

## The Nature of Ideology in Urban China

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### Abstract

This paper investigates whether the Chinese public possesses structured political preferences, or ideology. We show that ideology in China is organized around a state-market economic dimension and an authoritarian-democratic political dimension. The most politically informed individuals are the least likely to constrain their ideological preferences to one dimension, which we argue is a product of the Party's propaganda efforts. We find that younger and better-educated individuals are the most likely to favor free markets, and that while members of the Communist Party no longer possess any sort of distinct economic preferences, they are markedly more authoritarian. We conclude that the diffuse character of the Chinese public's preferences provides the Party with an opportunity to divide and rule.

Keywords: Ideology, Political Knowledge, Public Opinion, Ideal Point Estimation, China

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What do the citizens of an authoritarian regime know and believe about politics? Is there a structure to their political attitudes, something we can understand as ideology?

In democracies, partisan conflict is a key source of the structure in public opinion. Electoral competition divides the public and reproduces ideological divides between political parties as divides within public opinion.<sup>1</sup> In majoritarian systems, these divides typically appear in a unidimensional ideological space, while in proportional systems, partisan competition tends to produce a multidimensional structure instead.<sup>2</sup>

How is ideology structured in an autocracy, where electoral competition between multiple parties is either impossible or a sideshow, and the government can institute a one-sided information environment? This paper investigates the structure of political beliefs under authoritarian rule by measuring the ideology of Chinese citizens in an original survey. We show that public opinion in China is organized around two major axes. The first is an economic divide over the role of the state in the economy, while the second is a split between authoritarian and democratic orientations.

We find that there is an inverse relationship between political information and ideological constraint. Chinese citizens who are more informed about politics are more likely to organize their thinking about politics using two dimensions instead of one. We argue that the Communist Party's efforts to flood the public with propaganda messages explains this distinctive pattern.

A two-dimensional understanding of the Chinese public sheds new light on a number of long-standing puzzles in Chinese politics. In particular, it suggests that the regime's ability to sustain economic reforms while stifling political reforms may not be a puzzle at all, since in a two-dimensional policy space, the winners from economic reforms may have nothing to do with the segment of the public that supports political change.

The last part of our empirical analysis describes the relationship between ideology and socioeconomic variables, such as membership in the Communist party, education and age. We show that Communist party membership is not associated with statist economic views - party members have the same beliefs about the role of the state in the economy as non-party members. Where party members differ from non-party members is in their attitude towards democracy; party members are more likely to endorse autocracy.

We also find that education predicts support for the market economy, but not democracy. A better-educated public may push for economic reforms, but not political reform. Age, however, does correlate with both dimensions of ideology. Younger respondents are more likely to prefer a market economy and democracy.

We conclude with some thoughts about the sources of structure in Chinese public opinion. One implication of our results is that a diffuse ideological structure empowers the state at the expense of society.

### **The Structure of Ideology in Comparative Perspective**

Scholars of political behavior have debated the nature and existence of ideology in democracies since *The American Voter* and Converse asserted that most Americans lacked meaningful structure to their political opinions.<sup>3</sup> While most observers agree that political

rhetoric and elite behavior is well-characterized by a single left-right dimension in the US, scholars still disagree about the nature of ideology in the general public. Some contend that the public lacks ideological coherence.<sup>4</sup> Others find a structure to ideology among the public, but disagree as to whether it is characterized by one dimension or two.<sup>5</sup> In the US, when a second dimension appears, it tends to capture social issues such as abortion, though issues like slavery and race have also characterized the second dimension.<sup>6</sup>

In European democracies, ideological divisions for both parties and the public emerge in two dimensions - an economic dimension that captured class divides, and a cultural dimension which captured divisions over religion.<sup>7</sup> These divisions are rooted in the class cleavage, the religious cleavage, and the center-periphery cleavage.<sup>8</sup> As social movements transformed the left and the right, the second dimension incorporated issues such as immigration, ethnicity, nationalism, and European integration.<sup>9</sup>

In practice, political contestation often occurs along a one-dimensional axis. A one-dimensional space facilitates coalition formation for parties,<sup>10</sup> and lightens the intellectual burden on voters.<sup>11</sup> Herbert Kitschelt reports that the first dimension of ideology in Europe is a Socialist-Capitalist divide, while the second dimension is a Libertarian-Authoritarian division.<sup>12</sup> In his view partisan competition in Western Europe actually occurs along a single Left-Libertarian and Right-Authoritarian axis; citizens who have Left-Authoritarian and Right-Libertarian views are left without parties that align with their views. In Eastern Europe, a similar two-dimensional space collapses into a Left-Authoritarian and Right-Libertarian division instead.<sup>13</sup>

In nearly all two-dimensional ideological spaces, the first dimension describes the left-right debate over the role of the state in the economy. The second dimension is frequently unique to the country in question. In Argentina, for instance, the left-right dimension is supplemented with

a Peronist- Anti-Peronist dimension, while in Paraguay the second dimension captures intraparty factional divisions.<sup>14</sup>

What do we know about the structure of ideology in authoritarian regimes? Most studies of authoritarian regimes have been focused on political institutions, or the elite. Classic models of autocracy considered the dynamics of political competition within the elite, and in particular the strategic choices of the winning coalition and the selectorate.<sup>15</sup> More recent work on authoritarian regimes has turned towards institutions. These works have discussed the significance of nominally democratic institutions such as elections, legislatures, and parties.<sup>16</sup>

Some studies of authoritarian regimes have invoked ideology to explain the effects of institutional changes. Pioneering work by Melanie Manion found that competitive village elections in China produced greater ideological congruence between villagers and their leaders on economic issues.<sup>17</sup> Ideology is also considered an important mediating variable between the rulers and the ruled. Beatriz Magaloni argues that an individual's ideology is one of the parameters that determines the price of his vote.<sup>18</sup> Voters who do not share the regime's ideology are expected to name a higher price to support it.

Until recently, less work had focused on the structure of political attitudes under authoritarian rule. Most survey research in China, for instance, focused instead on features of public opinion, such as support for the government,<sup>19</sup> economic preferences,<sup>20</sup> democratic values,<sup>21</sup> political trust,<sup>22</sup> or political culture.<sup>23</sup>

This paper explores the nature of ideology under authoritarian rule. We investigate the structure of political attitudes in urban China, using a face-to-face survey. Our work builds on previous work on ideology in China,<sup>24</sup> and on a paper by Pan and Xu, which examines the structure of political attitudes in China by using a sample of individuals who took a popular

online survey called the Chinese Political Compass.<sup>25</sup> Pan and Xu find that in a re-weighted subset of their opt-in sample, the ideology of Chinese citizens is organized around three dimensions which are highly correlated with each other. Individuals who support greater state involvement in the economy are also likely to favor authoritarian rule and nationalism. Meanwhile, individuals who prefer market reform are also more likely to endorse democracy and oppose nationalism.

This paper makes three principal contributions. First, by analyzing a nationally representative urban sample, we see how the ideological conceptualizations of ordinary citizens might differ from those who are sufficiently interested in politics to encounter and self-administer an online ideology survey. Our second major contribution is to investigate the relationship between political knowledge and ideological constraint in China. Finally, we present a detailed picture of where Chinese society falls along this ideological spectrum by examining sociodemographic characteristics.

### **Ideological Divisions in China**

While relatively little research to date has focused on the ideological structure of public opinion in China, the history of Communist rule is often a history of ideological transformation. During the Mao era, the Communist Party used ideology as a tool to unify and reshape Chinese society.<sup>26</sup> Ideological unity was enforced by the regime through re-education campaigns, repression, and the propaganda apparatus.<sup>27</sup> The party's conception of ideology during this period was one-dimensional, and it organized ideological campaigns like the Anti-Rightist Movement to punish deviations from Mao Zedong Thought.

