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Regime Type, Censorship, and Trust in Government With a Special Look at China

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Regime Type, Censorship, and Trust in Government With a Special Look at China

Abstract

This research stems from a fascination with the unique social media censorship efforts in China. In order to determine if such heavy social media restrictions are unique to China this study uses data from the World Values Survey to investigate the relationship between regime type and social media censorship. The paper then examines the relationship between government censorship effort and citizens' trust in government. Ultimately, I find that while regime type is a predictor of censorship, censorship does not have a substantial effect on citizens' confidence in government overall. However, the data does seem to suggest that censorship may be important to autocracies and that censorship may actually be effective in China.

Keywords

censorship, China, trust in government

Disciplines

Asian Studies | Comparative Politics | Political Science

Comments

Written for POL 404: Capstone - Comparative Politics.

Regime Type, Censorship, and Trust in Government
With a Special Look at China

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POL 404 Capstone

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May 1, 2023

Abstract: *This research stems from a fascination with the unique social media censorship efforts in China. In order to determine if such heavy social media restrictions are unique to China this study uses data from the World Values Survey to investigate the relationship between regime type and social media censorship. The paper then examines the relationship between government censorship effort and citizens' trust in government. Ultimately, I find that while regime type is a predictor of censorship, censorship does not have a substantial effect on citizens' confidence in government overall. However, the data does seem to suggest that censorship may be important to autocracies and that censorship may actually be effective in China.*

Key Words: *censorship, China, social media, trust in government*

Introduction

Liberty or order? These two concepts are quite contradictory. Complete liberty suggests that humans have the ability to do whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want free of constraint or restriction. Conversely, order proposes that people behave in a way that conforms to the rules of the society that they live in. These concepts exist on two opposite sides of the spectrum, yet for a society to function, both are needed. However, the extent to which they are granted depends upon which value governments see as paramount to the success of their state. By raising one value, the other is inevitably undercut in some way. Thus, when we look at the governments of the world, we see all types of structures with varying prescriptions of liberty and order. This paper aims to consider how regimes core values can affect how governments react to innovations that either act to threaten or enhance their values. Specifically, this paper will focus on the advent of social media and how regimes responded to it based on their core values. Further, the paper will investigate the effect that each regime's response to social media had on their citizens' level of confidence in the government.

In 2004 the world as we knew it changed forever: MySpace was created. MySpace was the first of its kind and set the stage for social media to infiltrate the world. Since 2004, the capabilities of social media have expanded greatly. What started as a way to share photos and express interests has grown into a means of banking, shopping, gathering news, and connecting with people on the other side of the Earth. Not to mention that users of social media can do all of this from anywhere in a matter of seconds. With its expansive capabilities, social media has transformed the way society and the world functions.

When we think about what motivates social media, what it was created to enhance, we are pointed towards the value of freedom. Essentially, unrestricted social media gives users the freedom to share what they want with who they want when they want. With this freedom comes

more possibilities than just posting the latest update on their life. When it comes to politics, social media has the power to allow citizens to organize protests, expose corruption, and criticize their government. For instance, the United States Black Lives Matter movement, which started in 2013 on Facebook has spread throughout the world, and in 2020, it was used to organize protests in cities like Philadelphia and D.C. following the death of George Floyd (*BLM*, 2023). The freedom associated with social media, as well as the rate at which thoughts can be shared, makes it a critical area of interest for states because of its ability to mobilize citizens. While under certain regimes citizen participation is encouraged, other regimes aim to suppress citizen mobilization like the BLM movement. Therefore, this paper sets out to investigate the relationship between regime type and social media and internet censorship. Because regime type is so heavily entrenched in the values of the state, it seems logical that a platform created to enhance freedom would warrant different reactions from the various regime types. Further, this paper will consider if censorship of social media is an effective way to maintain order and control by way of investigating the effect of social media censorship on citizen's confidence in government. There has been research conducted on social media censorship; however, the results vary from experiment to experiment. In addition, much of the research only focuses on one or a few states. This research design is unique because it incorporates all of the states included in the World Values Survey and goes further to determine if social media censorship is an effective means of control or if it is a waste of government time and resources. Additionally, it delves into a critical case study of China, which I will demonstrate does not conform to the rest of the findings of this study. Thus, this research has the potential to make substantial contributions to the questions surrounding the relationship between regime type, social media censorship, and trust in government.

The paper will commence with a brief description of the unique media censorship effort in China which ultimately serves as the inspiration for this research. Then to provide clarity about the regime types considered in this paper, frameworks will be applied to the concepts of authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies. After establishing what is meant by liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, I will review the existing research on the topics of mobilization by media, media-based repression, and censorship and trust in government. From there I build a theory taking into account previous research and outline the two hypotheses of the paper. The hypotheses are tested using a linear regression analysis and the result of each test is interpreted in detail. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings as well as with an analysis of the specific results from the Chinese data.

The China Case

The inspiration for this research originates from my interest in China's distinctive social media censorship policy. Along with Iran and North Korea, China imposes some of the harshest social media restrictions on its citizens in the world (Armstrong, 2022). China's inclination to control the information that its citizens consume is not a new phenomenon. Even back during the Ming Dynasty, emperors prioritized information regulation. For instance, before plays could be performed, the script had to be reviewed and approved by the government for anything that they deemed to be inappropriate (Tai & Fu, 2020). Recently China's coverage of the 2022 World Cup has flooded the news in the United States. In the latter half of 2022 China's Zero COVID-19 Policy was still in effect meaning that many parts of the state remained in lockdown. However, the rest of the world had largely lifted COVID-19 restrictions by the time of the World Cup (Holmes, 2022). For fear of uproar from the public, the Chinese government took proactive measures to avoid protest: they doctored the footage.

