


ARTICLE

# Explaining Activity in Authoritarian Assemblies: Evidence from China

Felix Wiebrecht\* 

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

\*Corresponding author. Email: [felix.wiebrecht@gu.se](mailto:felix.wiebrecht@gu.se)

(Received 19 June 2022; revised 21 August 2022; accepted 26 August 2022)

## Abstract

Who attempts to influence policymaking through authoritarian assemblies and why are some delegates considerably more active in doing so than others? Drawing on original data from provincial People's Political Consultative Conferences (PPCCs) in China, this study adopts a delegate-centered perspective and develops a theory of delegates' activity in authoritarian assemblies. It argues that delegates' activity can be explained by a combination of both cooptation theory and an understanding of delegates' position within the authoritarian regime and hierarchy. The results highlight that core elites with more direct means of influencing policymaking will forego assemblies. Yet, peripheral elites lack other institutional channels of access to decision-makers and have to voice their demands in authoritarian legislatures. This study highlights the need for disaggregating groups of actors in authoritarian politics and offers an alternative view of cooptation particularly relevant for closed authoritarian regimes.

**Keywords:** authoritarianism; legislature; China; cooptation; institutions

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to formal institutions in authoritarian regimes such as elections and legislatures. From the conventional wisdom of seeing them as mere democratic facades, scholarship has moved to identify a number of ways in which legislatures, in particular, can prolong authoritarian rule (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). Dictators can avoid being overthrown, for instance, by coopting regime opponents into assemblies (Gandhi 2008). Legislatures can also preempt coups from the dictator's inner circle by providing a credible power-sharing mechanism among elites (Svolik 2012). Both mechanisms can either work through making policy concessions or by distributing rents and material perks (Gandhi 2008; Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2011).

Most of the literature on authoritarian legislatures has focused on dictators' reasons for establishing them in the first place, yet the roles and actions of individual delegates are similarly important (Art 2012). In fact, members of assemblies in

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the East Asia Institute. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

authoritarian regimes can show remarkable levels of commitment and passion for participating in their activities as for instance delegates of China's National People's Congress and People's Political Consultative Conference do (Truex 2016; Chen 2019). To be sure, delegates also exhibit remarkable differences in their levels of activity (Krol 2020; Malesky and Schuler 2010). In Russia, for instance, some delegates are very active in amending bills (e.g., Noble 2020) but at the same time, the Russian leadership had to reform internal rules of the State Duma to persuade other members to even fulfill minor tasks (Szakonyi 2017). This elicits the question of which elites are active and engage in policy-related efforts in authoritarian regimes, and which ones are not.

Prior research on delegates in authoritarian assemblies has highlighted that financial rewards can explain why someone would want to become a member of parliament but does not go into detail in explaining delegates' activity once they are part of the legislature (Blaydes 2011; Truex 2014). Other research, inspired by cooptation theory, more explicitly focuses on the question of delegates' activity (Desposato 2001; Malesky and Schuler 2010; Krol 2020; Simison 2020). These studies often primarily focus on electoral cooptation mechanisms and, as a result, can relatively clearly distinguish between regime insiders and outsiders. In "closed regimes" (Diamond 2002), however, recent research has dismissed cooptation theory as an explanation for delegates' work due to the absence of an opposition (e.g., Truex 2016; Lü, Liu, and Li 2020; Schuler 2021). Nevertheless, regimes such as China and Vietnam have also successfully coopted other elites such as private entrepreneurs (e.g., Dickson 2003; Hou 2019) and thus, the theory may also be valuable in regard to authoritarian assemblies.

Adopting a delegate-centered perspective, this article explores why some delegates actively participate in authoritarian assemblies and how we can explain the variance in delegates' behavior. I argue that delegates' activity can be explained by a combination of both cooptation theory and an understanding of delegates' position within the authoritarian regime and hierarchy. The results highlight that *core elites*—powerful, agenda-setting delegates with more direct means of influencing policymaking—will forego assemblies and advance their interests through other channels such as party institutions. In contrast, *peripheral elites*—delegates that lack other institutional means of access to decision-makers—have to voice their demands in an authoritarian assembly. I particularly highlight these results regarding delegates' occupational backgrounds, but they also apply to their social backgrounds, including aspects such as gender, ethnicity, and whether or not they are members of the governing party.

I place this argument in the context of China and, in particular, the provincial People's Political Consultative Conferences (PPCC/*sheng zheng xie*),<sup>1</sup> in which the main task of delegates is to submit policy proposals to the government. Previous analyses of the PPCCs have either analyzed only the proposals of a certain group (Chen 2015; Huang and Chen 2019) or related to a certain issue (Lü, Liu, and Li 2020). Therefore, this article is the first substantial analysis of the dynamics of proposal-writing. In this background, the results firstly show significant differences between government officials. Provincial government officials are the most powerful actors on this level and can make use of more direct channels to influence government actions. In contrast, cadres working on lower levels are the most active delegates and channel local knowledge and demands into the official processes. Given their

lack of other channels to transmit demands vertically, they have to utilize an authoritarian assembly to appeal to the provincial government and request resources.

Secondly, I find that some coopted groups such as academics and professionals are also among the most active delegates in providing recommendations to the government. Since they tend to be sidelined in other decision-making processes, for both groups these assemblies are the only way of airing demands. Academics can channel their research findings and academic expertise into official policy-making processes through this mechanism whereas professionals know working conditions and environment “on the ground” and can relay their professional expertise. The results also suggest that private entrepreneurs tend to participate less in formal institutions despite also lacking direct access to decision-making. This may be explained by the fact that private entrepreneurs in particular benefit from material rewards of becoming members of the institution and thus, abstain from voicing too much criticism towards the government.

