Do Xi's Children Support the Government More than Ever? An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis from the Chinese General Social Survey

By

YEO, Minju

THESIS

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY

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Committee in charge:

Professor Rhee, Inbok, Supervisor

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Professor Choi, Seulki

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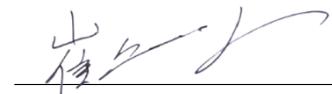
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ABSTRACT

Do Xi's Children Support the Government More than Ever? An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis of the Chinese General Social Survey

How public opinion on policies varies in authoritarian regimes has received relatively little scholarly attention. While some find evidence for the relevance of multidimensional ideological spectrum even in authoritarian regimes, investigations regarding temporal changes in public opinion are still rare. Using the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) data for 2011-2018, a nationwide sample of individuals (N = 71,323), this article examines how individual preferences on government policies differ across generations in an authoritarian regime. Based on an age-period-cohort approach, the results show that public support for restrictive government policies, such as the limited freedom of expression, one-child, or *hukou*, gradually decreased when comparing cohorts whose formative years were spent under Mao, Deng, Jiang, and Hu. However, Xi's Children show support for such policies at comparable levels to Mao's Children. These findings highlight the importance of understanding long-term dynamics in public opinion, and how the leaders of the day may affect the formation of public preferences.

Keywords: public opinion; policy preference; political generation; age, period and cohort analysis; China; authoritarian regime

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I. INTRODUCTION

Who supports or opposes government policies in authoritarian states such as China? Can the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) shape the Chinese public opinion as it intends? Public opinion in authoritarian regimes has long been stereotyped as largely being shaped by the state and its propaganda, and the view on the Chinese case has not been much different (Brady 2009; Edney 2012; Shambaugh 2007). Yet, recent evidence suggests that while expression of public opinion matters that may lead to collective actions may often be prevented (King, Pan and Roberts 2013), the Chinese government often allows citizens to voice opinions in public on other matters (Chen and Xu 2017). Moreover, contrary to the conventional expectation regarding rather uniform public preferences for policies, others have found evidence for meaningful ideological variations at the individual level (Pan and Xu 2018, 2020; Blanchette 2021; Wu 2019; Wu and Meng 2017; Cunningham, Saich and Turiel 2020).

In this paper, I build upon this small but growing literature by examining how individual preferences on government policies differ across generations in China. China has gone through dramatic political, economic, and cultural changes past 50 years. This led some observers to expect that the gap between China's older and younger generations can be arguably wider compared to the Western countries (Boisot and Child 1996; Leung 2008). Indeed, popular media discourse often depicts, for example, the distinct nature of the generation who spent their formative years under Xi compared to those came before them, namely in terms of their extreme nationalistic and patriotic public opinion (e.g. Qin and Hernández 2018; Yuan 2019). Likewise, terms such as Balinghou (八零后, post-80s) or Jiulinghou (九零后, post-90s) have been increasingly used to explain Chinese politics and society (e.g. Rosen 2009). Still, while systematic studies on how different generations hold varying policy preferences have been heavily explored in non-authoritarian settings, we lack systematic evidence to answer questions regarding how policy preferences of Xi's Generation differs from that of Mao's Generation.

Using the repeated-cross sectional data of more than 70,000 responses across six survey years from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS), I offer a systematic analysis of the different generation cohort effects of Chinese public opinion. In particular, I focus on the generational differences in terms of government administration with different leaders at the helm. Following Pan and Xu (2018), I use preferences on policies as proxies to estimate regime

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support, in lieu of choosing direct questions about the government support which may be susceptible to self-censorship. Specifically, I examine survey responses regarding contentious policy issues that divide public opinion, namely limited freedom of expression, one-child policy, and *hukou* policy, in order to consider whether and how citizens may support or oppose government policies that may interfere with their individual freedom.

Using an age-period-cohort (APC) model, I test my hypothesis on public support for contentious government policies across governments under five different leaders, namely Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu and Xi. I first conduct a linear bivariate analysis between age and policy preference, and show that higher age is associated with greater support for government interference policy. Yet, I further argue that this test cannot rule out the possibility that in addition to age, there may be distinct cohort effects: while people may become more supportive of the government as they grow older, people who spent their formative years under different political leadership may exhibit different policy preference that is independent of the age effects. Building upon this intuition, I construct a APC model to parse out the cohort effect from the age effect to estimate how the preferences changed across political generations.

My baseline finding focuses on Xi's Children showing support for the government policies even at higher levels than Mao's Children. While the public support for policies gradually decreased since Mao, Xi's Children show an increase, which supports the idea that they are notably more nationalistic and patriotic compared to previous generations. Hu's Children, on the other hand, shows the greatest opposition to the government policies examined, hinting towards a more liberal preferences. I further show that this empirical pattern holds even after controlling for CCP membership and village level voting behavior, which is often considered as a strong determinant of the support for the government. I also find some heterogeneity in public preference across different policy agenda. These findings suggest that public opinion in China is diffused and disorganized, rather than unidimensionally pro- or anti-government, which are in line with the earlier findings on the multi-dimensional nature of the Chinese public opinion (Wu 2019). Departing from the existing studies which examined only one slide of time and the static dimensions of policy preference, these findings also highlight the importance of considering the temporal dimensions of variation in policy preference across different generations.

The findings contribute to the existing literature in that generational analysis on public preferences show the importance of understanding long-term dynamics in public opinion, and how the leaders of the day may affect the formation of public preferences. More broadly, this study documents how Xi's generation, which is arguably the richest and most educated, seem to defy the expectations from the modernization theory which predicts greater demand for liberal values as educational attainment and income increase (Inglehart 1977; Lipset 1959).

In the next section of the paper, I first review the existing literature on the public opinion of China and generational studies in China. Then, I explain how I construct the APC model and estimate the outcomes. Next, I present the results of the analysis and discuss the findings. I conclude with some thoughts about the structure of public opinion in China and broader implications of the findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I review the literature on public opinion in authoritarian states, including China, and explain why it is important to study individual-level policy preferences. Next, I provide background on generational studies in China and outline the potential expectations from generational studies of public opinion in China.

2.1. THE STUDY OF PUBLIC OPINION IN CHINA

2.1.1. Public Opinion in An Authoritarian Context

Research on public opinion in authoritarian states typically investigates how public opinion shapes public policy and how leaders or institutions react to public opinion. While works on democratic states have focused on individual-level relationships among policy preferences, ideology, and partisanship (Jacobson 2000; Carsey and Layman 2006; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998), works on authoritarian states have focused on the dynamics of political competition among the elite (Shirk 1993), or selectorate and winning coalition strategies in authoritarian states (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003). Some studies have indeed examined individual-level public opinion in authoritarian states. Geddes and Zaller (1989) contributed to the discussion by estimating public support for the authoritarian regime in Brazil. They argued that support for a regime relies heavily on the political awareness of citizens. Blaydes and Linzer (2012) have examined the attitudes of Muslims toward America using large-sample individual survey data.