It is well known that social media and news in China is censored, even the citizens themselves are aware that it is government regulated (Wu, 2020); however, there are specific posts that are more likely to be censored by the government than others. Jennifer Pan, Gary King, and Margarete Roberts conducted a comprehensive study that aimed to shed light on which types of posts the Chinese government censored on social media (King et al., 2014). Using a text analytical system, they found that the government was likely to censor or remove any posts that seemed to call for collective action, no matter what the context of the proposed mobilization was (King et al., 2014). There are many more examples of China's extensive censorship efforts, and because their restrictions are so advanced that it is likely that many of them have yet to be discovered by the rest of the world.

What is so intriguing to me about China is that despite all the restrictions the citizens live under, there are extremely trusting in their government. A global survey on citizen trust in government found that 89% of Chinese citizens trusted their government to do what was right (Statistic, 2023). 89% is an exceptionally substantial number regarding having a lot of trust in the government. This large amount of trust makes me wonder if the citizens' trust is somehow related to censorship efforts in China. Thus, the China case, as I call it, where the government heavily restricts social media and citizens have a lot of trust in government, motivates this research. These statistics beg a lot of questions: Does censorship predict confidence in government? Do other states that employ a lot of restrictions on social media like China, also have citizens who are very trusting of government? We can use data to answer these questions and they inform the research to come.

Values Centered Regimes

In this paper I will be focusing on two types of regimes: liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes. As a unanimous definition of authoritarianism and liberal democracies does not exist, it is important to clarify what is implied by these concepts in this paper. Authoritarian regimes are characterized using Juan Linz's definition of authoritarianism. This framework rests on four conditions: little political pluralism (presence of one-party systems), legitimacy established through an appeal to ethos, low subject mobilization (high levels of repression), and vaguely defined executive powers (Linz & Linz, 2000). Essentially, the Linz framework implies that authoritarian regimes are dependent upon government control which is threatened by the presence of social media. Conversely, liberal democracies are characterized by their value of freedom. Kenneth Bollen defines liberal democracies as "the extent to which a political system allows political liberties and democratic rule" (Bollen, 2009). In this instance, political liberties refer to the ability of citizens to *freely* share their opinions through the media and participate in political groups (Bollen, 2009), whereas democratic rule refers to the ability of citizens to participate in government (Bollen, 2009). Therefore, citizens in more democratic societies should be able to freely share their opinions and participate in politics whether that be through protest or voting.

Social Media as a Political Tool

Existing research suggests that social media can be harnessed as a political tool by governments as both a facilitator of mass mobilization and repression (Kalathil & Boas, 2001; MacKinnon, 201; Shirky, 2011). In terms of mobilization, social media acts as a facilitator of group identification, where users can find other people that share their beliefs on a given topic (Sturmer & Simon, 2004). Social media's capacity for allowing people to identify with groups, makes it a powerful force for mobilization (Kende, 2016; Sturmer & Simon, 2004). According to

Sturmer and Simon, group identification is one pathway through which citizens have been found to be more willing to participate in collective action. These findings are significant, because they add a layer of dimension to Olson's collective action problem and imply that social media is a means through which it can be overcome. According to Olson, competing interests and the cost of participation make it unlikely for a large group of people to successfully work together to achieve a common goal (Clark et al., 2018; Olson, 1977). The game theory model of collective action finds that the most optimal scenario for a rational actor is that the protest is a success and that he does not participate. Therefore, rational actors are not expected to participate in public protests, the collective action problem. This can help to explain why authoritarian regimes are so stable because even when citizens do not agree with their government, the game theory model suggests that they will not act on their beliefs (Clark et al., 2018). However, the collective action problem can indeed be overcome through reaching one's revolutionary threshold, "the size of a protest at which an individual is willing to participate" (Clark et al., 2018; Kuran, 1991). Kuran argues that the success of protests is decided by the revolutionary thresholds of individuals and that government actions are able to change individuals' revolutionary thresholds and result in a revolutionary cascade (Kuran, 1991), "when one person's participation triggers the participation of another, which triggers the participation of another, and so on" (Clark et al., 2018). Just as Kuran proposes that government actions can prompt revolutionary cascades, research has shown that conversations on social media can insight similar participation through group identification (Howard et al., 2011; Kende, 2016; Sturmer & Simon, 2004). For instance, the role of social media during the Arab Spring, a wave of pro-democracy demonstrations in Tunisia, cannot be understated. Egyptian and Tunisian social media users were able to spread information and messages about democracy around the world, while engaging in the process of group

identification, which “helped raise expectation for success of political uprising” (Howard et al., 2011), and increase tweets about the issue from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. The vast engagement promoted by social media boosted people’s morale and triggered the participation of others which ultimately resulted in a revolutionary cascade and rebellion (Kuran, 1991). The Arab Spring represents one of the most successful examples of public mobilization and democratization through social media, speaking to the power of social media to stimulate participation. Through “transcending social divides” and uniting citizens against a shared grievance, social media is a significant political tool (Enjolras et al., 2013).

Whereas the mobilization power of social media threatens authoritarian regimes by promoting democratization (Kalathil & Boas, 2001; Linz & Linz 2000), liberal democracies may see it as a way to promote their value of freedom and public participation. A key characteristic of authoritarian regimes is repression in order to maintain control (Linz & Linz, 2000). Therefore, the ability of social media to mobilize protests and citizens against the government would suggest that authoritarian regimes would likely see social media as a threat to control. Conversely, liberal democracies that see freedom and citizen participation as central to maintaining democracy would likely view social media as an opportunity to strengthen democracy through a more efficient means of sharing thoughts and organizing participation.