The main contributions of this article to the literature on comparative authoritarianism are twofold. First, it contributes to the increasing understanding that even in dictatorships many actors have different and even conflicting interests (e.g., Kim and Sudduth 2021). In the case of this article, for instance, government officials have different motives depending on the administrative level they work on. Thus, the findings of this article highlight the need to disaggregate important groups of actors in authoritarian regimes more finely to illustrate their diverging interests. In addition, doing so not only sheds light on their motivations but also helps in understanding the different channels of action available to them. This article, for example, illustrates how the career backgrounds make it necessary for some actors to engage in assembly work while others remain inactive in this context.

Secondly, by explicitly differentiating between groups of actors this article further clarifies important functions fulfilled by institutions in authoritarian regimes. For one, this study shows that cooptation cannot only be a strategy of incorporating regime outsiders into policymaking (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008; Reuter and Robertson 2015) but that a closed regime like China also uses it to keep peripheral elites engaged in official institutions. This is similarly of vital importance to an authoritarian regime as it can prevent insiders from turning into or reaching out to outsiders. On the other hand, it places limits on views that emphasize institutions’ role in power-sharing mechanisms (e.g., Svobik 2012; also see Li 2020). The findings of this study suggest that it is precisely high-ranking elites who do not publicly declare their preferences but instead bargain over policies in smaller circles.

### **Core elites, peripheral elites, and activity in authoritarian assemblies**

In recent years, research has singled out nominally democratic institutions as cornerstones of dictatorships and highlighted the mechanisms through which they can prolong authoritarian rule (Magaloni 2006; Gandhi 2008; Svobik 2012). These approaches have highlighted that authoritarian institutions can help to coopt opposition forces and incorporate them into policy-making processes (Gandhi 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Reuter and Robertson 2015), facilitate power-sharing among the

authoritarian elite (Svolik 2012; Gehlbach and Keefer 2011), and collect information about elites' and citizens' preferences (Truex 2016; Manion 2015; Ong 2015). Yet, the individual delegates within authoritarian assemblies equally deserve attention.

In order to explain delegates' activity in authoritarian assemblies, scholars followed the theoretical premise of cooptation theory (Desposato 2001; Malesky and Schuler 2010; Simison 2020). Although it is primarily concerned with why dictators would establish institutions in the first place, cooptation theory also offers insights on how delegates might behave in assemblies. The establishment of legislatures is primarily aimed at opposition forces that previously had no opportunity to voice their demands (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008). Thus, in assemblies that function as a forum for policymaking with eventual policy concessions, regime outsiders can be expected to make more use of the institutional mechanisms (Malesky and Schuler 2010). Regime insiders, however, do not need the additional opportunities of assemblies since they are key decision-makers or have closer links with them to begin with. Prior studies that followed the cooptation approach focused often primarily on electoral cooptation mechanisms (Desposato 2001; Malesky and Schuler 2010; Simison 2020).

'Closed regimes' (Diamond 2002), however, are not open to any form of electoral competition and do not allow regime outsiders in their legislatures. Thus, recent research has dismissed cooptation theory as plausible explanation for delegates' activism entirely (e.g., Truex 2016, Lü, Liu, and Li 2020; Schuler 2021). Nevertheless, the distinction between regime insiders and outsiders are not always clear-cut there either. In fact, research in other areas has long highlighted how a wide range of actors can be coopted through mechanisms other than elections. Prominent cases include private entrepreneurs (Dickson 2003; Huang and Chen 2019), religious actors (Payne 2010), the media (Wiebrecht 2018), lawyers (Liu and Stern 2020), and civil society groups (Mattingly 2019). Thus, cooptation theory may hold merit even in the absence of a formal opposition.

An alternative perspective sees institutions such as assemblies not as mechanisms for cooptation but rather as arenas for competition between different government agencies for state resources (Lust-Okar 2006). Lü, Liu, and Li (2020) for instance put forward the perspective that government departments actively encourage deputies in China's legislatures to submit proposals and build 'policy coalitions.' In consequence, they see intra-institutional processes as characterized by bureaucratic struggles over influence in policymaking rather than by conflicts between regime insiders and outsiders (Noble 2020). This is an important perspective to understand dynamics in authoritarian assemblies, but it neglects the strict hierarchy of authoritarian regimes and legislatures (Schuler 2021). As some actors start from a much more powerful position to influence policymaking than others, not all of them need to compete for influence in legislatures equally (Wu 2020).

In an effort to synthesize the aforementioned competing perspectives, I propose to further differentiate actors in authoritarian institutions. In contrast to aggregating delegates into categories of regime insiders and outsiders, I argue that it is primarily their position in the authoritarian regime and hierarchy that predicts their levels of activity in an authoritarian assembly. While even in authoritarian regimes actors have many competing and divergent preferences (Williamson and Magaloni 2020;

Kim and Sudduth 2021), their ability to ultimately influence policymaking varies. Just as in democracies (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Gailmard and Jenkins 2007), some actors in authoritarian regimes are more powerful than others regarding policymaking and agenda-setting and can bypass legislative bargaining more easily (Wu 2020; Schuler 2021). They may prefer to advance their interests either through alternative decision-making organs such as party institutions (Svolik 2012; Gehlbach and Keefer 2011; Malesky, Abrami, and Zheng 2011) or through informal connections (Jiang and Zhang 2020). These agenda-setting elites are what I call *core elites*.