Audience cost theory, on the other hand, has been used to examine how authoritarian leaders respond to public opinion. As Weeks (2008) demonstrated in her paper on domestic accountability mechanisms faced by nondemocratic leaders, these leaders are impacted by public opinion in that their actions generate audience costs. However, the ways that public opinion in authoritarian states impacts the policies of these states has mainly been studied through the lens of U.S. foreign relations. Thus, the literature has focused on how public opinion in Russia or China shapes the foreign policies of these authoritarian regimes (Weiss 2014; Blanchar 2015; Reilly 2011; Zhao 2013; Hermann et al 2001; Weeks 2012, Kertze, Joshua D and Zeitzoff 2017).

The existing literature on public opinion in authoritarian states has focused on governments or institutions as agents, while individual-level studies have mainly focused on attitudes toward foreign policies. Further research on the domestic structure of policy preferences or public opinion in China is needed. Sub-national investigation of the policy preferences of Chinese citizens can shed light on the mechanisms of Chinese public opinion and how public opinion affects government policy decisions or institutional changes in the long term.

2.1.2.   Chinese Public Opinion

While the study of subnational public opinion in China is in its early stages, some studies have focused on the extent to which the CCP allows the expression of public opinion while others have examined the spectrum of public opinion.

King, Pan and Roberts (2013) have demonstrated that the CCP allows Chinese citizens to express public opinion, but restricts collective action. Their study contradicts conventional understandings of CCP censorship of negative public opinion. Moreover, Chen and Xu (2017) have found that the Chinese government allows citizens to voice their opinions in order to assess the citizens' policy preferences when they believe collective action will not occur. Such evidence has shown that the Chinese government fears not so much public opinion, but public action.

Pan and Xu (2018) have shed new light on Chinese public opinion, suggesting there is a nationwide ideological spectrum based on a multidimensional configuration of policy preferences. Looking at competitive elections, Manion (1996) has also found ideological congruence and a divide among Chinese villagers over economic issues. The implications are that public opinion and individual preferences in China may be diverse but expressed in a quieter way than one might expect, making investigation into the topic vital. Meanwhile, public opinion cleavages in China cannot be defined simply by pro-regime and anti-regime sides; they are multidimensional (Pan and Xu 2017; Wu 2019). Wu and Meng (2017) have found that there is more than one dimension to Chinese ideology; it encompasses both an economic divide and a democratic/authoritarian split. These findings suggest that investigations of Chinese policy preferences must take a systematic approach that embraces this multidimensionality.

In addition to research on nationwide cleavages in public opinion, some scholars have approached Chinese public opinion using empirical studies. Tang (2005) has used public opinion surveys to collect empirical evidence on changing patterns in Chinese public opinion, and has argued that even in the absence of direct nationwide elections, it is possible for liberal thought and bottom-up participation to emerge. Nathan and Xi (1996) have demonstrated that like Western states, to some extent China has the dynamics of an ideological polarization between left and right. They have shown that liberals want to reform the government while conservatives support the government's ongoing role in economic and social issues. Adding to Modernization Theory, Chen and Dickson (2010) have argued that the private sector may support the government. They surveyed entrepreneurs in China, and the results contradicted previous works that had shown that entrepreneurs tended to support democratic values. The authors identified dissatisfaction with public policies related to regulation and limits on private companies.

The existing literature on Chinese public opinion shows that there is a multidimensional, varied ideological spectrum, and that there have also been temporal changes in public opinion. However, these works have focused on specific features of public opinion rather than how it is structured and how it varies nationwide.

2.2. GENERATIONAL STUDIES IN CHINA

The literature has long examined generational differences, though how to divide generations remains controversial. Mannheim (1952) famously defined a generation as a group of people with a collective memory who share experiences and feelings about significant events that occurred during their formative years of adolescence and young adulthood. Meanwhile, Inglehart and Norris (2003) have suggested that when a society undergoes fundamental changes, value shifts occur, and younger generations that were socialized within a certain socioeconomic system during their formative years come to replace older generations. These approaches treat generational differences as social interactions rather than clear-cut divisions by age.

Various disciplines have begun to pay more attention to generational studies in China. Sun and Wang (2010) have identified a significant generational gap in values using survey

data from residents of Shanghai. Egri and Ralston (2004) have found that younger Chinese generations are more open to change than the generation that grew up during the Republican era in China. Hung, Gu and Yim (2007) have compared Chinese and American consumers, finding that there are different consumer behaviors across generations. Jennings and Zhang (2005) have used interview samples of local cadres in China to argue that generational memories are associated with political attitudes. Yi, Ribbens and Morgan (2010) have examined generational differences in attitudes toward careers in China.

The existing literature supports the idea that there are generational value gaps in China. Some of these works have examined attitudes or trust toward the government. However, the structure of Chinese citizens' preferences toward policy or the government needs more investigation.

Studies of public opinion under authoritarianism and of generational differences suggest that individual policy preferences may differ across generations in China. This paper explores generational gaps in public opinion under authoritarian rule in the Chinese context. I investigate how Chinese policy preferences differ among political generations, using a nationally representative individual-level general social survey, CGSS. This paper builds on the theory of individual ideological spectrum existing in China. It also adds to the theory that Chinese public opinion is multidimensional, corresponding to different preferences on three different policies.

III.   DATA

I utilize data from six waves of the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS, 中国综合社会调查)—2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018. An advantage of using CGSS data is that it contains repeated questions on policy preferences and other crucial variables used in this paper. The sample of Chinese respondents represents a wide range of birth cohorts, including birth years from 1900 to 2000, with 71,323 observations in total.

3.1.   CGSS DATASET

CGSS is the first nationwide continuous General Social Survey in mainland China conducted annually since 2003 by the National Survey Research Center at Renmin University of China and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The CGSS data is of high quality, with a low rate of missing responses, and consists of repeated cross-sectional surveys on opinions and attitudes toward various social and economic issues. The data comes from face-to-face interviews with around 20,000 Chinese respondents per year. The dataset has previously been used in economic and social science research, including a study by Jiang and Yang (2016) that measured preference falsification in China. The dataset has been one of the most frequently used by Chinese scholars in recent years, although it has not yet been widely used in political science research. The questionnaires contain relevant questions that assess individual preferences on three contentious policies in Chinese politics over the past 50 years, the freedom of expression, one-child policy, and *hukou* system.

3.2.   MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION ON POLICIES

3.2.1.   Dependent Varable: Preference Regarding Contentious Policy Measures

Among the policies in China, I estimate three main policies of political repression that may divide individual preferences on government policies since they influence people's lives in both direct and indirect ways.