While social media can be harnessed to enhance freedom, it can also be used to take it away (Fu & Tai, 2020; Kalathil & Boas, 2001). Through restricting access to social media and removing unwanted connect, authoritarian regimes have the ability to limit the possibility of protest arising from social media usage (Kalathil & Boas, 2001). Technology allows states who have an interest in filtering the media that their citizens see on social media to do so, making social media an effective way to control information flow (Gallagher & Miller, 2021). By

removing posts that call for mobilization or express shared grievances, citizens are not afforded the opportunity to identify with groups that oppose the government, and therefore the collective action problem is preserved (Fu & Tai, 2020; Kende, 2016; Sturmer & Simon, 2004). Thus, through censorship, social media's threat to the stability of authoritarian regimes can be mitigated (Kalathil & Boas, 2001).

The research surrounding social media ability to function as a political tool is fairly compelling; however, my research will expand the existing research by determining what types of regimes embrace social media and what role values play in how they choose to respond to it.

Censorship and Trust

One of the most attractive parts of social media is that it allows users to connect with people halfway across the globe in seconds. The rapid transfer of information contributes to a feeling of connectedness. Through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter users are able to connect with friends as well as people who they barely know. In the realm of politics, these platforms provide spaces where citizens can feel connected to politicians, whether that be through keeping up to date on their posts or directly messaging them (Crawford, 2009; Utz, 2009). Distance between political elites and citizens can increase distrust in government because it makes citizens feel like they are not being adequately represented (Listhaug and Jakobsen, 2017; Starke et al., 2020); however, social media has the ability to bridge that gap and bring politicians and citizens closer together and increase trust in government (Bowler & Karp, 2004; Listhaug and Jakobsen, 2017; Starke et al., 2020). While there is not an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence considering social media and trust in government, there are studies that suggest that social media

can increase trust in government by giving the perception that the government and politicians are transparent about their actions with citizens (Kim et al., 2015; Song & Lee, 2016; Starke et al., 2020).

While social media can breed the feeling of connectedness, social media also has a lot of potential to spread conspiracy theories and misinformation. Uncensored social media allows users to post nearly anything they wish. In doing so a few, thousands, or potentially millions of people are exposed to this information, whether it be factual or not. Which permits misinformation to spread. In some instances, misinformation pertaining to the government spread on social media can be detrimental to the functioning of the institution because it can reduce citizens level of trust in government (Pavela Banai et al., 2020; Rahbarqazi, 2021; Sergie, 2021). When citizens are less trusting in government, they become less willing to participate in it, and therefore effective governance is threatened (Baldassare, 2004; Hetherington, 1998). However, misinformation does not always result in distrust in government. When social media users are already skeptical of misinformation and conspiracy theories in the media, they are more trusting in government (Islam, 2021). Those who are predisposed to trust the government, meaning they were taught to trust institutions, or have professions related to government, are the ones who are generally likely to question the accuracy of information on social media and maintain trust in institutions (Islam, 2021; Uslaner, 2002). In authoritarian regimes where social media is highly censored there are generally high levels of trust in the government and institutions (Muller, 2013). For instance, in China, citizens view highly censored media but are still very trusting in their government (Gallagher & Miller, 2021; MacKinnon, 2011). By removing information from the media that does not conform to the teachings of the government, authoritarian regimes can ensure that the information that their citizens absorb is pro- state

(Muller, 2013; Nathan, 2020). This eliminates the prospect of new groups forming online, such as anti-states groups, through which citizens could identify and lose trust in government (Howard et al., 2011; Kende, 2016).

The relationship between social media censorship and trust in government still remain largely inconclusive (Islam, 2019; Pavela Banai et al., 2020; Rahbarqazi, 2021; Sergie, 2021; Starke et al., 2020). While some scholars find support for social media increasing trust, others find that it breeds misinformation and distrust (Pavela Banai et al., 2020; Rahbarqazi, 2021; Sergie, 2021). Most of the studies on social media and trust look solely at one state or one type of regime (Gallagher & Miller, 2021; Pavela Banai et al., 2020). My study will advance these findings by comparing the effects of social media on trust in government in democracies, anocracies, and autocracies. Based on the compelling evidence that censorship in authoritarian regimes improves legitimacy, my research will follow the theory that censorship improves trust in government.

Theory

Social media is a powerful political tool that has the capability to overcome the collective action problem, making it substantially threatening to the stability of authoritarian regimes (Howard et al., 2011; Kende, 2016; Sturmer & Simon, 2004). The values inherent to authoritarian regimes are control and order (Linz & Linz, 2000). Conversely social media prioritizes freedom. These values are incompatible in their essence, and in order for an authoritarian regime to maintain control and order I submit that authoritarian regimes must censor and restrict social media in order to repress dissent and preserve control. By censoring social media and removing content that speaks out against the government or calls for mobilization, authoritarian regimes are capable of restoring the collective action problem to

make themselves more resilient. On the contrary, because democratic regimes value freedom and public participation, I predict that they will encourage the use of social media. Shirky and Enjolras' studies both indicate that social media is a powerful tool for citizen mobilization. Therefore, there should not be social media restrictions in liberal democracies. However, with the use of unrestricted social media the ability to freely share thoughts is at almost every internet-using persons' fingertips. This means that they are able to spread their beliefs and thoughts even if they are not factual. Most rational people are aware that every post they see on social media has the potential to be completely fabricated. Seeing different opinions and different accounts of events that transpire increases uncertainty in humans, and as a result we do not know what to believe. Overall, this makes people more skeptical. As it pertains to the government, the phenomenon of uncertainty which has spawned from the onset of social media causes people to have less faith in government. Just in the United States, we are constantly faced with conspiracy theories about the government. When we are cognizant of it or not, it instills doubt in us and causes us to lose faith in our institutions. Conversely, when social media is highly censored and restricted it promotes certainty. For instance, in China, anti-Party posts are filtered out of social media. In their attempt to maintain control, states that censor social media are able to create certainty about the way the world looks, or at least the way they want citizens to believe it looks. As a result of more certainty and less conspiracies against the government, states with restricted social media will have more trust in government.