Deng Xiaoping's decision to open up the Chinese economy created the preconditions

for new ideological patterns to emerge in Chinese society. During the 1980s, the Chinese leadership pursued rapid economic and limited political reform. By decentralizing power and loosening the strictures of the planned economy, China's leaders lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty. At the same time, the overwhelming success of economic reform brought about wrenching changes in society. Inequality soared, and hundreds of millions of people moved from the countryside to the cities.<sup>28</sup> Emboldened by the success of the economic reforms, liberal intellectuals called for the party to embrace political reform as well.<sup>29</sup>

The 1989 Tiananmen Square incident spurred a period of conservative retrenchment. The party instituted a sweeping patriotic education campaign to bolster its legitimacy,<sup>30</sup> while leftist intellectuals called for China to embrace traditional values and eschew westernization.<sup>31</sup> The New Left demanded that China do more to control inequality and the costs of globalization by exercising greater state control of the economy.<sup>32</sup>

Liberals argued that the best way to solve these problems was to implement comprehensive economic reform, embrace grassroots democracy, and enforce rule of law.<sup>33</sup> These patterns of ideological debate persist to this day.

### **Theoretical Intuitions and Testable Implications**

Authoritarian regimes promote their own messages while curtailing dissonant information from their political opponents. We expect the information environment under authoritarian rule to feature ubiquitous government messages and few opposing viewpoints. This type of information environment exists for specific issues in democracies when there is both a consensus among elites about a given policy and a preponderance of one-sided messaging about that issue. When elite consensus exists about a policy, Zaller shows that a "mainstream effect" shapes

public preferences.<sup>34</sup> Under these circumstances, more informed citizens are more likely to apprehend and internalize elite preferences about that policy. This state of affairs stands in contrast to a scenario where elites are evenly divided and engage in two-sided messaging, where a "polarization effect" induces more informed citizens to take up the opinions of the elites from their party.

Geddes and Zaller argue that if citizens in an authoritarian regime lack access to alternative political values, we expect the one-sided messaging model to take effect.<sup>35</sup> In a pure one-sided messaging model, the most informed citizens would be the most likely to adopt the government's positions and show the most ideological constraint.

If the regime's control over information flows is incomplete, then we would expect less ideological agreement among the most informed. Geddes and Zaller find that in autocracies that invest less in managing public discourse, such as Brazil during its authoritarian period, moderately informed citizens are the most likely to adopt the government's position.<sup>36</sup> This curvilinear relationship is the product of two forces. Exposure to government messages increases as citizens become more politically aware, while the probability of accepting government messages decreases as citizens become more informed. Since the least informed lack exposure to regime messages and a portion of the most informed are more able and motivated to resist them, moderately informed individuals are the most likely to accept the government position. In this variety of autocracy, we would expect moderately informed individuals to show the most ideological agreement with the government, and also the most ideological constraint.

However, in China, the regime is deeply invested in using censorship and propaganda to shape public opinion. Even poorly informed citizens will be consistently exposed to incidental information created by the "information flooding" propaganda strategy of the regime.<sup>37</sup> Under

these circumstances, citizens cannot escape exposure to government messages. However, if we posit that the probability of resistance to government messages increases as political awareness increases, then our prediction would be that the least informed respondents will show the highest levels of ideological agreement with the government position, because they are fully exposed but unable to resist. More informed citizens would be more capable of resisting government propaganda and also less ideologically constrained.

To distinguish between these possibilities, we condition our analysis of ideological constraint in China on political knowledge. By analyzing the beliefs of our least, moderately, and most informed respondents separately, we will be able to see if the structure of ideology we observe is consistent with the one-sided messaging framework. This approach parallels studies in the US which compare the structure of ideological beliefs for citizens and elites.<sup>38</sup>

Our expectations about the content of these ideological divisions are based on the state of ideological debates among elites in China. One potential axis of ideological contestation is based on the winners and losers of economic reform. If this organizes public opinion, then we would expect relatively well-off respondents to support economic and political reform, while relatively disadvantaged respondents oppose both economic and political reform. This hypothesized structure approximates what we find in Post-Communist Europe - a dominant left-authoritarian and right-democratic axis.<sup>39</sup>

Another potential ideological divide is organized around support or opposition to the regime and to the political system. If this is the case, then the questions we ask about the political system are likely to be the best at discriminating between individuals on this ideological dimension. If the level of ideological constraint is high, then respondents who support the political system might also be expected to support the party's economic policies.

If the level of ideological constraint is low, however, then we will expect to find only a weak correlation between economic preferences and political ones. If the public's economic and political preferences are only weakly correlated with each other, then it would be easier for the CCP to decouple its political and economic programs. The party would be able, for instance, to pursue economic reforms without empowering the part of the public that also favors political reform.

### **The Chinese Urban Governance Survey**

To estimate the ideology of Chinese citizens, we use new data from the Chinese Urban Governance Survey (CUGS), which was conducted in the summer of 2015. Since traditional samples based on household lists tend to undercount migrants from rural areas in China, this survey used GPS Assisted Area Sampling to generate a nationally representative urban sample.<sup>40</sup> Our enumerators interviewed a total of 3513 respondents in 50 cities from 24 different provinces in China. The response rate for the survey was 63.6%.

Our analysis focuses on twelve questions that asked citizens whether they agreed or disagreed with statements about a range of salient issues, such as the role of the state in the economy and freedom of speech.<sup>41</sup>

Since we are interested in how the dimensionality of ideology changes with the level of political knowledge, we also use seven factual questions to measure political information. The full text of these questions is presented in the appendix.<sup>42</sup>

We report response proportions for the ideology questions in Table A.1, and descriptive statistics<sup>43</sup> in Table A.3.

## Empirical Strategy

We begin by investigating the amount of variance explained by each dimension of the ideological space with a weighted Principal Components Analysis (PCA).<sup>44</sup> We also analyze the structure of ideology separately for low, medium, and high information respondents to see if more knowledgeable citizens have a different understanding of ideology.

We then specified two-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models to evaluate the structure of our respondents' political attitudes.<sup>45</sup> We use separate models for low, medium, and high information respondents to see if political knowledge conditions the structure of ideology for our respondents.

The last part of our analysis explores the relationship between ideology and variables such as age, education, and party membership. To generate individual-level measures of ideology we use a Bayesian item response theory (IRT) model designed for the analysis of ordinal variables.<sup>46</sup> Our IRT model estimates individual ideal points, as well as difficulty and discrimination parameters for each question. The discrimination parameters estimate the strength and the direction with which a respondent's position on a given ideological dimension is related to her answers to that question. When questions have large discrimination parameters, a respondent's answers to that item will be strongly related to her overall ideal point.

We estimate a two-dimensional item response model. For identification purposes, we constrained the discrimination parameter for the question on the role of state-owned enterprises to be negative on the first dimension and zero on the second dimension. We also constrained the discrimination parameter for the Confucianism question to be negative on the second dimension. This means that individuals who agree that state-owned enterprises should control the key sectors of the economy will have a negative ideal point for the first dimension, while individuals