Freedom of Expression. Censorship has been one of the most intensively researched topics in the Chinese context. Although the Chinese government has, to some extent, begun allowing people to express their views in public (Chen 2017), and even to criticize the govern-

ment, it still censors collective action by citizens and critical keywords it regards as dangerous. The relevant survey question asks respondents whether they support or oppose the government interfering when people criticize the government in public. Since this is the main contentious policy representing government coercion, the question measures both the nationalism of Chinese citizens and their views on freedom of expression as a human right.

One-Child Policy. China's one-child policy—which restricted married couples to have only one child—was a radical population planning approach by the government. The policy was abolished in 2015, leaving a generation of "little emperors" as a vestige. The government eventually announced it had concerns about personality disorders in young people and social problems resulting from the policy (Cameron 2013). The policy had side effects such as the skewing of the population by sex, an aging problem, and "hidden children." Even after the one-child policy was abolished, the government has continued to dictate the number of children that couples can have, changing between two and three. Public opinion on the on-going policy may be divided, since it continues to affect people's daily lives in a way that hinders their human rights.

Hukou Policy. In recent years, the loosening of *hukou* restrictions has been a major issue (*The Economist*, 2021). The *hukou* policy, which began in 1958, is a legal system of registration for Chinese citizens' households, which restricts their freedom of movement and employment. The *hukou* policy has been depicted as a pernicious caste system that divides the nation into urban and rural castes based on where citizens were born (Whyte 2019). It has resulted in inequalities in terms of economic conditions, education, healthcare, and jobs. Chinese citizens' preferences as to the controversial policy may be another public opinion divide in China.

Freedom of Expression, One-Child Policy, and Hukou Policy

The empirical analysis is based on the assumption that the questions can be used as a general measure of support or opposition to government policies. Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement with the following three questions on a 5-point Likert scale—1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree. The questions are as follow:

Freedom of Expression.

If someone announces comments criticizing the government in public place, government should not interfere. Do you agree?

如果有人在公共场所发布批评政府的言论，政府不应该干涉。您同意吗？

One-Child Policy.

How many children to have is a personal matter, and the government should not interfere. Do you agree?

生多少孩子是个人的事，政府不应该干涉。您同意吗？

Hukou Policy.

Where to work and live is an individual's freedom, and the government should not interfere. Do you agree?

在哪里工作和生活是个人的自由，政府不应该干涉。您同意吗？

Measuring Preferences on Policies: PCA

For the baseline model, I perform Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the policy preferences to configure the preferences focusing on the effects of political cohorts. The three policies mentioned above are possibly correlated, so I convert the preferences regarding each policy into a linearly uncorrelated composite variable. Then I compare them with the two variables frequently used in analyses of Chinese political opinions: 1) whether respondents vote in the village level election; and 2) whether they are a CCP member. As shown in Figure 1, the arrows for the three policies all point in one direction, which means that they can be compared pairwise. Meanwhile, the three policies are all orthogonal to CCP membership and the voting variable, meaning the three policies are not correlated with the other two variables and have the largest variance. I use the PCA score from the results of the three policies as a dependent variable, focusing on the constraint of preferences.
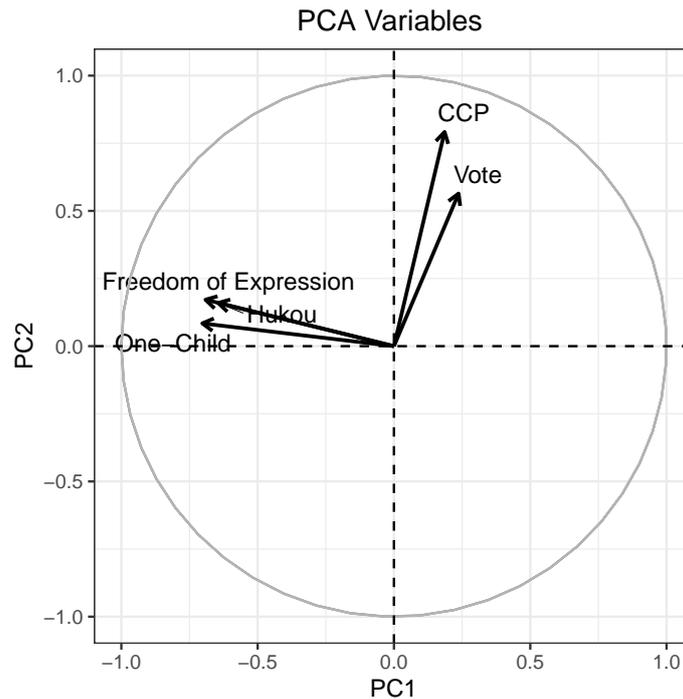
Figure 1. Orthogonal PCA Variables

Notes. Preferences with regard to the three policies show the same direction, while the other two variables are orthogonal, meaning they are not correlated. "CCP" measures whether the respondent is a CCP member or not (1: CCP member; 0: Nonmember), and "Vote" is whether the respondent participated in the village level election last year (1: Yes; 0: No)

3.2.2. Cohort Division Measure

As Mannheim ([1928] 1952) famously argued that generation is not a biological but a social creation, I divide the cohorts according to the paramount elite leaders of their era rather than by their age in decades. The public's preferences change along with the government of the day (Erikson, Mackuen and Stimson 2002), and authoritarian leadership significantly influences policies. Therefore, dividing Chinese citizens merely into age cohorts may be inappropriate. I divide the sample according to the elite leaders of respondents' formative years rather than by discrete historical events, which would risk cherry-picking certain periods. In fact, events in China largely coincide with the rule of elite leaders, so I presume that the approach of dividing based on the elite leader of the era is appropriate.

I define each generation according to its "formative years," and name them the leader's "children." A formative period, defined by Mannheim (1952), refers to the adolescent and early

adulthood years when a generation's personal outlook and political preferences are formed. For example, the first group, Mao's Children, represents senior citizens born between 1929 and 1956, and their formative years occur 20 years later, or from 1949 to 1976. Table 1 shows the formative periods organized by elite cohorts and the number of observations for each.

Table 1. Formative Period by Political Cohorts

	Mao's Children	Deng's Children	Jiang's Children	Hu's Children	Xi's Children
Formative Period	1949-1977	1978-1992	1993-2002	2003-2011	2012-Present
Year of Birth	1929-1957	1958-1972	1973-1982	1983-1991	1992-Present
Total Number	3,541	8,353	13,141	21,983	24,300
Percentage(%)	4.97	11.71	18.43	20.82	34.07

Note. Formative period = Year of Birth + 20.

Control Variables

I control variables with inherent characteristics of China that may affect individual preferences other than age, period, and cohort. Whether a member or not of CCP is an important predictor of policy preference since the members have social privilege in China. In CGSS, all respondents were asked to choose from: CCP member, Communist Youth League member, Democratic Party of China member, and no political affiliations. Communist Youth League members do not have privileges in economic or political participation yet, so I record only those who answered "CCP member" as 1 and all nonmembers as 0 for the reference group.