Hypothesis 1: As a regime becomes more authoritarian, it will place more restrictions on social media. Conversely, as a regime becomes more democratic it will place fewer restrictions on social media.

Hypothesis 2: As a state imposes more restrictions on social media, citizens will have more trust in government. Contrarily, as a state allows more freedom on social media, the less trust citizens will have in government.

Research Design

Dataset

To test my hypotheses, I will investigate the data from the World Values Survey (2017-2020). The WVS includes data from close to 100 countries and measures citizen's values and beliefs on six continents. This dataset is the most ideal one for this research because it codes for variables that effectively operationalize my independent and dependent variables. The survey includes measures of government censorship of social media as well as opinion data on citizens' feelings toward the government and the press. Therefore, it will not be necessary to look at additional datasets to test the hypotheses raised by this study. Further, the dataset is current which is important as social media is a relatively new phenomenon. Finally, the WVS has data on China and the United States, which can be used as dummy variables in my specific case studies. These characteristics make the WVS the optimal dataset for this research.

Variables

The independent variable in H1 is regime type, and it is operationalized through the Regime Type variable in the WVS. This variable filters states into five categories: hardline autocracies, moderate autocracies, highly defective democracies, defective democracies, and democracies in consolidation. The measure ranges from 1 to 5, 1 being the hardline autocracies and 5 being the democracies in consolidation. This data is derived from the Bertelsmann Stiftung Index from 2018.

I will operationalize the dependent variable in H1, censorship, using the government censorship variable in the WVS. The censorship variable has been recoded to sort censorship into three categories: high, medium, and low. 1 represents states with high levels of censorship and 3 represents states with low levels of censorship. 33.71% of states fall into the high censorship category, 33.12% in the medium level, and 33.18% fall into the low level. The relationship between censorship and regime type is visualized in Figure 1, where the level of social media restrictions is graphed over regime type.

In H2 the independent variable is censorship level, again this variable is operationalized by the same variable as it was to test H1. The dependent variables are trust in government and confidence in the press. I have decided to include confidence in the press as an additional dependent variable, as I predict more censorship will result in more trust in institutions, which could include the state's press. Censorship could also be a potential proxy for trust in the press. The trust in government variable is operationalized using the Confidence in Government variable in the WVS. Again, the variable will filter the data into high, medium, and low categories to keep consistent with the censorship data. Trust in press is operationalized through the Confidence in Press variable in the WVS. The Trust in Press Variable is coded as follows: (1= A Great Deal, 2= Quite a Lot, 3=Not Very Much, and 4= None at All).

Regime type is also operationalized through the Polity variable in the WVS in Figures 2 to 4. The measure ranges from -10 to 10, -10 being the most authoritarian and 10 being the most democratic. Democracies are defined by free and fair¹⁸ elections, unrestricted political participation, and substantial constraints on the chief executive. Authoritarian regimes are characterized by a chief executive with undefined authority, corrupt or no elections, and citizen suppression (Clark et al., 2018). Using these characteristics, Polity IV calculates each regime's

democracy and autocracy score and then subtracts the autocracy score from the democracy score to produce its polity score. -10 to -6 is an authoritarian regime and 6 to 10 is a democratic regime. -6 to 6 is a hybrid. This measure is well suited to measuring regime type because it uses the polymorphic view of regime type, whereas as a state becomes more authoritarian, it becomes less democratic. Other researchers recommended using this type of continuous measure, rather than a dichotomous measure because it allows us to observe greater differentiation in regime type (Mainwaring et al., 2001). In addition, the characteristics that this measure uses for scoring are in line with the definition of liberal democracy and authoritarian regimes proposed in my theory section. The *Polity* variable is already coded in the WVS survey; however, for this specific design it will be re-coded to sort states into three categories: *not free (-10)*, *partly free (0)*, and *free (10)*.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Confidence in Gov.	120,468	1.319778	.9508678	0	3
Confidence in Press	121,988	2.762313	.838228	1	4
USACHINA_W~D	124,854	.153243	.588244	0	3
Polity	116,277	6.146598	5.459338	-7	10
Censorship	121,700	1.994684	.8178184	1	3
GDPpercap1	121,128	31565.32	21589.63	2311.7	129103
Age	124,214	45.65832	17.263	16	103

Data source: World Values Survey 2017-2020

Model Examination

I am treating the dependent variable as interval level, so I am using the linear regression to represent it.