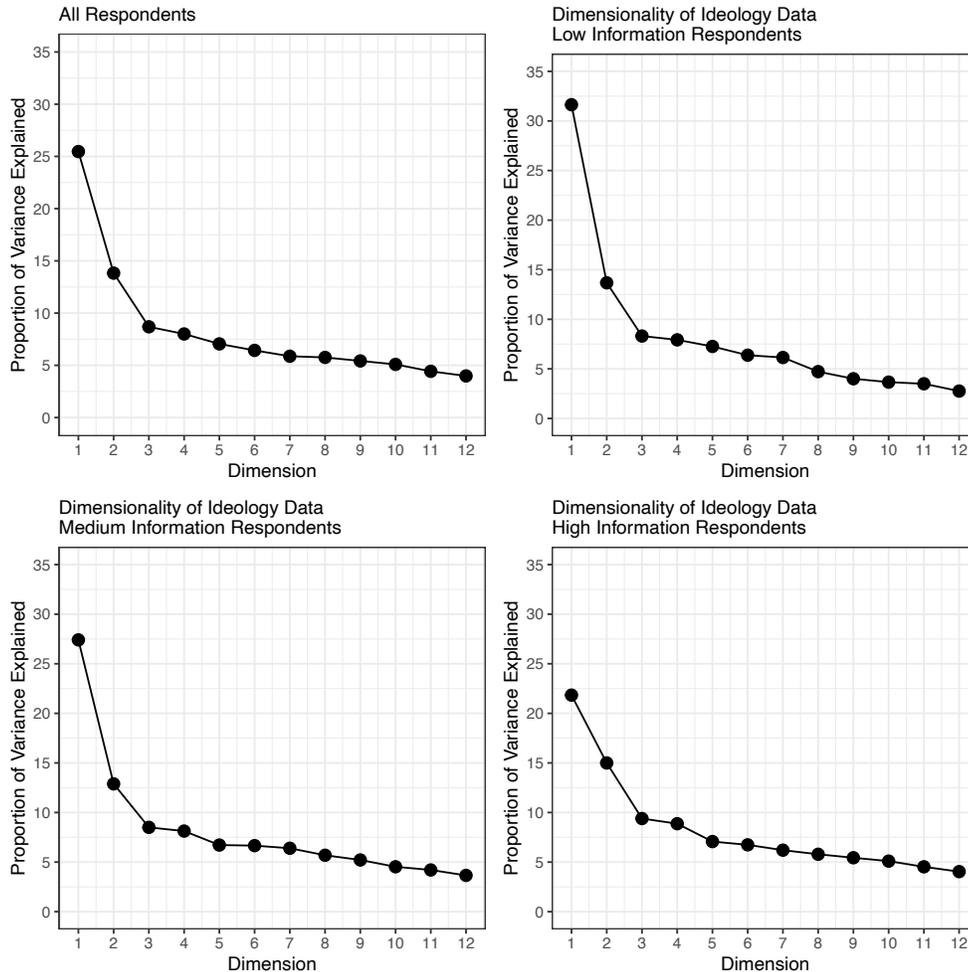
who believe modern Chinese society needs Confucianism will have a negative ideal point for the second dimension. To estimate the ideal points and parameter estimates, we implement an MCMC model with normal priors for  $\Lambda$ . After discarding a burn-in of 50,000 iterations, we thin the next 1,000,000 iterations by 100 to generate 10,000 posterior samples. The Heidelberg-Welch, Raftery-Lewis, and Geweke diagnostics all indicated that our model reached convergence.

### **The Structure of Mass Attitudes in China**

Our weighted PCA results show that multiple dimensions explain how Chinese citizens structure their political preferences. The top-left panel of Figure 1 shows that the first dimension explains 25.5% of the variation in our data, while the second dimension explains 13.8%. Both figures are significantly more than we would expect if the answers to the ideology questions were uncorrelated.<sup>47</sup> Since the third dimension does not do any better at explaining the variance in the data than random chance, we conclude that the ideology of our sample is best modeled in a two-dimensional space.

What remains unclear is whether we find a two-dimensional structure because most people lack the political awareness to detect a one-dimensional ideological cleavage in society. If we were basing our intuitions on the US case, then we might expect that one latent dimension effectively summarizes the ideology of elites and the well-informed, while two are needed to effectively characterize the general public.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 1** Proportion of variance explained by each dimension of the principal components analysis, by level of political knowledge.



To explore this possibility, we divided our sample into thirds based on their level of political information and used weighted PCA to examine each subset. Our results in the next three panels of Figure 1 show that the ideological preferences of the most informed respondents are also the hardest to summarize using one latent dimension, contrary to our expectations. For the least-informed, the first dimension of ideology explains 31.6% of the variation in the data, while for the moderately informed it explains 27.4%. For the most informed, the first dimension only explains 21.8% of the variation in their preferences.

This result shows that political ignorance is unlikely to explain the structure of beliefs we find in our data. What is more likely is that the two dimensions of ideology we recover are rooted in substantive organizing principles, which politically knowledgeable individuals are better able to grasp and use to structure their beliefs.

### **Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

We specified a two-factor confirmatory factor analysis model. Table 1 shows the factor loadings for each question, as well as the correlation between the two factors and a collection of fit indices, which include the comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). We find that the two factor model we have specified fits the data well (CFI = 0.910, SRMR = 0.038, RMSEA = 0.028).<sup>49</sup>

We find that the questions that load the most heavily on the first factor, which we call State-Market, correspond with the familiar debate about the role of the state in the economy. These questions ask about the consequences of economic reform, as well as whether privatization has helped the working class in China, whether state-owned enterprises should control the key sectors of the economy, and whether free markets exacerbate inequality. Also loading on this dimension is a question about whether the media should be allowed to represent the interests of specific groups in society.

The second factor, which we call Authoritarian-Democratic, loads most heavily on political and cultural issues, such as multiparty democracy, China's political system, freedom of speech, and Confucianism. A question about whether the minimum wage should be set by the state also loads on this factor, while a question about land ownership is very weakly related to this factor.<sup>50</sup>

The factor correlation for the overall sample is relatively low at 0.394, which further indicates that the ideology of Chinese citizens is not well characterized by a single dimension.<sup>51</sup>

**Table 1** Confirmatory Factory Analysis Results

Variable	<i>All Respondents</i>	
	State-Market Factor	Authoritarian-Democratic Factor
Worker Status	.660	
Real Estate Prices	.579	
Privatization	.555	
Free Market Inequality	.530	
State Owned Enterprises	.523	
Media Independence	.427	
Multiparty Democracy		.697
Free Speech		.558
Confucianism		.536
Political System		.466
Minimum Wage		.436
Land Ownership		.175
<b>Factor Correlation</b>		.394
<b>Fit Indices</b>		
CFI		.910
SRMR		.038
RMSEA		.028

To evaluate the effect of information on the structure of political attitudes, we estimate separate factor analysis models for low, medium, and high information groups. If multiple dimensions are needed to summarize the preferences of well-informed individuals, the correlation between the two factors should be relatively low for the high information group. The factor correlation for the most informed is 0.242, while the factor correlation for the least informed and the moderately informed is 0.480 and 0.506, respectively.<sup>52</sup> High information respondents are much more likely to draw a distinction between a state-market ideological dimension and an authoritarian-democratic dimension, and to use these constructs to guide their answers to our questions.

These findings support our argument that the ideological structure of the Chinese public is two-dimensional. Our results show that the ideological divide is not simply organized around the

degree of support for the regime. Moreover, our results provide some insight into why the public's ideology is structured in this way. Ideology in the US is sometimes described as two-dimensional because less informed citizens do not hold political beliefs that are consistent with the left-right divide among elites. What we find, however, suggests that in China, ideology is not two-dimensional because of a lack of constraint among less informed citizens, but rather because more informed citizens organize their policy preferences along separate economic and political lines.

### **Measuring Individual Ideal Points**

The weighted PCA and factor analysis results show that Chinese public opinion is structured along both a state-market and an authoritarian-democratic axis. The next question is where different social groups fall along these two dimensions. Who favors state management in the economy, and who prefers market allocation? What sorts of people tend to endorse more authoritarian or more democratic attitudes? In this section we use an ordinal IRT model to estimate the ideal points for each individual and then evaluate the relationship between each dimension of ideology and variables such as age, education, and party membership. We also report the difficulty and discrimination parameters we find for the twelve ideology questions. Our IRT analysis confirms the finding that the first dimension of ideology in China is the divide between market and statist orientations. The questions that load the most heavily on this dimension have discrimination parameters with large absolute values. These questions ask if private ownership of property disadvantages working class people, if privatization of state-owned enterprises should be forbidden, and if the expansion of the market has exacerbated income inequality. Respondents who agreed with the statist position in these questions come

away with negative first dimension ideology scores, while those who disagreed received positive scores.

The second dimension of ideology captures political and cultural divides in China. It is most clearly associated with a divide between traditional-authoritarian orientations (which show up as negative ideal points) and democratic orientations (which show up as positive). The questions that load the most heavily on the authoritarian-democratic dimension have discrimination parameters with high absolute values. These items ask whether Western multiparty systems are unsuitable for China, whether indiscriminately imitating Western-style freedom of speech will lead to chaos, and whether modern Chinese society needs Confucianism. Respondents who agreed received negative second dimension ideology estimates, while respondents who disagreed received positive scores.