Media exposure in an authoritarian context is directly related to regime support due to its government control (Li, Geddes and Zaller 1989). In China, the people who use the internet often are likely to be more informed about politics and government propaganda. I use the measure of frequency (1 = Never to 5 = Very Often) with which respondents use the internet in their free time.

Ethnicity is intertwined with politics, policy, society, and economy in China, and their stances are influenced significantly by government policy decisions (Mackerras 2003). Han

Chinese being the majority population, the minorities may have different preferences on the policies due to their different economic or political situation. Therefore, I control the majority Han Chinese as 1 and other ethnic minorities as 0.

I control other variables that are known to affect political preferences (Grasso et al. 2017). I control for education level (primary only, secondary, post-secondary), as well as income (5 level percentile), gender (female = 1), home ownership (ownership including family ownership = 1, do not own = 0), marital status (married, separation but not divorced = 1, not married, divorced =0) and subjective social class (self check from low = 1 to high = 10). Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statics of variables. All the variable questions included in this paper are shown in Appendix.

Table 2. Variable Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent Variable					
Freedom of Expression	70,032	2.7	1.1	1	5
One-Child Policy	70,805	2.6	1.2	1	5
Hukou Policy	70,747	3.7	1.1	1	5
Independent Variables / Controls					
Political Cohorts	71,318	3.8	1.2	1	5
Age	71,318	49.7	16.6	17	118
Education	71,219	1.8	0.7	1	3
Income	65,405	3.0	1.5	1	5
CCP Member	71,132	0.1	0.3	0	1
Female	71,323	0.5	0.5	0	1
Home Ownership	71,231	0.8	0.4	0	1
Internet	71,193	2.4	1.6	1	5
Marital Status	71,292	0.8	0.4	0	1
Social Class	70,796	4.2	1.7	1	10
Ethnicity	71,260	1.1	0.3	1	2

IV. EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

The goal of the empirical analysis is to estimate how Chinese individual policy preferences differ across generations. The main estimate employs age-period-cohort (APC) analysis with repeated cross-sectional surveys to answer this question.

4.1. AGE EFFECT ANALYSIS

Examining only one component rather than the combined impact of the age period cohort would produce a biased understanding of Chinese individual preferences. For example, there has been speculation that nationalism has increased among the post-90s Chinese generation due to the patriotic education implemented in 1991 and recent disputes over the South China Sea. If the assumption were plausible, the age effects would show that the younger generation is more supportive of government policies. I first began by conducting a relatively straightforward bivariate analysis of age and policy preferences to see if basic policy preferences change with age. The result of the analysis is shown in Figure 2. Age effects reveal that preferences do change as individuals age. Respondents became more supportive of government policy on *Freedom of Expression* and *Hukou*, while preferences with regard to the *One-Child Policy* maintained a similar level of opposition over time. In sum, looking only at age effects, it appears that older people are more likely to accept government interference in public life than younger people.

As the result shows, looking at age effects alone restricts the analysis to the observational time frame. Older people being more conservative than younger people is regarded as common sense. However, the age effect analysis by itself does not explain why the youngest generation in China is often depicted as more nationalistic than other generations. Therefore, investigating how preferences have changed over time among specific cohorts will give us more clues about public opinion differences across Chinese generations.
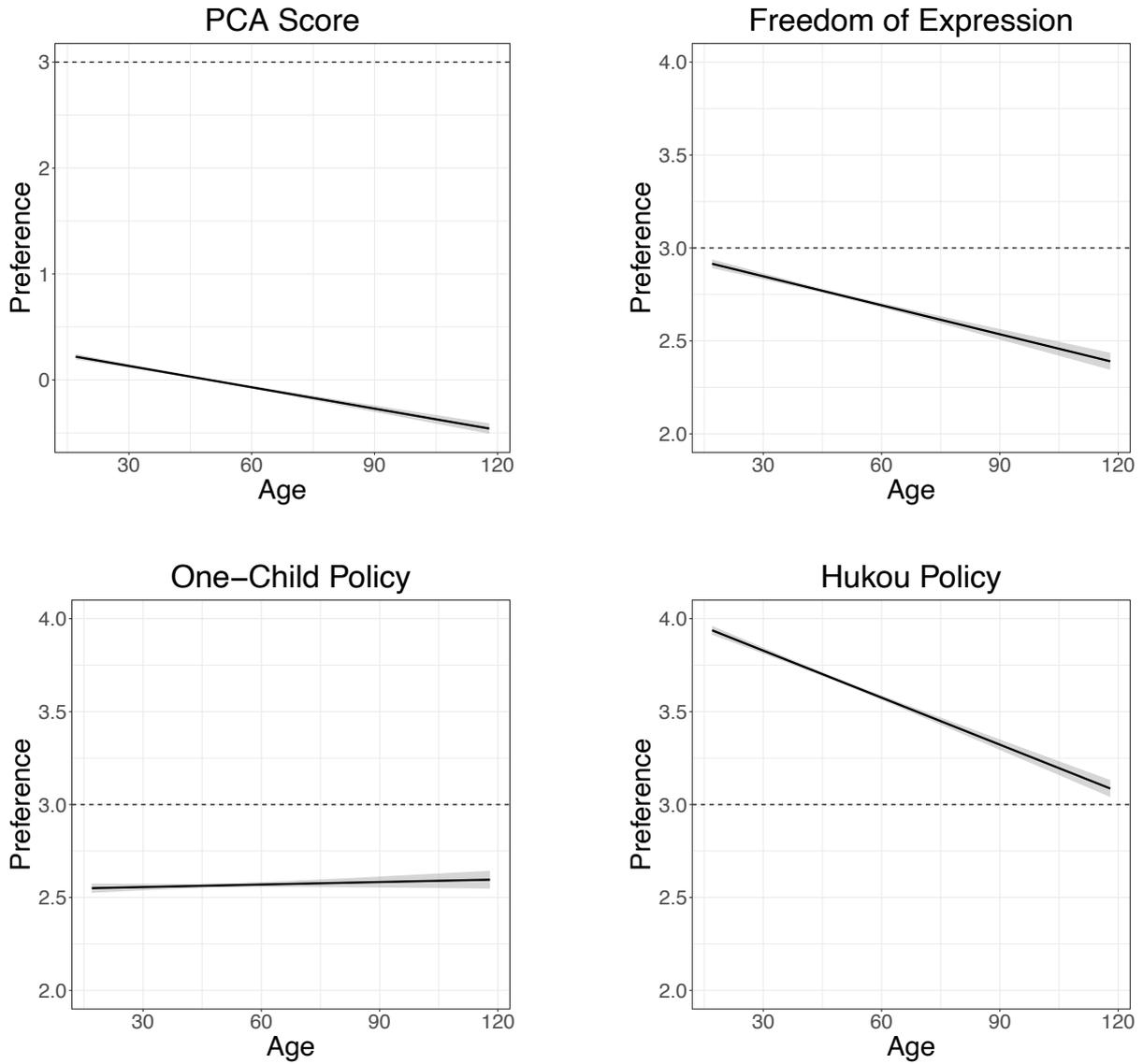
Figure 2. Age Effects on Dependent Variables

Notes. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

"Disagree" means people disagree on the government not interfering—support the government.