Results

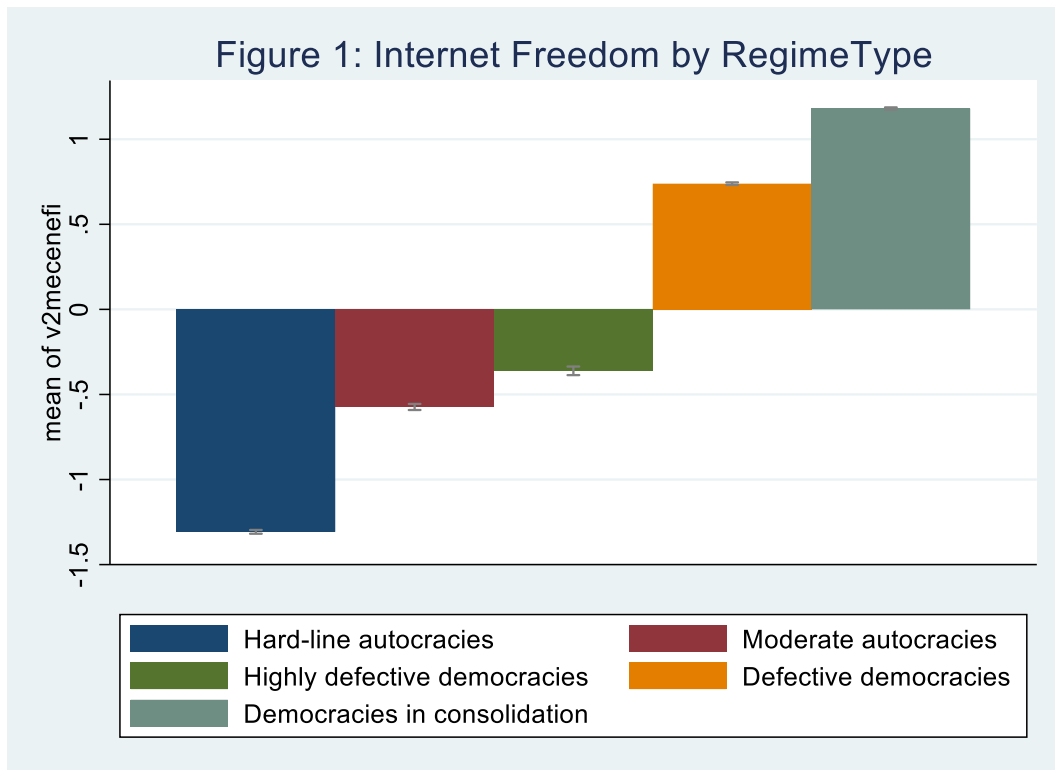


Figure 1: Amount of internet freedom by regime type, with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1 tests H1 by using descriptive statistics to illustrate the relationship between regime type and level of social media censorship. According to the theory I have put forth, as regimes become more authoritarian, they will employ more restrictions on the internet. The reason being that social media provides a means through which the collective action problem can be overcome. Thus, this political tool poses a threat to authoritarian regimes' value of control and order. In attempts to become more resilient and maintain control, we would expect authoritarian regimes to limit access to social media. The results in Figure 1 follow this theory. The "Hardline" and "Moderate" autocracies have negative values of internet freedom.

Conversely, as we would expect, the more democratic regimes have more internet freedom. As discussed in my theory, democracies value liberty and self-expression. Because social media has both values at its core, democracies would likely support and encourage its use. We see in this figure that democracies do indeed have more internet freedom. Further, I have suggested that regime type exists on a scale: it is polymorphic. Figure 1 illustrates these concepts. As a state becomes more democratic it becomes less authoritarian and vice versa. Internet freedom also follows this progression. The more democratic a state is the more freedom to internet they afford their citizens. Figure 1 allows me to accept H1 and reject the null.

Table 2:			
VARIABLES	(1) Censorship	(2) Gov't Confidence	(3) Trust in Press
polity	0.182*** (0.000390)	-0.0502*** (0.000513)	0.0272*** (0.000465)
Constant	-0.683*** (0.00322)	1.641*** (0.00424)	2.586*** (0.00384)
Observations	110,172	110,172	110,172
R-squared	0.663	0.080	0.030

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 2: Bivariate regression determining if a relationship exists between regime type (polity) and censorship, confidence in government, and confidence in the press.

The relationship between censorship and polity is statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.01. The relationship between regime type and confidence in the government is also statistically significant. Lastly, trust in the press and polity have a statistically significant positive relationship with a p-value of less than 0.01. This regress shows that there are statistically significant relationships between the independent and dependent variables in my hypotheses.

Table 3: Effects on Government Confidence

VARIABLES	(1) government confidence
Quite a lot of trust in press	-0.390*** (0.0428)
Not very much trust in press	-0.764*** (0.0588)
None at all	-1.137*** (0.0977)
China	0.259** (0.120)
USA	-1.077*** (0.137)
Russia	0.324*** (0.0836)
Quite a lot of trust in press (China)	0.0299 (0.0773)
Quite a lot of trust in press (USA)	0.374*** (0.0333)
Quite a lot of trust in press (Russia)	-0.177*** (0.0303)
Not very much trust in press (China)	0.172* (0.102)
Not very much trust in press (USA)	1.090*** (0.0443)
Not very much trust in press (Russia)	-0.0504 (0.0427)
None at all (China)	0.215 (0.173)
None at all (USA)	1.665*** (0.0475)
None at all (Russia)	-0.131** (0.0611)
Polity (-10 full autocracy/ 10 full democracy)	-0.0600*** (0.0104)
Medium Censorship	0.111 (0.110)
Low Censorship	-0.833** (0.402)
Medium censorship Polity	0.0132 (0.0215)
Low censorship Polity	0.111**

	(0.0501)
Quite a lot of trust in press Polity	0.00412
	(0.00579)
Not very much trust in press Polity	0.00356
	(0.00737)
None at all Polity	-0.00255
	(0.0116)
GDPpercap1	2.18e-06
	(4.37e-06)
Age	0.000922
	(0.000681)
Polity	-
Constant	2.106***
	(0.121)
Observations	107,186
R-squared	0.232

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The results of this regression are visualized in the graphs that follow.