In contrast, authoritarian assemblies also accommodate several actors that lack any direct institutional access to decision-makers and for whom assemblies are the only formal channel through which they can transmit their demands. I call these actors *peripheral elites* because they are generally privileged and well-respected in authoritarian politics and society, but they are not ultimate decision-makers. They can be less advantaged in comparison to core elites in terms of their occupational, social, ethnic, or geographical background. They may be comparable to backbenchers in majority parties in democratic regimes as their influence on policymaking is also limited and their chances of success in parliament relatively low (Searing 1993; Hasson 2010). In order to voice their preferences to the leaders of the authoritarian regime, they will have to make use of institutions and attempt to influence policymaking in assemblies.

Thus, my argument builds on the abovementioned cooptation approach but generalizes it to dictatorships in which regime insiders and outsiders are not easily identifiable. In addition, it complements the bureaucratic competition approach with an emphasis on the hierarchical structure. This argument can be extended to more competitive assemblies in which opposition forces would fall below peripheral elites in the authoritarian hierarchy. However, this argument comes with two qualifications. For one, as the legislative process may not guarantee them a high chance of success in influencing policymaking, peripheral elites are also susceptible to alternative channels. If they have access to alternative and more direct channels to decision-makers such as informal connections, they will prefer to use them. The second qualification concerns the role of private rents. If delegates are primarily interested in private financial gains rather than influencing policymaking, they will abstain from voicing too much criticism to retain their position (Reuter and Robertson 2015).

I will begin by providing some background on the institutions before introducing the empirical strategy.

### **Background: The People's Political Consultative Conferences (PPCC)**

The PPCCs have a long history, as the first institution of this kind was held in 1946 and attended by the Communist Party, the Kuomintang, and other political parties in China at the time. In the immediate aftermath of the Communist victory, the national PPCC was promoted as the main legislative institution, but it was later replaced in that function by the National People's Congress (Chen 2015). Consequently, the institution did not possess state power and was relegated to the status of a consultative body. While it did not survive the Cultural Revolution, the political elite of the reform and opening-up period re-discovered the advantages of the system and revitalized the

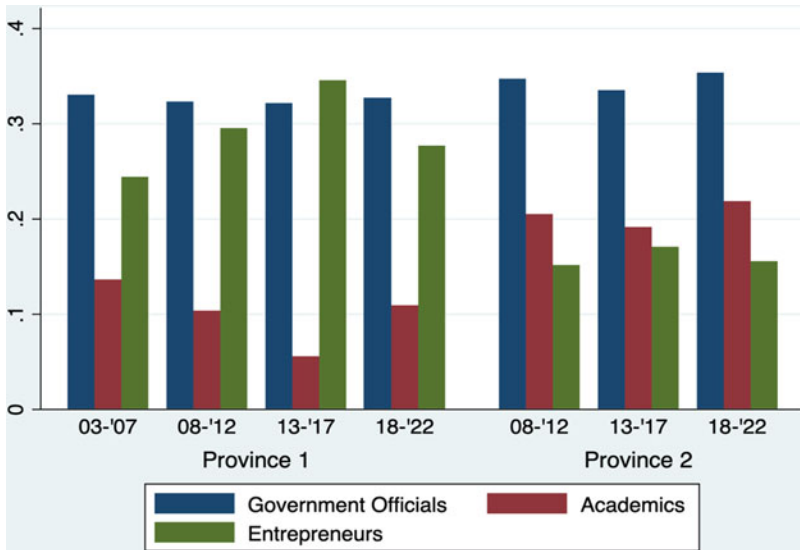


Figure 1. Membership Composition of PPCCs in Provinces 1 and 2. Compiled by author

PPCCs from the early 1980s onwards (Yan 2011). According to its charter, consultation is the principal function of the PPCCs (Article 3) with “assist[ing] state organs in carrying out structural and institution reform, improving work, raising efficiency, overcoming the practice of formalities for formalities’ sake, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance, and building a clean government” (Article 7) stated as some of the main objectives.

As one of the most inclusive political institutions in China, they are a key element in the party-state’s system of coopting important sectors of society (e.g., Yan 2011). Prior research has particularly focused on their ability to incorporate influential actors in society into the realm of the state, going as far as calling the institutions “rich people club” (Chen 2015; Sagild and Ahlers 2019; Jeffreys 2016). While it was primarily concerned with coopting the minor political parties in China in the founding days of the People’s Republic (Groot 2004), more recently private entrepreneurs have become the center of its cooptation work (e.g., Yan 2011; Chen 2015; Heberer and Schubert 2019; Huang and Chen 2019). For the Chinese regime, the PPCCs with their diverse membership composition deliver welcome images illustrating how inclusive political institutions in China can be. The assemblies also offer a forum for interacting and maintaining patronage relationships with the government and prior research confirms that entrepreneurs benefit from their membership (e.g., Sun, Zhu, and Wu 2014).