"Agree" means people agree on the government not interfering—oppose the government.

4.2.   AGE-PERIOD-COHORT MODELING STRATEGY

4.2.1.   HAPC

The baseline concept of the APC model is that it controls for both age and period to identify cohort effects (Cohort = Period − Age). However, the APC model faces an identification problem since age, period, and cohort have linear dependence. Figure 3 illustrates the linear structure of the age-by–time period data. I opt to use a Hierarchical Age-Period-Cohort (HAPC) model, which avoids this common identification problem in APC models (Yang and Land 2006, 2013). The repeated cross-sectional survey is a multilevel design that nests individual observations within time periods and cohorts. Therefore, the two higher levels, time period and birth cohort, simultaneously cross-classify the individual observations (Yang and Land 2006). Moreover, a mixed effects model that uses both fixed and random effects is applied. Since the repeated cross-sectional survey design is unbalanced in terms of the cohorts and the time periods of the observations, using mixed effects is more statistically efficient (Yang and Land 2006). This also prevents correlation between survey year and cohort effects.

I estimate the following multilevel model:

Level 1 : Individual Level

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_{0jk} + \beta_1 AGE_{ijk} + \beta_2 AGE^2_{ijk} + \beta_3 EDUCATION_{ijk} + \beta_4 INCOME_{ijk} + \beta_5 CCP_{ijk}$$
$$+ \beta_6 GENDER_{ijk} + \beta_7 HOME_{ijk} + \beta_8 INTERNET_{ijk} + \beta_9 MARITAL_{ijk}$$
$$+ \beta_{10} SOCIALCLASS_{ijk} + \beta_{11} ETHNICITY_{ijk} + e_{ijk} \; with \; e_{ijk} \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$$

Level 2 : Group Level

$$\beta_{0jk} = \; \gamma_0 + u_{0j} + \upsilon_{0k}, \; with \; \sim u_{0j} \sim N(0, \tau_u), \upsilon_{0k} \sim N(0, \tau_\upsilon)$$

Combined Model

$$Y_{ijk} = \gamma_0 + \beta_1 AGE_{ijk} + \beta_2 AGE_{ijk}^2 + \beta_3 EDUCATION_{ijk} + \beta_4 INCOME_{ijk} + \beta_5 CCP_{ijk}$$

$$+ \beta_6 GENDER_{ijk} + \beta_7 HOME_{ijk} + \beta_8 INTERNET_{ijk} + \beta_9 MARITAL_{ijk}$$

$$+ \beta_{10} SOCIALCLASS_{ijk} + \beta_{11} ETHNICITY_{ijk} + u_{0j} + v_{0k} + e_{ijk}$$

for

$i = 1, 2, \ldots, n_{jk}$ individuals within cohort j and period k;

$j = 1, \ldots, 5$ political generations;

$k = 1, \ldots, 6$ survey years.

I treated the individual respondents as Level 1 and cross-classified groups—period and cohort—as Level 2. In Table 3, I report the frequency distribution of respondents within cohort groups by survey year.
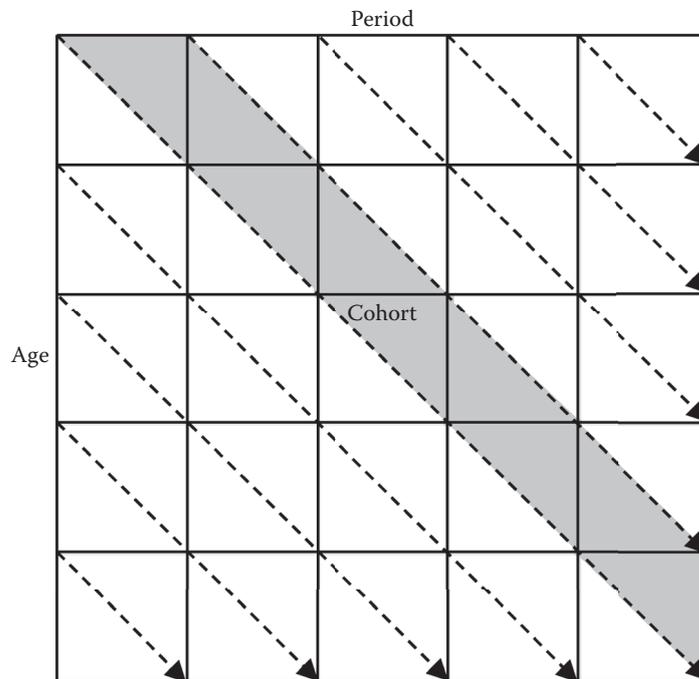
Figure 3. Age-by-time period data structure

Note. Reprinted from *Age-Period-Cohort Analysis: New Models, Methods, and Empirical Applications* (p.16), by Yang and Land. 2006.

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Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Political Cohorts by Survey Year

Political Cohorts	Survey Year					
	2010	2012	2013	2015	2017	2018
Mao Zedong	4,137	4,268	3,908	3,796	4,053	4,138
Deng Xiaoping	3,983	3,658	3,378	3,325	3,821	3,818
Jiang Zemin	2,280	2,239	2,322	1,897	2,166	2,237
Hu Jintao	1,288	1,286	1,371	1,301	1,575	1,532
Xi Jinping	92	313	458	649	967	1,062
Total	11,780	11,764	11,437	10,968	12,582	12,787

At Level 1, Y_{ijk} being the policy preferences, I control for the variables discussed in the previous section—education level, income, CCP membership, gender, house ownership, internet frequency, marital status, social class, and ethnicity. The regression slope coefficients are fixed effects with an individual-level random error term. In the equation, $\beta_1, \ldots, \beta_{11}$ are the individual Level 1 fixed effects; e_{ijk} is the random individual effect. Level 2, the group-level, needs to use either fixed or random effects. Following Goldstein (2003: 3-4), since the groups are regarded as a sample population and the analysis is going to be made on this population, so random effects were used. Level 2 consists of period and cohort random effects— u_{0j} is the cohort random effect and v_{0k} is the period random effect. The restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimator is the preferred for HAPC models, since there are less than 30 numbers of time periods and cohorts in the model (Longford 1993).