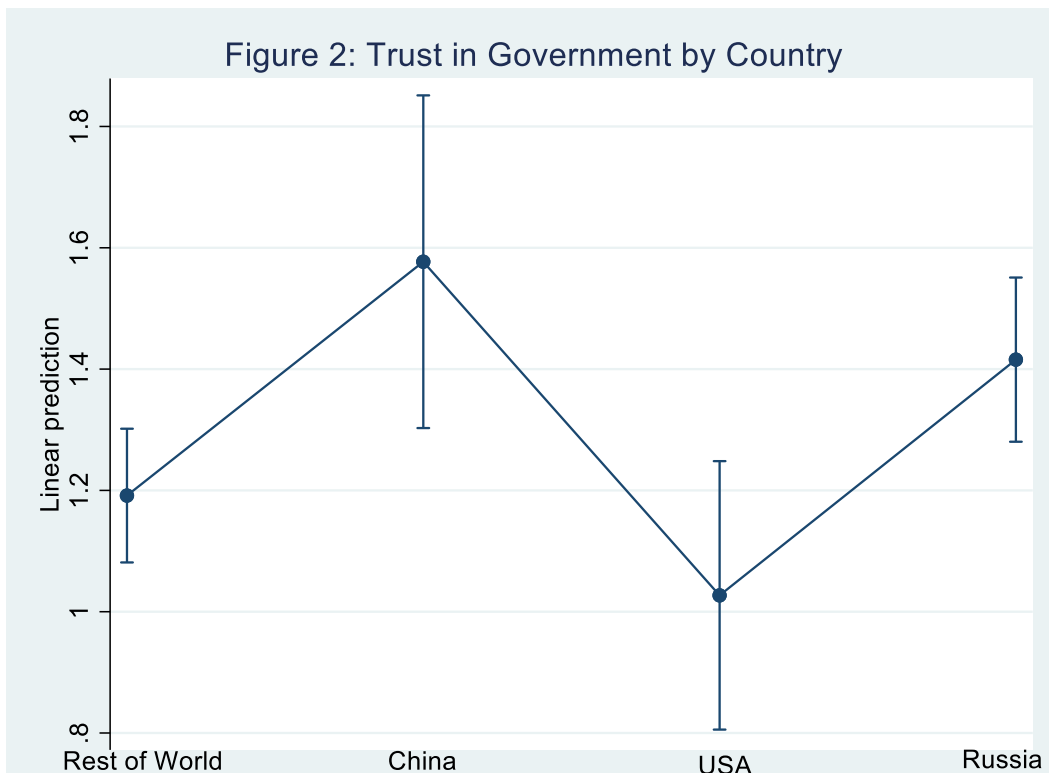


Figure 2 is the output of the regression analysis which determines the level of trust in government in the world, and in my three dummy variables: China, USA, and Russia. China and Russia were isolated as examples of hardline authoritarian regimes, and the United States was chosen as an example of a model liberal democracy. The results of this regression show that the citizens of China have the highest level of trust in their government; however, the least trusting citizens in China are virtually indistinguishable from the most trusting citizens of government in the rest of the world. Chinese citizens are significantly more trust of their government than American citizens, with the Chinese citizens reporting a little over 1.8 in trust in government, and Americans around 1.3. Russian citizens are the second most trusting citizens of their government behind China; however, the most trusting Russian citizens are indistinguishable from the least trusting Chinese citizens, as the confidence intervals overlap. These results are intriguing as they imply that regime type has an effect on trust in government. As demonstrated through this figure, authoritarian regimes on average have more trust in government than citizens in liberal democracies. My theory supports this finding, as I stress that authoritarian regimes will go to great lengths to maintain control and thwart dissent. This figure represents the effectiveness of their efforts to maintain citizen control. Another implication that can be derived from this result is that there is something unique about China that makes its citizens more trusting. If regime type were the only indicator of trust in government than we would expect the results from China and Russia to be virtually the same as they are both hardline autocracies; however, the graph shows that the most trusting Chinese citizens report about a 1.85 level of confidence whereas the most trusting Russian citizens report about a 1.55. Therefore, there are more influences on trust in government than just regime type.