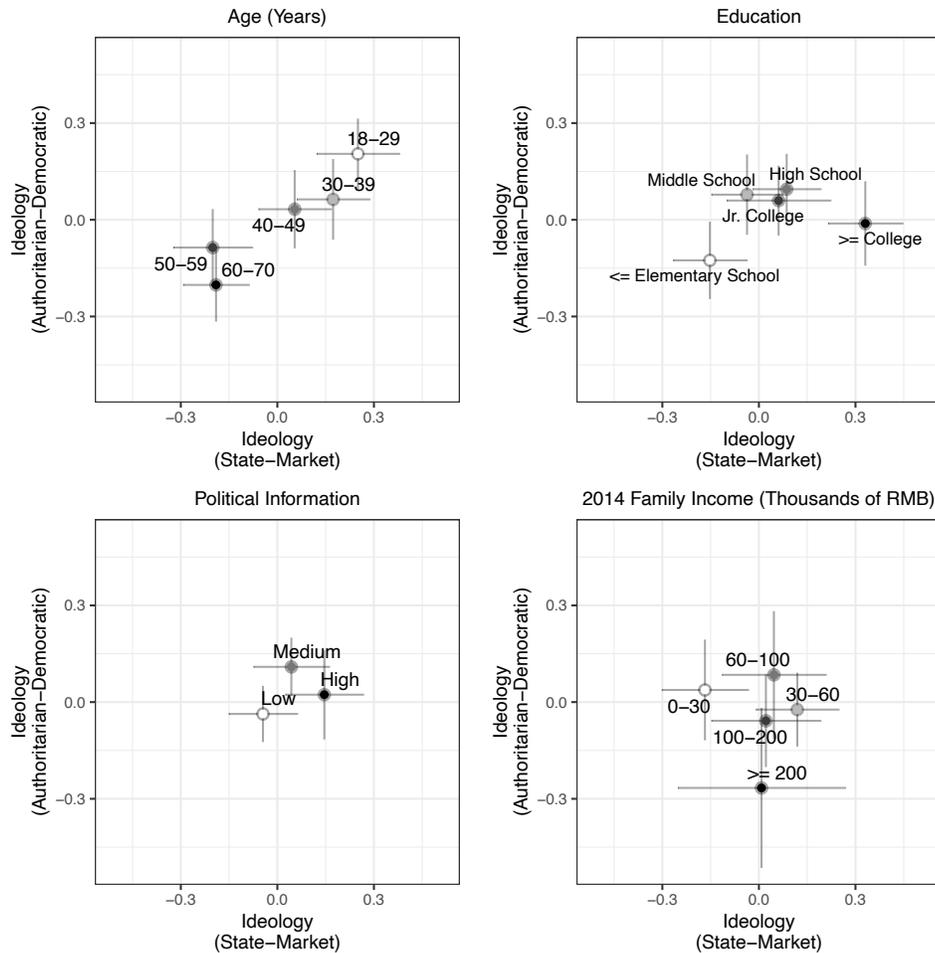
We scaled the ideal points so that on each dimension, the mean was 0 and the standard deviation was 1. Figure A.1 shows the weighted distribution of respondent ideology over these two dimensions. Our respondents are roughly evenly distributed, with a substantial concentration of individuals in the middle of the ideological space. If we divide the space into quadrants, we can observe that there are more who are in the quadrant that either favors both free markets and democracy (29.4%) or opposes both market allocation and democratic ideals (26.6%). On the other hand, we find 23.3% of our respondents in the quadrant that favors statist economic policies and democracy, while 20.9% are located in the quadrant that is pro-market and more authoritarian. Table A.5 presents the discrimination and difficulty parameters. The discrimination parameters we recover are very similar to the factor loadings we found through confirmatory factor analysis. One difference from the factor analysis is that the questions about

whether the minimum wage should be set by the state and whether individuals should be able to own land load relatively equally on both dimensions.

### **The Correlates of Ideology**

Measuring ideology at the individual level allows us to explore the variation in ideology for different segments<sup>53</sup> of Chinese society. Figure 2 presents the relationship between ideology and age, education, income, and political information. In the top left panel we find that age has clear associations with both ideological dimensions. Younger respondents are more pro-market, while older respondents favor greater state involvement in the economy. On the second dimension, younger respondents show less attachment to traditional and authoritarian political attitudes. The differences between age groups are substantial; respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 are, on average, about four-tenths of a standard deviation more pro-market than those between 60 and 70 years old on economic issues and also about four-tenths of a standard deviation more democratic on the second dimension.

**Figure 2** The relationship between ideology and age, education, political information, and family income



The location of each point indicates the mean ideology for a given group. Darker points have higher values of the demographic variable in question. The 90% confidence intervals for each estimate have been adjusted to reflect the uncertainty introduced by the sampling strategy.

The top-right panel of Figure 2 shows that education correlates with the first dimension of ideology. The most educated are more likely to support the market, while the poorly educated support greater state intervention. Individuals who have graduated from college or attended

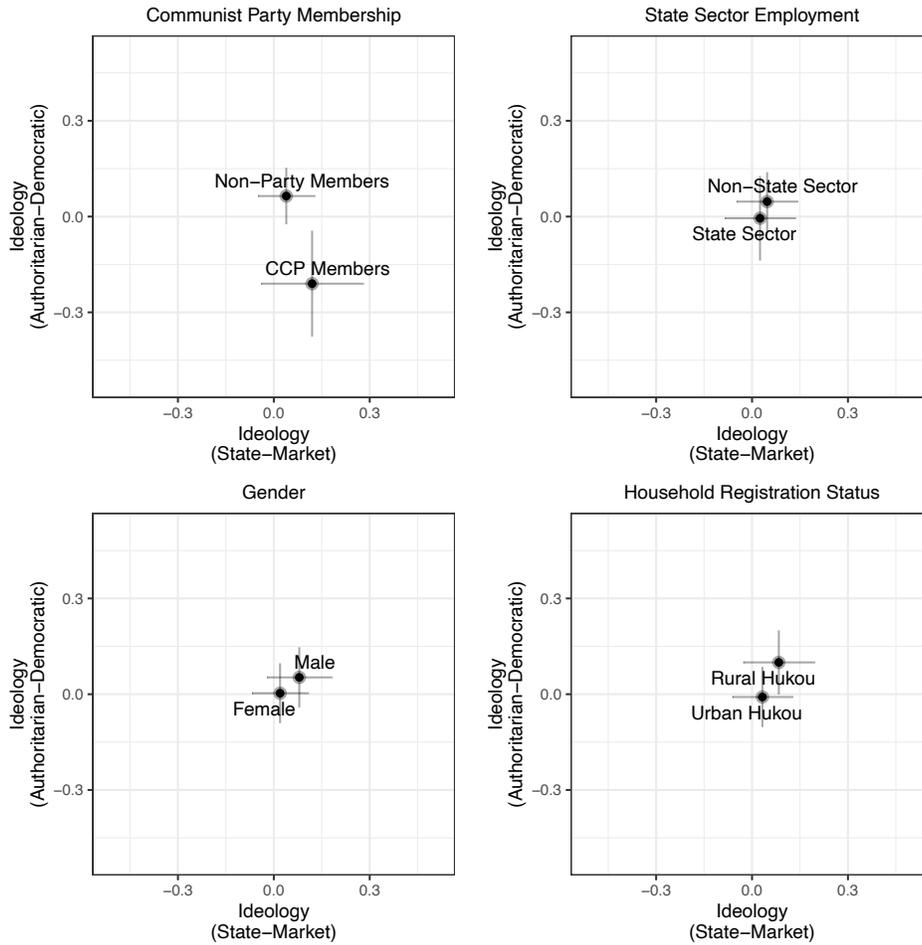
graduate school are roughly half of a standard deviation more pro-market than the least educated respondents, who had at most an elementary school education.<sup>54</sup>

However, the relationship between education and the authoritarian-democratic dimension of ideology is less clear. While the least educated respondents are the most authoritarian group, the differences between each category are for the most part insignificant, and a bivariate linear regression using education as a predictor and the second dimension of ideology as an outcome variable does not return a significant association,<sup>55</sup> though there is some evidence of a curvilinear relationship between education and the second dimension of ideology, where the moderately educated are the most supportive of democracy.