V.   RESULTS

5.1.   PCA/HAPC

The HAPC model regresses the aggregate of all available over-time individual preference measures in the data on a number of covariates, with the PCA—the preferences on the three contentious Chinese government policies—being the key regressor of preference. The model estimates standardized coefficients of policy preference differences among political cohorts in China. Table 4 presents the estimation results with the coefficient in the main entries and the standard errors in parentheses. A positive coefficient means that respondents oppose government interference—oppose the government, and a negative coefficient means respondents accept government interference—support the government. The results suggest that Chinese policy preferences—whether respondents support or oppose the government—differ among political cohorts or generations.

What stands out the most among the results is that *Xi's Children* tend to accept government interference more than other generations, even more than *Mao's Children*. This supports the idea that *Xi's Children* are equally or even more nationalistic than *Mao's Children*. *Xi's Children* has a negative and significant coefficient at the 0.05 level in the model. *Mao's Children* also has a negative coefficient of 0.03, although it is not statistically significant. The coefficient for *Jiang's Children* is not statistically significant but shows a tendency toward acceptance of government interference. Meanwhile, *Hu's Children* and *Deng's Children* have the opposite preference. The coefficient for *Hu's Children* is positive and significant at the 0.01 level. The coefficient for *Deng's Children* is not statistically significant, but the tendency is to oppose government interference. The controls generally show the expected effects, except for gender. *Age* is positive and significant at the 0.01 level while *Age squared* is negative and significant at the 0.01 level with a decreasing marginal effect. This shows the opposite result from the bivariate age effect mentioned above. However, the independent effect of age is conditional on other observable variables, which means it is not significantly linear to the dependent variable.

Table 4. PCA HAPC Result

	Dependent variable
	PCA (1)
Cohort Effect	
Mao's Children	−0.03 (0.02)
Deng's Children	0.01 (0.02)
Jiang's Children	−0.008 (0.02)
Hu's Children	0.07*** (0.02)
Xi's Children	−0.05** (0.02)
Age	0.01*** (0.003)
Age Squared	−0.0001*** (0.0000)
Education (ref.: Primary only)	
Secondary	−0.01 (0.01)
Postsecondary	0.10*** (0.02)
Income	0.02*** (0.004)
CCP Membership	−0.26*** (0.02)
Female	0.01 (0.01)
House Owenership	−0.05*** (0.01)
Media	0.06*** (0.004)
Marital Status	−0.05*** (0.01)
Social Class	−0.02*** (0.003)
Ethnicity (ref.: Han)	
Ethnic Minorities	−0.20*** (0.02)
Constant	−0.15* (0.09)
Observations	63,075
Log Likelihood	−100,617.90
Akaike Inf. Crit.	201,267.80

Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

5.2. ANALYSIS OF EACH THREE POLICIES

The previous section demonstrated that there are differences in policy preferences across political generations using PCA. However, on top of the baseline result that the cohorts differed in their support or opposition to government interference, the policy preferences of each cohort also differed with regard to their opinion of each of the three specific policies. Table 5 shows the HAPC coefficient results for each political generations' preferences with regard to each of the three policies—*Freedom of Expression, One-Child Policy and Hukou Policy.* Although some results had strong statistical significance and some did not, I include the positive and negative trends of the results here as interpretations of the preference directions.

The most noteworthy result was that *Mao's Children* and *Xi's Children* differed in their views on *Freedom of Expression* and the *One-Child Policy*. *Mao's Children* had a positive coefficient on *Freedom of Expression* at the 0.05 level of significance, meaning they oppose government interference when a citizen criticizes the government in a public place. On the other hand, *Xi's Children* had a negative coefficient on *Freedom of Expression* with significance at the 0.01 level, meaning they accept government interference in free expression. While *Mao's Children* opposed government interference in *Freedom of Expression*, they supported the *One-Child Policy* at the 0.01 significance level and also the *Hukou Policy*, although the latter result was not statistically significant. Meanwhile, *Xi's Children* appear to accept government interference in terms of *Freedom of Expression* and the *Hukou Policy*, but not the *One-Child Policy*, which was abolished during their formative years. *Hu's Children* were the only cohort to oppose every form of government interference, with a positive coefficient on all three policies. The results for *Deng's Children* and *Jiang's Children* were not statistically significant, except that *Jiang's Children* accepted government interference when it came to the *Hukou Policy*.

The differences among the generations when it comes to each policy show that the policy preferences of Chinese citizens are multidimensional, and cannot be unified into one straightforward dimension. In the next section, I provide graphs of the above explained cohort effects, including those that were not statistically significant in the HAPC model, in order to give a sense of the generational trends.

Table 5. HAPC Results on Each Policies

	Dependent variable		
	Freedom of Expression (1)	One-Child Policy (2)	Hukou Policy (3)
Cohort Effect			
Mao's Children	0.04** (0.02)	−0.098 *** (0.02)	−0.008 (0.01)
Deng's Children	0.01 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	0.009 (0.01)
Jiang's Children	−0.004 (0.02)	0.005 (0.02)	−0.02* (0.01)
Hu's Children	0.02 (0.02)	0.094*** (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)
Xi's Children	−0.07*** (0.02)	0.009 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)
Age	0.01*** (0.003)	0.01** (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)
Age Squared	−0.0001*** (0.0000)	−0.0000 (0.0000)	−0.0000** (0.0000)
Education (ref.: Primary only)			
Secondary	0.04*** (0.01)	−0.13*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
Postsecondary	0.17*** (0.02)	−0.06*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.02)
Income	0.01*** (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.02*** (0.004)
CCP Membership	−0.15*** (0.01)	−0.25*** (0.02)	−0.11*** (0.01)
Female	−0.02** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
House Ownership	−0.04*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	−0.06*** (0.01)
Internet	0.04*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.004)	0.05*** (0.004)
Marital Status	−0.04*** (0.01)	−0.06*** (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)
Social Class	−0.03*** (0.003)	−0.01*** (0.003)	−0.01*** (0.003)
Ethnicity (ref.: Han)			
Ethnic Minorities	−0.11*** (0.02)	−0.13*** (0.02)	−0.14*** (0.02)
Constant	2.61*** (0.11)	2.40*** (0.14)	3.63*** (0.06)
Observations	63,476	64,125	64,080
Log Likelihood	−96,695.04	−99,938.29	−97,429.19
Akaike Inf. Crit.	193,422.10	199,908.60	194,890.40

Note: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$

5.3.   COHORT EFFECTS PATTERN

I assessed the significance of the random cohort effects in the HAPC model with z-values, and some were not statistically significant. However, examining the graphical patterns of each set of estimated coefficient trends in the cohorts is still meaningful (Yang and Land 2006). I interpret the cohort effects for each policy using the graphs shown in Figure 4, which contain estimated preference cohort effects with their predicted 95% confidence bounds. The results are shown for the PCA score and for each of the three policies. The horizontal line is drawn at the intercept.

