100% selfish and see politics as the only way to attain their all-important self-interests.)

APPENDIX F: Chinese Citizens in U.S. Government

U.S. Gov't Body	# of "Chinese"	Total #	% Chinese
Cabinet	2	22	0.091
Senate	1	100	0.010
House	2	435	0.005
CA Senate	3	40	0.075
CA Assembly	4	80	0.050
TX Senate	0	31	0.000
TX House	0	150	0.000
FL Senate	0	40	0.000
FL House	0	120	0.000
NY Senate	0	62	0.000
NY Assembly	1	150	0.007
IL Senate	0	59	0.000
IL House	0	118	0.000
State Governors	0	50	0.000
AVERAGE			0.017
TOTAL IN U.S.	3500000	307000000	0.011

(Compiled from Wikipedia, may unintentionally exclude some Chinese-American citizens whose first and last names are both non-Chinese.)

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