The relationship between ideology and information is similar to the one we found for ideology and education. As the bottom-left panel of Figure 2 shows, more informed individuals are more likely to favor the free market on the first dimension. On the second dimension, we do not observe a linear relationship but there does appear to be a curvilinear one, where the moderately informed are the most supportive of democracy.<sup>56</sup>

The relationship between ideology and income is harder to interpret. The poorest individuals in our sample, who report a family income of less than 30,000 RMB in 2014, are the most likely to favor state involvement in the economy - they fall the farthest to that side on the first dimension. Meanwhile, the richest individuals, who report family incomes in excess of 200,000 RMB a year, are the most authoritarian on the second dimension. However, bivariate regressions do not find a significant relationship between income and either ideological dimension.

**Figure 3** The relationship between ideology and membership in the Communist Party, state sector employment, gender, and household registration status



The point estimates indicate the mean ideology for each group, and the 90% confidence intervals for each estimate have been adjusted to reflect the uncertainty introduced by the sampling strategy.

Figure 3 reports the relationship between ideology and membership in the Communist Party, state sector employment, gender, and *hukou* status. We find that Communist Party members are indistinguishable from people outside the party on the state-market scale in the top-left panel of

Figure 3. Party members are, however, more authoritarian by a quarter of a standard deviation on average.

We do not find a definitive relationship between ideology and state sector employment. In the top-right panel we see that individuals who work for party or government organizations, state-owned enterprises, and other work units inside the state sector are on average slightly more statist and slightly more authoritarian than those who work for private or foreign-owned enterprises, but these differences are insignificant once the uncertainty introduced by sampling is taken into account.

We learn from the bottom-left panel of Figure 3 that gender also does not have a significant bivariate relationship with ideology. While men are slightly more pro-market on the first dimension and slightly more democratic on the second dimension than women, neither difference is significant if we adjust our standard errors to reflect the stratification and clustering in our sample.

The bottom-right panel shows that migrants from rural areas (who have a rural household registration status, or a rural hukou) tend to be more democratic on the second dimension than people with an urban hukou.<sup>57</sup> Rural migrants are also slightly more pro-market on the first dimension, though this difference is not significant

**Table 2** Regression Analysis of Demographics and Ideology

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	State-Market Ideology	Auth.-Dem. Ideology
	(1)	(2)
Age	-0.009*** (0.002)	-0.011*** (0.002)
Education	0.055** (0.021)	-0.022 (0.026)
Information	0.027 (0.045)	-0.031 (0.035)
Log(Income)	-0.031 (0.040)	-0.066 (0.044)
CCP Member	0.052 (0.094)	-0.257** (0.080)
State Sector Employment	0.050 (0.060)	0.124 (0.070)
Female	-0.020 (0.047)	-0.051 (0.036)
Rural Hukou	0.090 (0.065)	0.062 (0.052)
Constant	0.519 (0.440)	1.269* (0.494)
Observations	3,508	3,508

*Note:* Estimates from survey-weighted regression analysis of imputed data. Design-based standard errors in parentheses. \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

We present a multiple regression analysis of the relationship between these demographic variables and ideology in Table 2. The first model examines the state-market dimension of ideology as an outcome variable, while the second model regresses demographics on the authoritarian-democratic dimension. To alleviate missing-data concerns, we pre-processed the data using multiple imputation. Both models use survey-weighted regressions with design-based standard errors to account for the stratification and clustering in our sample.<sup>58</sup>

Model one reveals that age and education are significant predictors of state-market ideology.<sup>59</sup> Older respondents are more pro-state, while the highly educated favor market allocation. For the

authoritarian-democratic dimension of ideology, our significant predictor variables are age and party membership. Older people and members of the Communist party are more likely to endorse traditional and authoritarian views. All of these relationships are consistent with what we found in Figure 2, though the bivariate associations we found between ideology and information or household registration status are not statistically significant in a multivariate setting.

We do not ascribe a causal interpretation to these results. Reverse causality is one threat to inference that we are unable to rule out. We are also limited by the nature of our data. Our conclusions are based on an analysis of a nationally representative urban sample. While we have some insight into the political attitudes of migrants from rural areas, the ideology of the people who stayed in the countryside may be characterized by different patterns.

In addition, our cross-sectional analysis does not allow us to say why age, for instance, correlates with preferences for authoritarianism or government intervention in the economy. These associations could be a result of aging, but they could also be a cohort effect for individuals who were socialized during the era of the planned economy. More research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind the correlations we have described.

## **Discussion**

Previous studies in democratic contexts have often found that political knowledge is correlated with ideological constraint, and that one dimension best explains ideological variation for the most informed citizens. Among the general public, however, multiple dimensions often emerge because the least informed lack the sophistication to determine how specific issues are related to the liberal-conservative divide.

We find the opposite result in China. The multidimensional ideological space we uncover is not a product of low constraint among the poorly informed. We find instead that ideological constraint is inversely correlated with political knowledge; the most informed are also the most likely to organize their thinking about politics using multiple dimensions.

We see some parallels in our results to the patterns scholars have traced in other Confucian societies. In Taiwan, for instance, the ideological space is also diffuse, political awareness of ideological concepts is modest, and the influence of classic left-right issues, such as the role of the state in the economy, is quite limited.<sup>60</sup> Many Japanese citizens either misunderstand the ideological space or do not consider policy issues when thinking about the left-right scale; those that do often emphasize issues like nationalism and security rather than the economy.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, surveys in South Korea reveal a society in flux. During the early years of the consolidation of Korean democracy, radicalism ebbed,<sup>62</sup> and many respondents started to orient themselves towards the left, as the ideological space opened up.<sup>63</sup> In recent years, elite polarization has increased, but at the mass level, the polarization that has taken place has more to do with affective evaluations than policy preferences.<sup>64</sup>

The results of our analysis of low, medium, and high information Chinese citizens are not consistent with the theoretical expectations we derived from the idealized one-sided messages model. In a perfectly one-sided information environment, the model outlined by Zaller<sup>65</sup> anticipates that the least informed individuals will possess the lowest levels of ideological constraint, while the most informed possess the most constraint, since they can best identify and adopt the policy positions of elites.

Our findings also do not match the curvilinear pattern that Geddes and Zaller<sup>66</sup> expect when the autocrat exerts limited efforts to mobilize public opinion. They argue that if the information

environment is mostly, but not entirely, under the control of an autocrat, then the moderately informed are the most likely to take the autocrat's position (and thereby demonstrate attitudinal constraint). This pattern appears because the least informed lack exposure to government messages and some of the most-informed citizens resist the regime's messages.

The findings from our survey support a third set of predictions which grow out of the "information flooding" model of propaganda detailed in Roberts.<sup>67</sup> In regimes that invest heavily in mobilizing public opinion, even citizens who are poorly informed about politics are likely to be exposed to core regime messages, which in the Chinese context center around the importance of upholding "Socialism with Chinese characteristics." As a result, the impact of increasing political knowledge on exposure to regime messages is attenuated in these contexts. Since political knowledge is inversely correlated with the probability of accepting a regime message - more informed citizens are more capable of resisting propaganda - our expectation is that under these conditions, political knowledge is inversely correlated with attitudinal constraint. In other words, the anomalous relationship between political knowledge and ideological constraint in our data is a function of the Communist party's unprecedented propaganda efforts.

Our results provide an interesting contrast with previous work on ideology in China. Pan and Xu studied ideological preferences using data from the Chinese Political Compass Survey, an online opt-in sample, as well as data from the Asian Barometer Survey.<sup>68</sup> Because young men from wealthier areas were disproportionately likely to take the Political Compass Survey, Pan and Xu constructed a new sample that would better match the age, gender, and provincial profile of urban China.<sup>69</sup>

We can compare our sample to this constructed sample by reviewing the questions in the Political Compass and Chinese Urban Governance Surveys which were written to have the same

or similar text. Table A.1 presents the distributions of answers to the twelve ideology questions on the Chinese Urban Governance Survey, while Table A.2 presents the distribution of answers for the eight questions from the Political Compass Survey with comparable wordings.