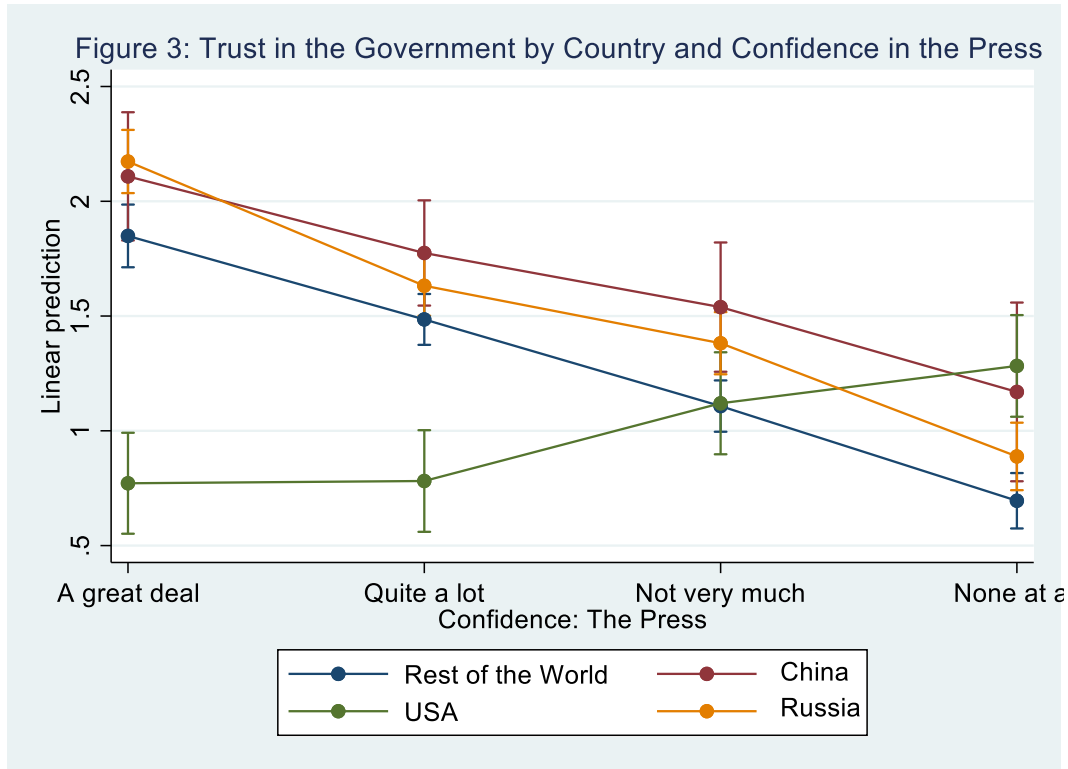


Figure 3 represents the interaction between confidence in the press and trust in government in China, the USA, Russia, and the rest of the world. In China, confidence in the press and government are aligned, whereas in the United States skeptics of the press were more confident in the government. In other words, the press and government have an adversarial relationship in the United States, whereas in the rest of the world, China and Russia, the relationship between these two institutions is supportive. The more trust in the press citizens had in China, Russia, and the rest of the world, the most trust they had in government. This result implicates that something unique may be happening in the United States that results in an adversarial relationship between the press and the government. One possible explanation could be that political speech is so protected in the United States that news agencies as well as citizens are willing to share all of their grievances with the government publicly. In addition, the polarization in the United States is so intense, that news agencies generally lean more towards one political ideology and cater to views that subscribe to those beliefs. For instance, CNN is

thought of as being a liberal leaning news outlet. Therefore, during Trump's presidency, those who watched CNN and supported Trump, probably had low levels of trust in the news and high levels of trust in the government. This is just a theory and more researching and testing is necessary to deduce the actual reason why the press and government have an adversarial relationship in the United States.

As for China and Russia, which are both hardline authoritarian regimes, it is expected that the press and government have a supportive relationship of one another (Geddes & Zaller, 1989). One of the main objectives of authoritarian regimes is to maintain control and limit descent. Therefore, it is in authoritarian regimes' best interest to ensure that the news the press puts out aligns with the government (Geddes & Zaller, 1989).

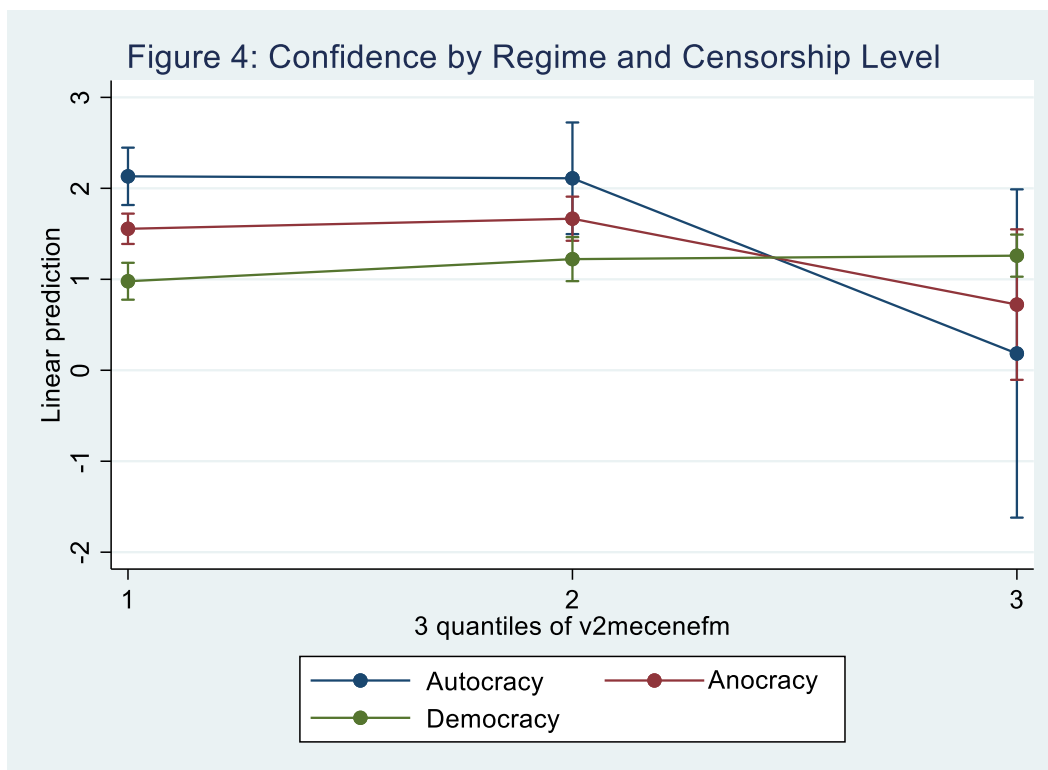


Figure 4 tests $H2$ which calls into question the effect of censorship on confidence in government. My theory predicts that citizens living in autocracies will have more trust in

government because information that may make them lose trust in the government, such as conspiracy theories about the government, is censored. Whereas in democracies, I theorized that citizens would have less trust in government because they are constantly exposed to varying opinions of the government on social media. The results of this regression suggest that there is no real effect by censorship on citizens' level of trust in the government. This may imply that citizens are most rational than expected. Some scholars indicated that users of social media may become less trusting of government due to misinformation they see online (Pavela Banai et al., 2020; Rahbarqazi, 2021; Sergie, 2021).; however, these results support Islam's argument that users may be able to decipher or at least question misinformation that they see online and maintain confidence in government. (2019).