As the trends indicate, *Xi's Children* show the biggest drops compared with predicted support of the government. The drops from the predicted policy preferences of *Xi's Children* were even stronger than those of *Mao's Children*—except for views on the *One-Child Policy*, for which *Mao's Children* had the largest drop compared with the predicted policy preference. *Mao's Children* had the lowest predicted policy preferences, except for *Freedom of Expression*, where they had the highest prediction. *Hu's Children* were relatively high on opposition to the government across the board. The policy preference trend increased a little for *Deng's Children*, while it dropped a little for *Jiang's Children*.

The graphical analysis on the predicted preferences clearly shows changing trends among different political generations. *Xi's Children* support government interference at higher levels than *Mao's Children*. Also, *Hu's Children* oppose government interference.
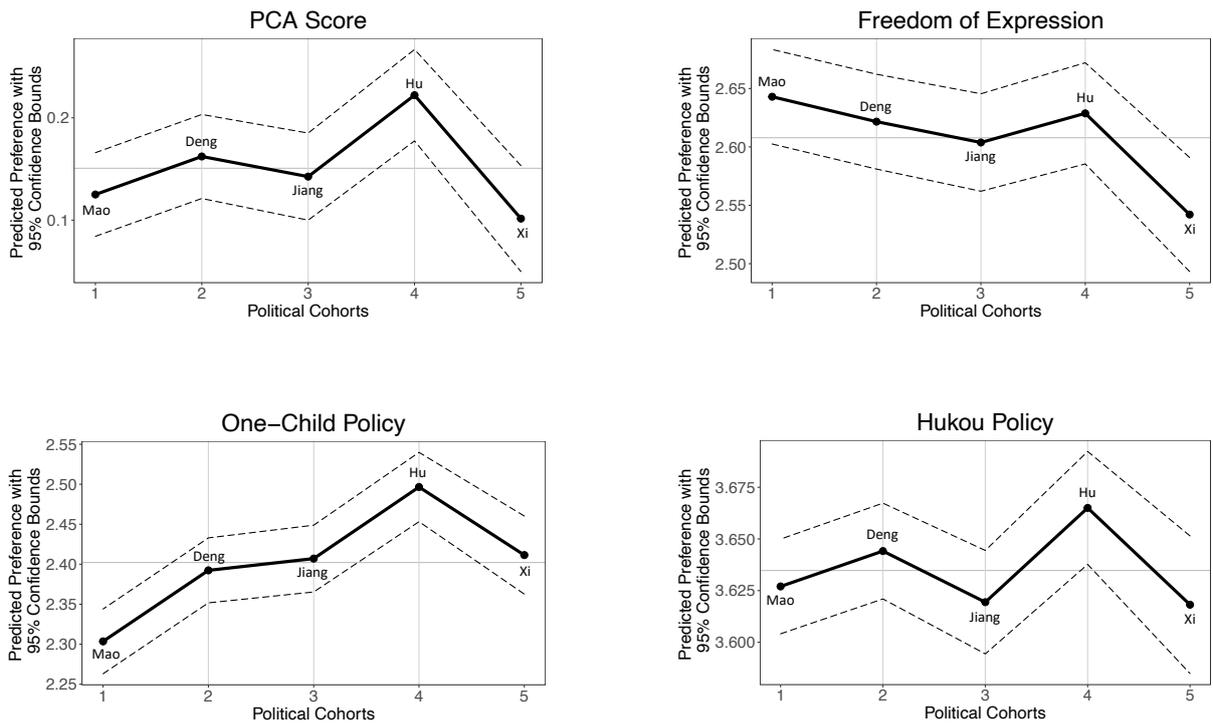
Figure 4. Cohort Effects of Dependent Variables

Notes. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

"Disagree" means people disagree on the government not interfering—support the government.

"Agree" means people agree on the government not interfering—oppose the government.

VI.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper presents evidence that Chinese public opinion differs across different political cohorts. I estimated the political cohort effects of policy preferences by applying a PCA score and an HAPC model. The estimated cohort effects in the HAPC model explained generational effects of Chinese policy preferences that bivariate age effects could not fully explain or capture. While the age effects on policy preferences showed that older generations are more supportive of the government, the HAPC cohort effects showed different patterns among different political generations. I showed that each political cohort supports or opposes government interference policies at different levels. Further, the political cohorts also differ as to which of the three policies they support or oppose. This shows that Chinese public opinion cannot simply be divided into pro- or anti-government sentiment, but rather is multidimensional and differs according to the characteristics of each policy under consideration.

A notable finding is that Xi's Children are more likely to support government policies that interfere in public life, at even higher levels than Mao's Children. In terms of the right to freely criticize the government in public, Xi's Children accept government interference with free expression even more than Mao's Children. This supports the media's argument that "Xi's generation" or "China's Gen Z" is extremely nationalistic and patriotic compared to previous generations. Since Xi Jinping took office, he has put substantial effort into reviving Maoism and establishing himself as a powerful figure. He launched a national campaign to bring China back to the Mao era, and introduced Marxist political ideology into the national curriculum under the name "Xi Jinping thought." The education of Xi's Children has emphasized nationalism and patriotism more than at any other time since Mao's era.

While this paper's findings support the assumption that these propaganda have been successful in shaping the worldview of Xi's Children, it is not clear how stable these views will turn out to be over time in Chinese public opinion. The estimation of the policy preferences of Chinese citizens appears to be constrained in dividing the ideology of the nation as a whole; however, the mass preferences of the public may influence governance outcomes even in such an authoritarian regime (Wang 2008; Weeks 2008). As Xi Jinping frequently points out in his speeches, how youth think and act will determine China's future.

Another intriguing factor is that while Xi's Children are nationalistic and patriotic, they

have also shown unprecedented audacity (*The Economist* 2021). They are not afraid to speak out about social issues in public. They are the first generation to fight for LGBTQ rights, and the first to raise their voices for factory workers and a solution to climate change. The media has suggested this is because Xi's Children were raised by parents who went through the Tiananmen Square protest and who were not willing to suppress their children. The ambiguous behaviors and thoughts of Xi's Children make the future steps of young generations in China more unpredictable, and more sophisticated analysis in the form of generational public opinion studies is needed.

Interpreting the policy preference patterns of older political cohorts provides a clue as to how different policies shape public opinion in different ways. Deng and his successors gradually started opening up to a market economy, abandoning the planned economy from Mao's era (Shirk 1993). This may explain why Deng, Jiang, and Hu's Children have a relatively liberal position opposing government interference in public life. It should be noted that many of the relatively liberal Jiang's Children and Hu's Children left the country during a period of mass emigration from China in the 1990s. There is a possibility of bias in the survey due to the limitations of the survey experiment design. While practical difficulties remain, the relatively liberal opinions of Deng, Jiang and Hu's Children may be related to the open market policies. More research is needed to determine which policies have had greater influence on public opinion in China.