The respondents from the two surveys answered these questions in highly dissimilar ways. Some of the differences are related to the survey mode; in the Political Compass survey, respondents were not allowed to give a "Don't Know" or a "Not Applicable" response, while in the Urban Governance survey, respondents were allowed to make such responses. But sizable substantive differences also appear between the two samples; when compared to the representative urban sample in our survey, the constructed online sample in the Political Compass survey tended to be more skeptical of the market on the first dimension, and more supportive of democracy on the second dimension.<sup>70</sup> For instance, 80% of the Political Compass survey respondents strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement that "Attempting to control real estate prices will undermine economic development," while in the Urban Governance sample, the comparable figure is 35.8%. 27% of the Political Compass sample agreed (either strongly or somewhat) with the statement that "Western Multiparty systems are unsuitable for China in its current state," while 56.7% of the Urban Governance sample did. 66% of the Political Compass sample disagreed with the statement that "The modern Chinese Society needs Confucianism," while only 20.9% of the Urban Governance sample disagreed. This variation may be the product of different sampling strategies, or of different survey modes.

Another important difference between our results and Pan and Xu is that the ideological dimensions in our sample are more distinct. The correlation between the two latent factors in our confirmatory factor analysis model was 0.394, and for the most informed third of respondents, it was only 0.242. In Pan and Xu, on the other hand, the three dimensions they recovered were

tightly correlated with one another, with correlations that were typically greater than 0.7.<sup>71</sup> These differences are difficult to compare because they may be a product of the set of questions used to measure ideology in each survey, but they do suggest that the most knowledgeable elements of the Urban Governance sample do not necessarily resemble the opt-in Political Compass sample, even though the Political Compass sample may be selected in part on the basis of political interest.

Our analysis of the correlates of ideology also yields new insights into the question of how to conceptualize ideology in Chinese public opinion. In contrast to Ji and Jiang, who concluded that members of the Communist party hold what are in many cases more "enlightened" attitudes which are more aligned with modern values,<sup>72</sup> we find that members of the Communist party are chiefly distinguished from the rest of the populace through their autocratic inclinations.<sup>73</sup>

In our sample, younger, more educated, and better-informed respondents are more likely to favor the free market. Those best poised to take advantage of the opportunities of the market are more likely to support further economic reform. On the economic dimension of ideology, we see some signs that the outcomes of reform help structure political attitudes towards the market.

We also see that some groups who are relatively advantaged are more likely to endorse authoritarian political attitudes. This result is consistent with existing literature on democratic attitudes in China,<sup>74</sup> as well as political economy models of democratization.<sup>75</sup> The respondents who are at the top of the income distribution appear to be somewhat more authoritarian than members of the working or middle class. Citizens with an urban hukou are significantly more authoritarian than rural migrants.

Our analysis of ideology demonstrates that China's ideological spectrum has a state-market divide along the first dimension, and an authoritarian-democratic divide along the second

dimension. The specific two-dimensional ideological structure we recover in our data is consistent with a major development in the relationship between the state and society during the reform era. When the party abandoned the planned economy and embraced a market-oriented economy, it also hollowed out its core message of building socialism through class struggle. Our hypothesis is that as the party separated socialist dogma about economics from the political system, the more knowledgeable parts of the public followed suit.

There are many factors that help explain why political reforms have stalled in China, while economic transformations were allowed to move forward. Some of these relate to the disposition of elites, who fear public disunity,<sup>76</sup> and prefer the power and perquisites afforded to them by the status quo.<sup>77</sup> Other explanations point to a lack of popular pressure for political change. In other late-developing societies, potential constituencies of political reform, such as industrialists or organized labor, often depend on the state for resources, access, or political privileges. Many capitalists and labor unions in these countries withhold support for democracy until their dependence on the state eases.<sup>78</sup> A similar set of constraints binds Chinese society. Many of the potential supporters of democracy, such as the middle class, civil society organizations, or private entrepreneurs, are dependent on the state and accept the status quo.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, public opinion surveys show that many citizens are satisfied with the level of democracy currently practiced in China and believe that they already live in what they would call a democracy.<sup>80</sup>

Our analysis of the ideological space lends credence to another explanation by showing that the supporters of political reform are distinct from the supporters of economic reform. The modest correlations we observe between the political and economic dimensions in our data are a sign that many who support free markets do not also prefer democratic political institutions. If this is the case, then economic reform does not necessarily empower the people who would

support political reform. This gives us a new explanation for why Chinese businessmen and private entrepreneurs prefer authoritarian political outcomes.<sup>81</sup> We argue that this phenomenon is only puzzling if we conceive of ideology in China as a one-dimensional spectrum, where the beneficiaries of economic reform are also expected to support political reform. In a two-dimensional policy space where economic attitudes and political attitudes are largely orthogonal to one another, there is no inherent reason for private entrepreneurs to also support democracy.

The patterns in mass ideology that we have uncovered here have important implications for China's political future. If the ideological space is multi-dimensional, diffuse, and relatively weakly correlated with socioeconomic indicators, as we have found here, then the level of polarization in public opinion should be manageable for the party. While individual policies may evoke consternation or resistance from specific groups, ideological disagreements are less likely to spawn a broader backlash so long as mass attitudes are both multidimensional and loosely correlated with each other. Deficiencies in government performance on what Donald Stokes called valence issues - attributes all political actors see as desirable, such as government competence or honesty - however, take on added importance when the ideological space is diffuse.<sup>82</sup>

More generally, we know from studies of social choice that if the ideological space is unidimensional and political actors possess single-peaked preferences, we can expect the median voter's ideal point to be the outcome of majority voting.<sup>83</sup> However, if the ideological space is multidimensional and does not fulfill a restrictive set of symmetry conditions,<sup>84</sup> then the "chaos" theorems show that a sequence of majority votes can lead from any point in the ideological space to any other point.<sup>85</sup> Under these conditions, the power to set the agenda allows a political leader to exercise great influence over the outcome. Although the Communist Party

does not need to submit its agenda to a popular vote, the multidimensional orientation of public preferences does afford China's leaders greater flexibility in exercising their preferred form of authoritarian rule.

## Notes

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41. Several of these questions were drawn from the Chinese Political Compass survey to facilitate comparison.

42. We measure each respondent’s level of political information using an item response model. Due to space constraints, the Appendix is not in the print version of this article. It can be viewed in the online version, at [www.ingentaconnect.com/cuny/cp](http://www.ingentaconnect.com/cuny/cp).

43. Our measure of educational attainment used a 7-point scale, from 1 (Less than Elementary School) to 7 (Postgraduate Education). Our income variable is a composite of two measures. The first asked respondents to list their family income in 2014, while a second question asked them to choose an income bracket. When respondents answered the second

question but not the first, we imputed their income as the midpoint of the bracket they selected. For respondents in the top bracket, we imputed a value based on the number of respondents in the highest and second-highest categories, using a modified Pareto distribution. See Michael Hout, *Getting the Most Out of the GSS Income Measures* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 2004).

44. Since our survey used a stratified cluster sampling strategy, we use inverse probability weights, adjusted for unit nonresponse, to conduct weighted PCA. Weighting our analysis in this way gives us more representative results.

45. We estimated our CFA models using robust maximum-likelihood to relax distributional assumptions and adjust for design effects.

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47. To verify this, we generated 1000 simulated datasets with no correlation between answers, but with marginal distributions for each ideology question which matched the actual survey responses. We found that the first dimension would only be expected to explain 9.7% of the variation, while the second dimension would only be expected to explain 9.3%.

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50. This question does not load significantly on either factor. Moving it to the first factor results in roughly the same model fit.

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52. Table A.4 shows the factor analysis results after we condition on political information.

53. We adjusted for the uncertainty introduced by weighting, stratification and clustering in our comparisons of each subpopulation. See Thomas Lumley, *Complex Surveys : A Guide to Analysis Using R* (New York: Wiley, 2010).