The mechanisms of selecting PPCC delegates are non-transparent but recommendations from other delegates seem crucial (Sagild and Ahlers 2019). While political loyalty is a prerequisite to be considered as delegate, candidates’ social standing also appears crucial. For private entrepreneurs, for instance, business success and prior philanthropic engagement are key (Sagild 2019). Thus, delegates are generally

elites in their respective fields that the regime considers valuable and important to establish formal connections with. Figure 1 highlights the share of the three largest groups of delegates in the two PPCCs selected for this study. These are government officials, academics, and private entrepreneurs that altogether constitute slightly above 70 percent of all delegates. The remaining delegates are professionals, state-owned enterprise executives, government-affiliated organization representatives, and military cadres. Statistics on members' occupations have largely remained stable over time but can vary across provinces depending on regional characteristics. Province 2 for instance has a higher number of universities which is reflected in the higher share of academics in its PPCC.

Although the institution is lacking formal authority to enact laws it does offer opportunities for delegates to make their voices heard. In addition to attending training sessions and participating in inspections and research tours, the delegates' most important task is to submit formal policy proposals (*ti'an*) to which the relevant government departments are required to respond within a set period of time (Chen 2019).<sup>2</sup> The number of proposals has skyrocketed in recent decades (Lü, Liu, and Li 2020) and yet they have not been subject to comprehensive empirical studies. Past research has either focused on the proposals of a particular group, e.g., entrepreneurs (Chen 2015), or on proposals centering around an individual issue such as education (Lü, Liu, and Li 2020).

Contrary to prior studies that have focused on the national (Lü, Liu, and Li 2020) and local (Sun, Zhu, and Wu 2014) levels, this study will draw on two provincial-level PPCCs for several reasons. First, similar to those on other administrative levels, provincial PPCCs have also been very active in writing proposals and experienced significant growth in activity in past decades.<sup>3</sup> Second, provinces have become places of active lawmaking in recent decades that are just as "fragmented" (Mertha 2009) as the national level but often more innovative and "progressive." The central government often learns from provincial policy successes and failures (Xia 2008). Delegates on the provincial level may therefore also be more confident in proposing pioneering policies. Third, provinces take a unique position in the Chinese administrative hierarchy in the center of vertical relationships between top-down orders and local demands. As Jaros and Tan (2020) highlight, provinces function as "gatekeepers" between the affluent central state and the underprivileged local governments. Fourth, in comparison to the local PPCCs, which are likely to deal with more mundane issues such as a lack of parking spots in the respective city (Chen 2015), proposals on the provincial level tend to be more substantive and policy oriented, for instance calling for the establishment of a province-wide traffic accident rescue fund.

## Hypotheses

In this section, I lay out the theoretical expectations of PPCC delegates' behavior in accordance with the argument highlighted above. The focus in this analysis will be on the delegates' occupational backgrounds as these are most important in determining one's status within the authoritarian regime.

The membership composition of the PPCCs reveals that most delegates are indeed government officials. The view on authoritarian institutions as arenas for bureaucratic

competition (Lü, Liu, and Li 2020; Noble 2020) suggests that government agencies are competing for influence inside them and that government officials act as their “proxy fighters.” However, I suggest that not all government bodies and officials follow this pattern equally. Provincial government officials are by definition among the most authoritative actors on this level and therefore have alternative channels to influence policies according to their preferences. In particular, the elevated role of party organs for policymaking has been highlighted in prior research (Svolik 2012; Gehlbach and Keefer 2011; Malesky, Abrami, and Zheng 2011). Consequently, in their position as core elites, they will invest fewer resources and effort in engaging in an assembly.

On the other hand, local government officials (i.e., prefecture or county-level) are peripheral for provincial-level decision-making processes. There are no institutionalized channels through which local governments can advance their interests vis-à-vis provincial actors other than PPCCs and People’s Congresses (Manion 2014). Missing alternative promising channels, local government officials will feel compelled to make use of the institutions. However, not only do local governments lack alternative channels to appeal to higher-level governments, but they also often compete for resources (Lü and Landry 2014; Zhu 2014). Thus, local governments and their “proxy fighters” will appeal to provincial institutions more actively because the latter “have considerable control over the localities’ ... economic and institutional resources” (Jaros and Tan 2020, 81). Thus, particularly on the provincial level, local government officials can be seen as peripheral elites.

The efforts to convince the provincial government of the need for additional resources are also visible in many submitted proposals. Local government officials often draw attention to local issues. A municipal department head in a prefecture-level city in Province 2, for instance, appealed to the provincial government to support the city in establishing copper futures delivery warehouses in 2018. In 2005 a municipal department head in a county-level city in Province 1 similarly urged the provincial authorities to open a wind power plant there as soon as possible. A number of additional examples from Province 2 in 2005 are provided in Table 12 in the Appendix. Thus, bureaucratic competition in institutions is to be expected primarily in the form of parochialism, that is, among local governments competing for resources allocated by the provincial government (Manion 2014). However, the same cannot be expected for provincial-level agencies that can be classified as core elites.

Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 1b target the relationship between government officials on different levels and their activity in the PPCCs:

*H1a: Provincial-level government officials are less active in submitting proposals through PPCCs compared to other delegates.*

*H1b: Local government officials (i.e., prefecture and county-level) are more active in submitting proposals through PPCCs compared to other delegates.*

A second large group of delegates in the PPCCs is that of academics and professionals. Academics in particular, often function as policy entrepreneurs, irrespective of political regimes, characterized by their high degree of social acuity (Bakir and



Jarvis 2017). On the other hand, in authoritarian regimes, they often lack institutionalized channels through which they can communicate their research and participate in the policymaking processes (Kaczmarek 2019). This has also been recognized as an issue in China with many academics missing access to the governments' administrative channels (Zhu 2016). With the PPCCs as one of few institutionalized mechanisms in which they can offer recommendations, academics are likely to be more active than other groups of delegates in the institution.