This research on generational differences in policy preferences in the Chinese context complements existing studies of Chinese public opinion. I provide new insight into the diverse views of different political cohorts in China. One limitation of this study is that it relies on survey data, since respondents in authoritarian states may self-censor, especially in their responses to political questions. Future research may investigate the actual political behavior of Chinese citizens to estimate how policy preferences change across generations. This would provide greater knowledge of how Chinese public opinion influences government policy decisions in both direct and indirect ways.

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APPENDIX

CGSS Survey Measures

Source: Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS, 中国综合社会调查)

Year: 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018

A2. 性别

A2. Gender

男 ....1 : Male

女 ....2 : Female

A3. 您的出生日期是什么?

A3. What is your date of birth?

记录: ......年 ... 月 ... 日

Fill in: ...... Year ... Month ... Day

A4. 您的民族是:

A4. What is your ethnicity?

汉 ....1 : Han Chinese

蒙 ....2 : Mongolian

满 ....3 : Manchu

回 ....4 : Hui

藏 ....5 : Tibetan

壮 ....6 : Zhuang

维 ....7 : Uyghur

其他 (请注明:) .....8 : Other: (Please Specify:)

A7a. 您目前的最高教育程度是:

A7a. What is your current highest level of education?

没有受过任何教育.................1 : Never educated

私塾、扫盲班.........................2 : Private class, literacy class

小学..3：Elementary school

初中..4：Middle school

职业高中..................................5：Vocational high school

普通高中..................................6：High school

中专..7：Technical secondary school

技校..8：Technical school

大学专科(成人高等教育)......9：Two year diploma of adult higher education

大学专科(正规高等教育)....10：Two year diploma of regular higher education

大学本科(成人高等教育)....11：Undergraduate (adult higher education)

大学本科(正规高等教育)....12：Undergraduate

研究生及以上........................13：Postgraduate or higher

其他(请注明:)........................14：Other: (Please specify:)

A8a. 您个人去年全年的总收入是多少?

A8a. What was your total income for last year? (Enter number)

百万位 / 十万位 / 万位 / 千位 / 百位 / 十位 / 个位

Millions / Hundred Thousands / Ten Thousands / Thousands / Hundredth / Tens / Ones

9999996.个人全年总收入高于百万位数、9999997.不适用、

9999998.不知道、9999999.拒绝回答。

9999996.Over one million, 9999997.Do not apply the criteria,

9999998.Do not know, 9999999.Refuse to answer.

A10. 目前的政治面貌是:

A10. Your current political status:

群众 ....1：No political affiliations

共青团员 ....2：Communist Youth League member

民主党派 ....3：Democratic Party of China member

共产党员，入党时间是: ....4：Chinese Communist Party member, entering year:

不知道 ....98：Do not know

拒绝回答 ....99：Refuse to answer

A12. 您现在这座房子的产权(部分或全部产权)属于谁?(多选)

A12. Who is the owner (partial or as a whole) of the house you are living right now? (multiple choices)

自己所有 ....1：Self owned

配偶所有 ....2：Spouse owned

子女所有 ....3：Children owned

父母所有 ....4：Parents owned

配偶父母所有 ....5：Spouse's parents owned

子女配偶所有 ....6：Children's spouse owned

其他家人/亲戚所有....7：Other family members or relatives owned

家人/亲戚以外的个人或单位所有，这房是租(借)来的...8：Other individuals than family or relatives, the room is rented

其他情况(请注明:).....9：Other (Please specify:)

不知道.......................98：Do not know

拒绝回答..................99：Refuse to answer

A28. 过去一年，您对以下媒体的使用情况是:互联网(包括手机上网)

A28. In the past year, your usage status of the following media: Internet (including mobile internet)

从不 ....1：Never

很少 ....2：Rarely

有时 ....3：Sometimes

经常 ....4：Often

非常频繁 ...5：Very often

不知道 .....98：Do not know

拒绝回答 .99：Refuse to answer

A43. 在我们的社会里，有些人处在社会的上层，有些人处在社会的下层。这张卡片的梯子要从上往下看。最高 "10 分"代表最顶层，最低"1 分"代表最底层。

A43. In our society, some people are at the top social status, while others are at the bottom. The ladder on this card should be looked down from the top. The highest "10 points" stand for the top and the lowest "one point" stand for the bottom.

A43e. 综合看来，在目前 这个社会上，您本 人处于社会的哪一 层？

A43e. In general, at which social status do you see your self as located?

1分 ....1 : 1 point

2分 ....2 : 2 point

3分 ....3 : 3 point

4分 ....4 : 4 point

5分 ....5 : 5 point

6分 ....6 : 6 point

7分 ....7 : 7 point

8分 ....8 : 8 point

9分 ....9 : 9 point

10分 ....10 : 10 point

不知道 ....98 : Do not know

拒绝回答 ...99 : Refuse to answer

A44. 上次居委会选举/村委会选举，您是否参加了投票？

A44. Did you vote in the last election of residential committee and village committee?

是 ....1 : Yes

否 ....2 : No

没有投票资格 .....3 : Ineligible to vote

A46. 如果有人在公共场所发布批评政府的言论，政府不应该干涉。您同意吗？

A46. If someone announces comments criticizing the government in public place, government should not interfere. Do you agree?

完全不同意........................... 1：Strongly Disagree

比较不同意........................... 2：Somewhat Disagree

无所谓同意不同意.............. 3：Neutral

比较同意............................. 4：Somewhat Agree

完全同意............................. 5：Strongly Agree

不知道................................ 98：Do not know

拒绝回答............................ 99：Refuse to Answer

A47. 生多少孩子是个人的事，政府不应该干涉。您同意吗？

A47. How many children to have is a personal matter, and the government should not interfere. Do you agree?

完全不同意........................... 1：Strongly Disagree

比较不同意........................... 2：Somewhat Disagree

无所谓同意不同意.............. 3：Neutral

比较同意............................. 4：Somewhat Agree

完全同意............................. 5：Strongly Agree

不知道................................ 98：Do not know

拒绝回答............................ 99：Refuse to Answer

A48. 在哪里工作和生活是个人的自由，政府不应该干涉。您同意吗？

A48. Where to work and live is an individual's freedom and the government should not interfere. Do you agree?

完全不同意........................... 1：Strongly Disagree

比较不同意........................... 2：Somewhat Disagree

无所谓同意不同意.............. 3：Neutral

比较同意............................. 4：Somewhat Agree

完全同意............................. 5：Strongly Agree

不知道................................ 98：Do not know

拒绝回答............................ 99：Refuse to Answer

A69. 您目前的婚姻状况是：

A69. Your current marital status:

未婚 ....1 : Not married

同居 ....2 : Live together

初婚有配偶 ....3 : First marriage with spouse

再婚有配偶 ....4 : Second marriage with spouse

分居未离婚 ....5 : Separated but not divorced

离婚 ....6 : Divorced

丧偶 ....7 : Widowed