54. We collapsed our seven point education index into five categories in Figure 2 to keep all of our plots on the same scale. Respondents with college and postgraduate educations are combined, and respondents with elementary school educations and those with less are combined. If we use the full seven point measure, individuals with a postgraduate education are about seven-tenths of a standard deviation more pro-market than individuals with less than an elementary school education.

55. We estimate a survey-weighted regression model with design-based standard errors here to take the nature of our sample into account.

56. This result is at odds with the predictions growing out of the work of Geddes and Zaller, who found that the moderately informed were the most likely to support the policy of Brazil's military dictatorship.

57. A design-based t-test reveals that this difference is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), though the confidence intervals overlap.
58. Five of our observations were missing sampling weights and were dropped from the regression analysis.
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70. Some exceptions to this pattern appear, however, in responses to two questions whether the minimum wage should be set by the state, and whether media should be allowed to represent a particular group.
71. In subsequent work, using online quota samples, they find correlations ranging from  $-0.468$  to  $0.510$  between six different ideological domains. See Pan and Xu, 2020.
72. Ji and Jiang, "Enlightened One-Party Rule? Ideological Differences between Chinese Communist Party Members and the Mass Public:"
73. The second, authoritarian-democratic dimension in our survey is based on questions that measure whether freedom of speech or multi-party democracy is suitable for China - questions asking whether China should become more liberal or democratic. On the other hand, the questions from the third and fourth wave of the Asian Barometer that Ji and Jiang use to measure political "enlightenment" or "modernity," such as "The army should be allowed to rule the country" or "We should get rid of people's congress and elections and have a strong leader decide things" are in effect asking whether China should become more authoritarian. One possibility that emerges from the two studies is that rank-and-file party members are more supportive of the political status quo than non-party members - they are more likely to oppose change towards more democratic institutions but also change towards more authoritarian practices.

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## **Supporting Information**

### **Survey Measures of Political Information**

1. According to our country's laws, which political institution elects the President of the People's Republic?  
Republic?
2. Compared to 2005, are total local government debts today greater than debts back then, the same, or less?  
  
1. Greater 3. Same 5. Less 8. Don't Know
3. How long is a complete term for a provincial people's congress representative?
4. Can you tell me who holds the following political posts?
  - a) Chinese Communist Party General Secretary
  - b) Chinese Premier
  - c) American President
  - d) Japanese Prime Minister

## Descriptive Statistics and Additional Results

**Table A.1** Responses to the Chinese Urban Governance Survey Ideology Questions

	% Strongly Disagree	% Somewhat Disagree	% Somewhat Agree	% Strongly Agree	% DK	% NA
Private ownership of property disadvantages working class people 发展私有制经济会导致劳动人民沦为弱势群体	3.9	26.5	34.2	7.4	27.4	0.6
Privatizing the assets of state-owned enterprises should not be allowed 不能允许民间资本兼并国有企业	6.1	31.8	27.4	6.7	27.4	0.6
Attempting to control real estate prices will undermine economic development 试图控制房地产价格的行为会破坏经济发展	5.8	29	30.6	7	26.8	0.8
Sectors important to people's livelihoods must be controlled by state-owned enterprises 关系到国计民生的领域, 必须全部由国有企业掌控	7.8	30.6	28.4	7.5	25.1	0.6
Marketization exacerbates economic inequality 市场化必然加剧贫富两极分化	3	23.9	35.2	10.5	26.7	0.7
Western Multiparty systems are unsuitable for China in its current state 西方的多党制不适合中国国情	2.6	16.1	42.1	14.6	23.4	1.1
Media should be allowed to represent the voice of specific social strata or interest groups 应当允许媒体代表特定阶层或利益集团发言	6.3	23	32.8	10	27.3	0.7
Indiscriminately imitating western-style freedom of speech will lead to social disorder 照搬西方式的言论自由, 社会就乱了	3	20.7	39.6	13.5	22.1	1.1
The modern Chinese society needs Confucianism 现代中国社会需要儒家思想	2	18.9	41.7	13.5	22.8	1
The minimum wage should be set by the state 最低工资应由国家规定	2.3	19	47.6	18.3	11.8	1
China's current political system is the one that is best suited for China's circumstances 我国目前的政治制度是最适合中国国情的	1.9	15.5	47.9	19.7	14.3	0.8
Individuals should be able to own land 个人应当可以拥有土地	2.8	20.5	44.3	19.4	12.1	1

**Table A.2** Selected Responses to the Chinese Political Compass Ideology Questions  
(Constructed Sample of 10,000 Observations)

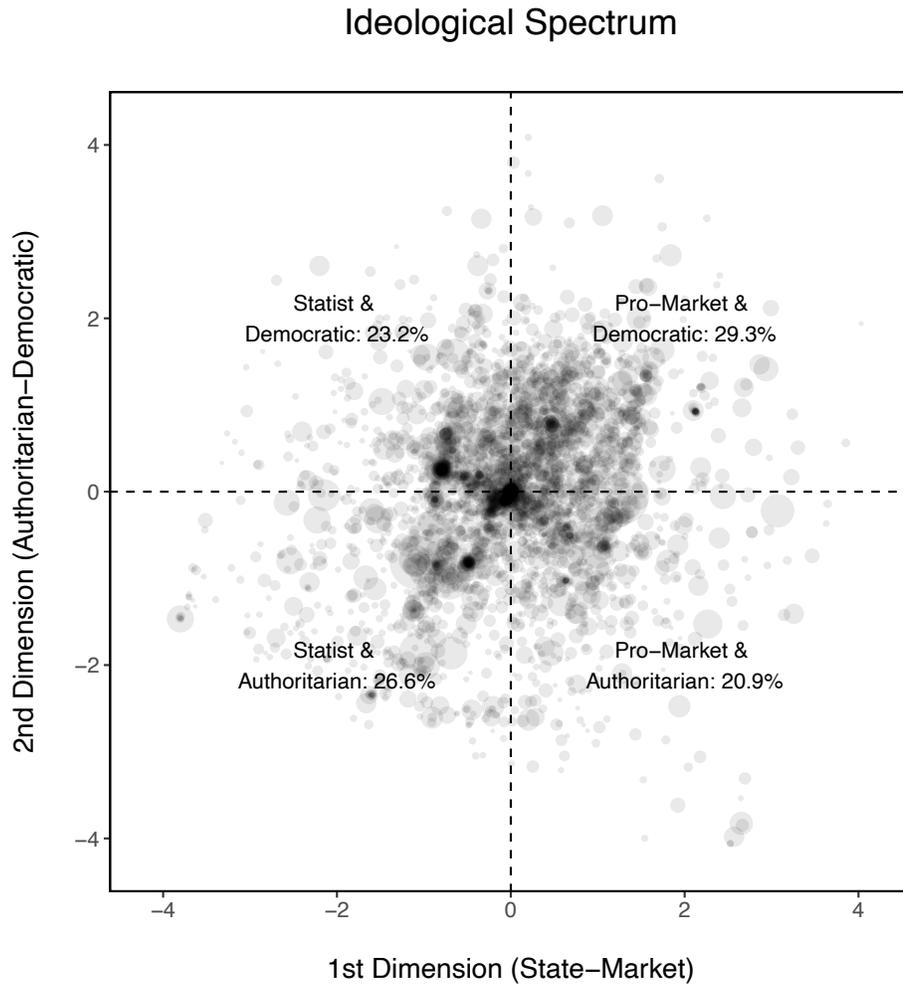
	% Strongly Disagree	% Somewhat Disagree	% Somewhat Agree	% Strongly Agree	% DK	% NA
Attempting to control real estate prices will undermine economic development 试图控制房地产价格的行为会破坏经济发展	19	61	17	4	0	0
Sectors related to national security and important to the national economy and people's livelihoods must be controlled by state-owned enterprises 那些关系到国家安全，以及其他重要国计民生的领域，必须全部由国有企业掌控	4	21	59	16	0	0
Western Multiparty systems are unsuitable for China in its current state 西方的多党制不适合中国国情	20	53	23	4	0	0
Media should be allowed to represent the voice of a particular social stratum or interest group 应当允许媒体代表某一特定阶层或利益集团发言	24	35	37	5	0	0
Indiscriminately imitating western-style freedom of speech in China will lead to a loss of social order 在中国照搬西方式的言论自由会导致社会失序	9	35	42	13	0	0
The modern Chinese society needs Confucianism 现代中国社会需要儒家思想	12	54	24	10	0	0
The minimum wage should be set by the state 最低工资应由国家规定	11	44	32	13	0	0
Private Individuals should be able to own, buy, and sell land 私人应当可以拥有和买卖土地	9	38	35	18	0	0