The institution provides academics, whether they are natural or social scientists, with the chance to relate their research to questions of governance. The proposals submitted to the PPCCs highlight that many of them follow precisely this approach. An economics professor from Province 2 for instance, in line with his research interests, proposed to improve the single window of international trade and to promote the integrated development of customs clearance in the region in 2020. In another case, familiar with the local infrastructure, a professor of sports sciences in Province 1 recommended the provincial government to accelerate the construction of additional sports facilities in the province in 2008. These examples are typical of the nature of academic engagement in the PPCCs.

The same can be said of professionals such as lawyers and medical professionals, who come across societal issues daily but do not have alternative institutionalized channels to inform the government. Professionals can often relay experiences from their work and submit proposals either directly related to their occupation or to issues they are aware of through their engagement with and in society. For instance, in 2020 a lawyer-delegate formulated recommendations regarding the provincial "Regulations on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights" that also fall into his professional expertise. In Province 1, a medical doctor authored the "Suggestions on Strengthening Hospital Policing Management and Protecting the Personal Safety of Medical Staff" and submitted them in 2014. A variety of exemplary proposals by academics as well as professionals from Province 1 in 2008 are included in Table 11 in the Appendix. Based on these proposals, this article's second hypothesis tests whether academics and professionals are in fact more active than other delegates:

*H2: Academics, as well as professionals, are more active in submitting proposals through PPCCs compared to other delegates.*<sup>4</sup>

A third notable group of delegates in PPCCs but also authoritarian institutions more broadly are private entrepreneurs as envoys of the economic sector. In fact, based on interviews conducted by other scholars, they are often said to be particularly active in authoritarian institutions (e.g., Hou 2019; Chen 2015). Private entrepreneurs also lack alternative formal channels in which they could voice their policy preferences, and thus, in line with the argument of this article, one might expect them to be very active. However, it appears that for private entrepreneurs, rather than through policy concessions, cooptation is primarily advanced through material rewards. In many cases, actors have been coopted primarily through financial remunerations or closer access to resources (Lust-Okar 2006; Blaydes 2011). In the Chinese context, these advantages have also been shown impressively in particular for private entrepreneurs (Sun, Zhu, and Wu 2014; Truex 2014).

Yet, this material approach of cooptation may instead lead to the opposite outcome of stifling incentives for active participation in authoritarian institutions. Previous research has shown that attracting overt attention is not helpful for actors in public positions in authoritarian regimes (e.g., Gueorguiev and Schuler 2016). Recent high-profile cases such as Jack Ma, Xiao Jianhua, Ye Jianming, and Wu Xiaohui illustrate that voicing political concerns or getting involved in factional politics is still a risky and dangerous undertaking for private entrepreneurs in China. Since membership in the institution often leads to better-protected property rights (Hou 2019), entrepreneurs may want to refrain from attracting attention by overly criticizing the regime. Instead, it is conceivable that private entrepreneurs can be 'bought off' through such benefits in order to abstain from voicing criticism (Lust-Okar 2006; Reuter and Robertson 2015; Blaydes 2011). While other delegates also benefit from their membership in an authoritarian institution, these advantages tend to be more important for private entrepreneurs' careers and businesses. Hypothesis 3 will test private entrepreneurs' levels of participation.

*H3: Private entrepreneurs are less active in submitting proposals through PPCCs compared to other delegates.*

### **Empirical Strategy**

In order to analyze the individual levels of activity, this article utilizes an original dataset of proposals submitted to two PPCCs in China from 2005 to 2020.<sup>5</sup> While many provinces and municipalities make a selection of proposals available, the provinces analyzed here are the only ones to publish all proposals of this period online and visible to the public.<sup>6</sup> This article will be the first substantial analysis on the dynamics on the provincial level that despite strong centralization efforts under Xi Jinping continues to play an important role (Jaros and Tan 2020). The unit of analysis used in this article is the delegate-year for which the dataset includes a total of 14,236 observations. Table 4 in the Appendix highlights that both provinces are close to the mean and median values of all Chinese provinces for a variety of indicators. The only exception is that Province 1 is smaller in size than the average province and has a smaller population.

The analyses will use a count variable of how many proposals each delegate has submitted to every annual meeting as dependent variable taken from the PPCCs' online platforms. Included in the analysis are all proposals written by individual delegates, either single-authored or jointly signed whereas group proposals for instance in the name of the minor parties and mass organizations have been excluded. The independent variables are based on the individual biographies of the delegates. The name lists of the delegates are taken from the PPCC websites. Further biographical information has been collected from Baidu Encyclopedia that has also been used for other studies (Jiang 2018; Truex 2014) and university and company websites. As outlined above, the delegates' occupations are the main variables of interest since they carry theoretical significance. Additional personal details such as delegates' gender, education level, ethnicity, birthplace, party membership, and whether they are part of the institutional leadership<sup>7</sup> function as control variables.