An interesting implication is that as autocracies loosen up their restrictions their citizens' confidence in government drops significantly whereas in democracies and anocracies we do not see the same affect. This indicates that censorship of social media might be more important for dictatorships. Still, overall, the level of social media censorship is not an indicator of trust in government, leaving me unable to reject the null in *H2*.

Discussion

Overall, the results of this study suggest that while regime type is a good indicator of social media censorship level, the level of social media censorship in a state has no effect on citizens' attitude towards the government or level of trust in the government. These results are fairly intriguing as based on theory developed by this study it was expected that the level of unrestricted access to social media, where users are exposed to conspiracy and theories about the government, would have some effect on how much citizens trust the government. However, as the output regression in Figure 4 shows, censorship has no substantial effect on trust in

government in democracies and anocracies. This implies that users of social media are able to be rational when they consume information on social media (Islam, 2019). Further the results may show support for Uslaner's argument that the tendency to trust is developed early in life, and is not affected by external stimuli, such as social media, in adulthood (2004). It should be noted that this is just a theory, and more testing is required to draw conclusions. Nevertheless, the results imply that censoring social media to maintain confidence in government, may play a bigger role in dictatorships. It should be recognized that the confidence intervals overlap, meaning that a lot of respondents are indistinguishable from each other. Still the dramatic drop in confidence once censorship is loosened is very fascinating. It seems somewhat logical that censoring social media would be more important in dictatorships as a few of the main objectives of a dictatorship are to maintain citizen "support" or at least cooperation, and limit dissent (Fu & Tai, 2020; Linz & Linz, 2000). Social media poses a threat to both of those intentions, and therefore, it seems intuitive for dictatorships to restrict the information that can be shared on it. Conversely, in democracies, freedom is an inherent value. Social media promotes freedom of thought and the freedom to share your thoughts with others. Democracies are also characterized by their willingness to let citizens keep the government in-check (Bollen, 2009). Therefore, social media might not be such of a worry in states where freedom of thought is already prioritized, because if it were not shared on social media, it would probably be shared somewhere else. Still, the results do not support H2 and therefore I am unable to reject the null.

Returning to H1, as theorized, more authoritarian regimes will have more restrictions on social media, whereas more democratic states will have less restrictions on social media. The results in Figure 1, support the theory that when a political tool that favors freedom and liberty enters an authoritarian state, the government will try to restrict citizens' use of it, because it

threatens dictatorship's core value of control and order. As demonstrated in the literature review, social media can be a mobilizing force that helps to overcome the collective action problem.

An additional finding of this research was that regime type is a predictor of citizens' confidence in government. As shown in Figure 2, China and Russia, dictatorships, both have more trusting citizens than the rest of the world and the USA. This finding indicates that dictatorships have citizens who are more trusting in government, and democracies and anocracies have less trusting citizens. While I was not testing this hypothesis, the results do fit into my theory in the sense that authoritarian regimes prioritize support from citizens whereas liberal democracies allow citizens to disagree.

The China Anomaly

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study was that China does not conform to the rest of the results. While the study found that throughout the world censorship was not a predictor of trust in government, in China increased censorship was associated with higher levels of trust in government. To rule out that trust in government in China was not only a result of regime type, I also looked at Russia as a comparison of another authoritarian regime. Trust in government was higher in Russia as censorship increased; however, it was not as high as China. Therefore, this seems to indicate that China might just be comparatively advanced when it comes to censorship and that is why it influences confidence in the government. More research is required to determine why Chinese citizens have such a high level of trust in their government. A possible explanation could be the success of China's economy. China's economy is rapidly growing (*World Bank, 2023*). In the United States, we are currently experiencing extreme inflation. Whereas our young and middle-aged citizens have experienced times of economic difficulties, the young and middle-aged Chinese citizens have not. Therefore, the success of

China's economy could contribute to the Chinese citizens' high level of trust in the government. Another possible influence on Chinese citizens' confidence in government could be the philosophies that inform what they are taught. For instance, Confucianism is still very prominent in China and one of the main teachings of Confucianism is that the collective is more important than the individual. Further, Confucianism emphasizes respect for authority and the government (*National Geographic*, 2023). If it were to be found that Chinese citizens' trust in government was a result of Confucian teachings, that would support Uslaner's argument that someone's tendency to trust is formed in early childhood (2004). This is all just speculation, and more research and tests must be conducted to further understand what contributor to such elevated levels of trust in the government in China.

Another point that I think is necessary to bring up, is that there is a possibility that the data coming out of China may not be fully reliable. China teaches its citizens to trust the government and they aggressively repress dissent (King et al., 2014); therefore, citizen's may be hesitant to report their true feelings. Again, this is just speculation; however, I think that it is an important thing to consider.

Further Questions

Further questions for research should focus on looking more in depth at the relationship between censorship and trust in government in specifically authoritarian regimes. As the results showed, the importance of censorship in authoritarian regimes may differ from democracies and anocracies. In addition, there should be more investigation into what influences trust in government. Based on the results of this study censorship has no effect, so what does? In relation to China, the field of political science would benefit from more research pertaining to the abnormally high level of trust Chinese citizens have in their government. What is causing this? Is

it the economy or is Confucian ideals? Overall, this study is useful in the sense that it ruled out censorship as an indicator of trust in government.

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