**Table A.3** Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Ideology (State-Market)	3,513	0.00	1.00	-3.81	4.03
Ideology (Authoritarian-Democratic)	3,513	0.00	1.00	-4.06	4.09
Information	3,513	0.00	1.00	-2.09	1.42
CCP Member	3,494	0.12	0.32	0	1
State Sector Employment	3,231	0.38	0.49	0	1
Age	3,513	43.20	15.04	18	70
Education	3,467	3.74	1.47	1	7
Female	3,513	0.50	0.50	0	1
Rural Hukou	3,510	0.33	0.47	0	1
Family Income	2,181	74,903	76,588	2,500	800,000

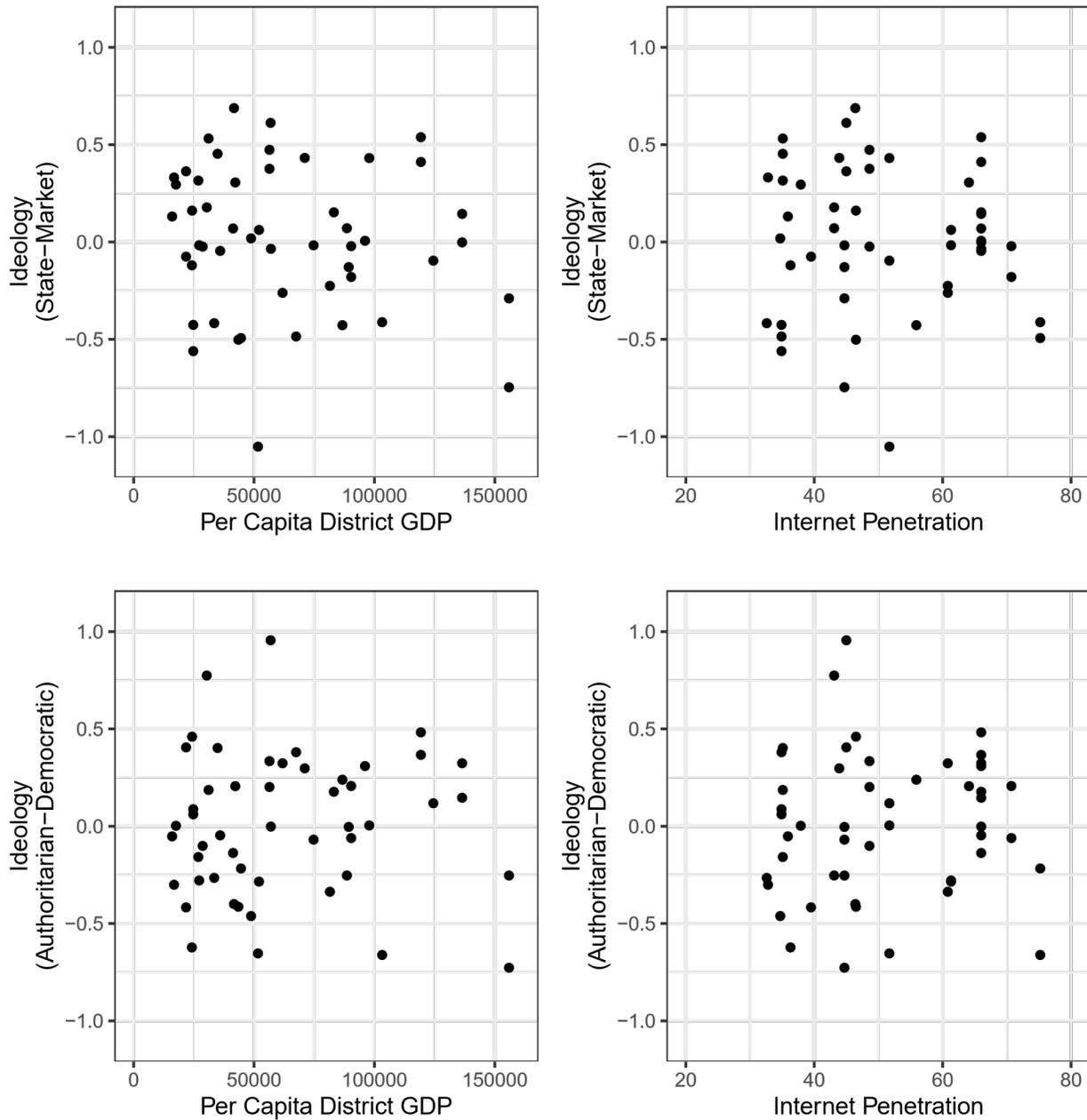
*Note:* Because we produce our ideology measures using a Bayesian item response model, we can still generate ideology estimates for respondents who have missing values in their answers.

**Figure A.1** Scatterplot of respondent ideology estimates from our ordinal item-response model.



The size of each point is proportional to the inverse probability weight, adjusted for nonresponse, for a given respondent.

**Figure A.2** The relationship between both dimensions of ideology and two variables, measured at the level of the urban district: GDP per capita and internet penetration.



**Table A.4** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results Conditioned on Political Information

Variable	State-Market			Authoritarian-					
	Factor			Democratic Factor					
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High			
Worker Status	.661	.622	.697						
Real Estate Prices	.723	.498	.553						
Privatization	.626	.593	.486						
Free Market Inequality	.552	.436	.582						
State Owned Enterprises	.656	.577	.412						
Media Independence	.528	.534	.306						
Multiparty Democracy				.760	.743	.652			
Free Speech				.715	.565	.466			
Confucianism				.618	.511	.513			
Political System				.406	.412	.543			
Minimum Wage				.424	.470	.409			
Land Ownership				.225	.365	.031			
<b>Factor Correlation</b>							Low	Medium	High
							.480	.506	.242
<b>Fit Indices</b>									
CFI							.912	.945	.911
SRMR							.050	.041	.046
RMSEA							.043	.026	.028

**Table A.5** Difficulty and Discrimination Parameters

	Difficulty Parameter	State-Market Discrimination Parameter	Auth.-Dem. Discrimination Parameter
Private ownership of property disadvantages working class people 发展私有制经济会导致劳动人民沦为弱势群体	2.37	-1.09	0.20
Privatizing the assets of state-owned enterprises should not be allowed 不能允许民间资本兼并国有企业	1.75	-0.80	0.17
Attempting to control real estate prices will undermine economic development 试图控制房地产价格的行为会破坏经济发展	1.72	-0.71	0.13
Sectors important to people's livelihoods must be controlled by state-owned enterprises 关系到国计民生的领域, 必须全部由国有企业掌控	1.51	-0.67	0.00
Marketization exacerbates economic inequality 市场化必然加剧贫富两极分化	2.07	-0.65	-0.01
Western Multiparty systems are unsuitable for China in its current state 西方的多党制不适合中国国情	2.78	-0.60	-1.04
Media should be allowed to represent the voice of specific social strata or interest groups 应当允许媒体代表特定阶层或利益集团发言	1.55	-0.53	-0.16
Indiscriminately imitating western-style freedom of speech will lead to social disorder 照搬西方式的言论自由, 社会就乱了	2.34	-0.50	-0.76
The modern Chinese society needs Confucianism 现代中国社会需要儒家思想	2.48	-0.46	-0.71
The minimum wage should be set by the state 最低工资应由国家规定	2.19	-0.44	-0.40
China's current political system is the one that is best suited for China's circumstances 我国目前的政治制度是最适合中国国情的	2.36	-0.34	-0.54
Individuals should be able to own land 个人应当可以拥有土地	1.88	-0.16	-0.14