Prior research especially from democratic parliaments showed that some of these social characteristics are also important in predicting legislative activity. Female and ethnic minority legislators for instance tend to be more active as they are typically in an institutionally disadvantaged position (Akirav 2018; Salmond 2006; Becker and Saalfeld 2004; Wängnerud 2009). In addition, experience within the institution has been highlighted as an important factor in parliaments since it allows MPs to understand institutional procedures better (Mayhew 2000; Katz 1999). The models in this article illustrate experience as a dichotomous variable of whether a delegate has been a member of the PPCC in a previous five-year session. The descriptive data (pre-and post-imputation) are available in the Appendix.

Delegates in provincial-level PPCCs are not particularly prominent public figures which is why it is difficult to collect some of their biographies. While records on government officials are relatively accessible and complete, personal details such as age and education are often unidentifiable for non-Party members. Therefore, to address the problem of missing data a data imputation approach has been applied in this study (King et al. 2001). The results presented here are based on the mean values of 35 imputation runs on the original dataset. More details on how many observations are missing and were imputed are provided in the Appendix (Table 3). In this study, multiple imputation is particularly helpful since the auxiliary variables are mainly affected by missingness but not the variables of main interest (Arel-Bundock and Pelc 2018). The empirical analysis has been conducted with a negative binomial regression (NBREG) model specification. Since the high number of delegates with zero submitted proposals leads to an over-dispersion in the data, NBREG is more appropriate in this case than the more commonly used Poisson models (Cameron and Trivedi 1998).

## Results

Descriptive statistics on proposal-writing reveal that, in fact, most delegates do not submit a single proposal in a given year. While 26 and 11 percent of delegates submit one and two proposals respectively, delegates that submit more than that are rare. Nevertheless, there are significant differences across occupational groups, as Figure 2 below illustrates. These statistics hint at the validity of the aforementioned hypotheses. While among provincial government officials more than 70 percent of delegates do not submit a single proposal, the rates of non-submission are lower for local government officials and especially for academics and professionals. Further evidence for this impression is provided by the regression analyses below.

Table 1 highlights the baseline results in six different models. Model 1 disaggregates government officials into local and provincial-level position holders and Model 2 illustrates the coefficients of academics and professionals. Model 3 focuses on entrepreneurs as independent variables in its analysis. Models 4–6 each include all independent variables with the difference that Model 5 includes year-fixed effects and Model 6 adds province-fixed effects. The results from the baseline models largely confirm the theoretical expectations. First, there are significant differences between government officials on different administrative levels. Provincial government officials are significantly less likely to submit proposals to the PPCCs in all models. In

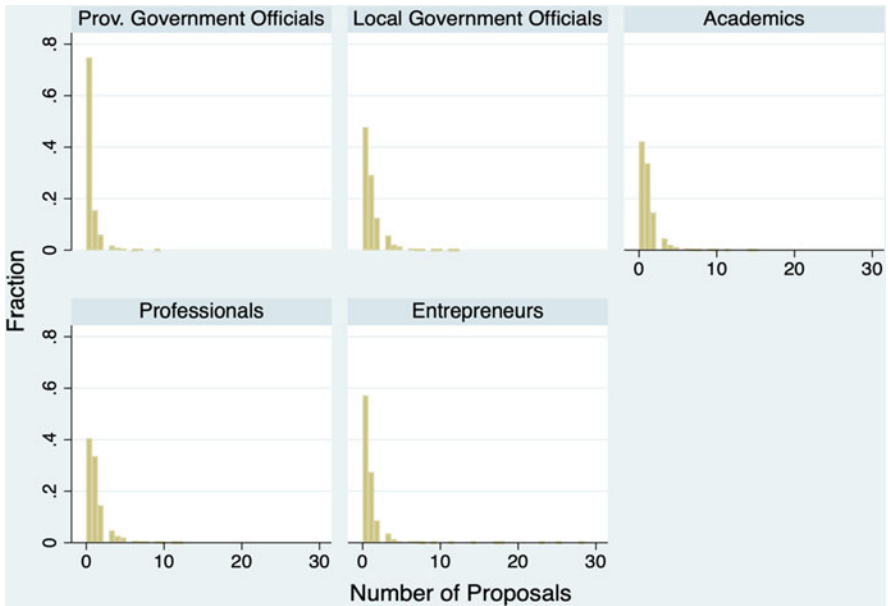


Figure 2. Distribution of Proposals by Occupational Groups. Compiled by author

contrast, local government officials submit around 20 percent more proposals than other delegates. The coefficients of both groups also remain highly significant in all analyses.

Secondly, academics and professionals are also more active in writing proposals than other delegates. Model 4 for instance highlights that both groups write about 11 and 16 percent more proposals than their delegate colleagues. Their coefficients remain significant throughout the models except for that of academic delegates in Model 6. It appears that the effect for academics is not equally strong across the two provinces which, however, cannot be said about professionals. In contrast, entrepreneurs are significantly less likely to participate actively with recommendations in the PPCCs. They tend to submit up to 17 percent fewer proposals than other delegates and this coefficient remains significant in all models except Model 6.

In addition to the focus on occupations, the empirical analysis also highlights how other personal characteristics shape delegates' levels of activity. The coefficients for party membership are the strongest predictors of activity, namely that CCP party members submit significantly fewer proposals than non-CCP party members. The same applies to the delegates that are members of the institutional leadership. Female delegates are significantly and substantially more active than their male counterparts and so are delegates who have had prior experience in the institution. Delegates' higher levels of education do not lead them to submit more proposals but instead stifle their activity in some models even significantly. As expected, delegates of ethnic minorities tend to be more active when compared to majority Han Chinese delegates. Finally, the local connection of delegates to their provinces only

Table 1. Baseline Results

	Number of Proposals					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Prov. Government	-0.49*** (0.05)			-0.48*** (0.05)	-0.48*** (0.05)	-0.47*** (0.05)
Local Government	0.19*** (0.04)			0.20*** (0.04)	0.20*** (0.04)	0.20*** (0.04)
Academics		0.19*** (0.04)		0.11* (0.05)	0.10† (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Professionals		0.22*** (0.04)		0.16** (0.05)	0.16** (0.05)	0.16** (0.05)
Entrepreneurs			-0.17*** (0.04)	-0.13** (0.04)	-0.12** (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)
Gender	0.31*** (0.03)	0.33*** (0.03)	0.31*** (0.03)	0.28*** (0.03)	0.28*** (0.03)	0.27*** (0.03)
Experience	0.22*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.21*** (0.03)
Party Membership	-0.58*** (0.03)	-0.60*** (0.03)	-0.68*** (0.03)	-0.58*** (0.03)	-0.59*** (0.03)	-0.57*** (0.03)
Education	0.003 (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.04† (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)
Native	0.12** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.11** (0.03)	0.09** (0.03)	0.10** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Ethnic Minority	0.10* (0.05)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.16** (0.05)	0.09† (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.12* (0.05)
Leadership	-0.23*** (0.04)	-0.30*** (0.04)	-0.32*** (0.04)	-0.23*** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.04)
Year-FE					✓	✓
Province-FE						✓
N	13,064	13,064	13,064	13,064	13,064	13,064

Note: †  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , Standard errors in parentheses.

appears to explain their activity in one province, as its coefficient in Model 6 is not statistically significant.

I have also conducted several robustness tests in order to corroborate the results of the above analyses. First, I have run the same analyses with the non-imputed dataset. Those models confirm the results presented here (Table 5 in Appendix). Secondly, a few delegates stand out because of their high number of proposals submitted reaching a maximum of 30. Thus, I have excluded outliers with more than 20, 15, and 10 proposals in any given year in separate analyses. The results remain largely the same (see Tables 6–8 in Appendix). As a further robustness test, I have also removed delegates that are not based in the two respective provinces. These are mainly from Hong Kong and Macau and the results of this analysis can be found in Table 9 in the Appendix.

In order to assess the representativeness of the results from two Chinese provinces, this study has conducted additional robustness tests with (limited) data from a third province. In light of Chinese governments' increased transparency, a rich coastal province (Province 3) has also recently started to publish the entirety of the submitted proposals online. This data adds further geographical variation to the sample of the provinces used in this study and is therefore useful in complementing the baseline results despite the limited temporal horizon in which data is accessible (2019–2021). The separate results from Province 3 are shown in Tables 10 (imputed) and 11 (not imputed) in the Appendix. They add further support to the baseline results and show very similar mechanisms. Local government officials and professionals are also the most active delegates in this province while provincial government officials and entrepreneurs tend to submit fewer proposals than other delegates. The baseline results also remain largely unchanged when adding data from Province 3 into the baseline analyses (Tables 12 and 13 in Appendix). Thus, while all provinces show some variations as, for instance, academics in Province 3 are less active than their colleagues in Provinces 1 and 2, the general theoretical arguments apply across provincial borders.

A competing perspective could see parochial interests at the center of activity not only for local government officials but for all delegates. Academics, professionals, entrepreneurs, and other delegates in the same municipality may notice the same local issues and report them to the higher level. To investigate such a potential mechanism, I have also coded the locations of the delegates' workplaces. In this case, one would expect delegates from certain localities to be more active than delegates based in other cities. However, the results from location-fixed effects do not show significant differences in delegate behavior across localities (Table 10 in Appendix). Indeed, only local government officials appear to be more active in highlighting issues particular to their constituencies. Quantitative evidence supports the above-mentioned examples of their parochial activism as Table 3 below shows. A random sample of 6,620 individually submitted proposals from both provinces have been examined and coded in regard to whether the issue that delegates present is one that is specific to a local context (municipal, county, or village-level) or relevant for the entire province. Relevant examples of the former can be found in Table 12 in the Appendix. More than one third of local government officials' proposals deal with local issues whereas local issues only amount to 12 to 19 percent of other delegates' proposals.

The baseline results above thus confirm the argument that primarily peripheral elites, i.e., actors who lack alternative institutional channels to voice their demands, are active in institutions. For instance, government officials do not act as a uniform group of delegates but exhibit different levels of activity with local government officials being the most active group. I provide further support to this line of argument by underlining the importance of informal connections for delegates. As policy changes are far from guaranteed for peripheral elites in any authoritarian assembly, they may opt to use informal institutions to influence decision-making provided they have such access. The importance of informal institutions and patronage has previously been highlighted in the Chinese context especially within the government and party apparatus (Jiang 2018).

**Table 2.** Proportion of Proposals with Local Issues, by occupational backgrounds

Occupation	Number of Proposals	Local Issues	Non-local Issues
Provincial Government Officials	569	84 (14.76)	485 (85.24)
Local Government Officials	1,305	461 (35.33)	844 (64.67)
Academics	1,149	175 (15.23)	974 (84.77)
Professionals	829	104 (12.55)	725 (87.45)
Entrepreneurs	1,509	270 (17.89)	1,239 (82.11)
Others	1,259	245 (19.46)	1,014 (80.54)

Data from: Compiled by author

I highlight that preferred alternative channels for influencing policymaking are not necessarily limited to formal mechanisms but can also exist in the form of informal connections. Thus, this article analyzes the most active group of delegates, namely that of local government officials, and tests whether those who have informal channels are also more likely to forego using the formal institutions. From the delegates' biographies, it can be determined whether local government officials have prior experience working in provincial-level government agencies. With this experience, it can be assumed that these delegates are closer to the upper echelons of decision-making on the provincial level and have informal connections they can make use of. Shared workplaces, among others, have long been used as indicators of informal connections in China (e.g., Ma 2016).

Figure 3 illustrates the results from the analysis on local government officials. The left subgraph shows the model with year-fixed effects while the subgraph on the right also adds province-fixed effects to the analysis. The results do not vary substantially between the graphs, but both highlight the strong and significant effect that prior work experience on the provincial level has on the activity of local government officials. In both models, those who have had posts in provincial government agencies are submitting about 50 percent fewer proposals than those who have not. Importantly, both groups of local government officials show similar values for their mean and median age as well as tenure in their current position. Thus, we can rule out the possibility that only younger local government officials appeal to the provincial government in their hope to receive investments, generate economic growth, and finally get promoted. These results confirm the argument of this article that delegates who are not able to voice their preferences through alternative channels, including through informal connections, are more likely to actively engage in assemblies.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Following the "fragmented authoritarianism" model (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Lieberthal and Lampton 1996) there are many different actors who choose a variety of institutional and non-institutional channels attempting to influence policymaking even in closed authoritarian regimes. As the first substantial analysis of delegate activity in two PPCCs in China, this article underscores this idea by highlighting which

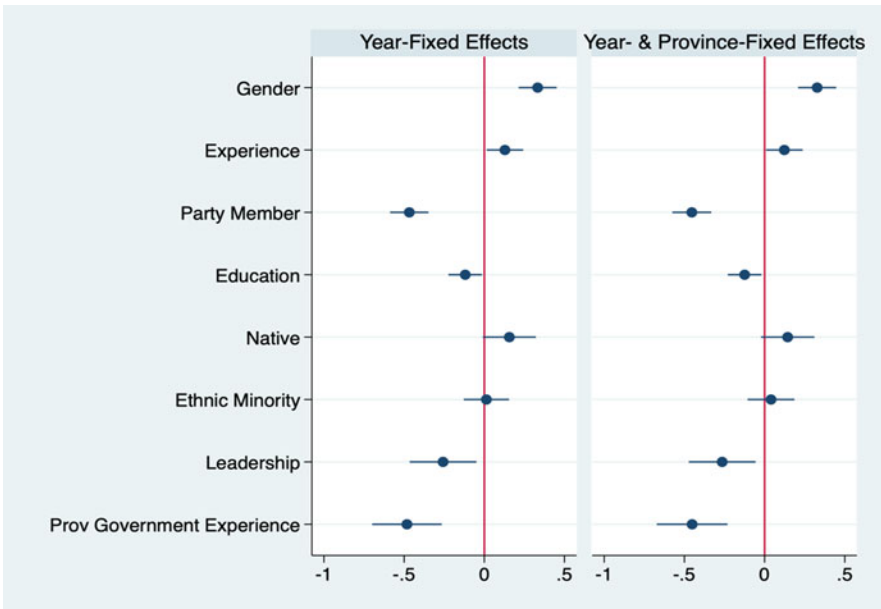


Figure 3. Analysis of local government officials

delegates will attempt to advance their interests through formal institutions. The results show that it is predominantly peripheral elites, as opposed to core elites, who actively engage in institutions. For the former, institutions are often the only channel through which they can engage with decision-makers, while the latter make decisions in other settings such as party organs (Svolik 2012; Gehlbach and Keefer 2011; Malesky, Abrami, and Zheng 2011).

Thus, instead of dismissing cooptation theory in closed authoritarian regimes, this article shows that it has some merit even in the absence of an opposition. Nevertheless, even government officials display important differences depending on their ranks, and delegates' positions in the authoritarian hierarchy thus also needs to be included in a theory of delegate activity. Despite this article's primary focus on the occupational background of delegates, the argument also extends to other aspects. Social characteristics such as gender or ethnicity, for instance, often hint at less privileged positions.

While this study has focused particularly on the consultative institutions of the PPCCs, the findings also resonate with previous research from other contexts that signaled that the distinction between regime insiders and outsiders is not the only fault line in authoritarian assemblies. Malesky and Schuler (2010), for example, highlight important differences even between elites of the Communist Party of Vietnam, whereas Manion (2014) and Desposato (2001) illustrate the importance of parochialism for local rather than central-level elites in China and Brazil. In the case of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan, there were also considerable differences across the ranks of the ruling Kuomintang (Tien and Cheng 1997).



For the comparative study of authoritarian regimes and institutions, this study has three main implications. First, it highlights the need for disaggregating broader groups of actors that in the interest of parsimony were previously often subsumed under categories such as regime insiders and outsiders or ruling elite (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012). As the results of this study show, even among delegates who would all be considered regime insiders, I find considerable differences in their interests and actions. Thus, in order to understand the political dynamics of authoritarian regimes and institutions better, we need to apply a more fine-grained approach as recent studies on intra-elite bargaining have shown (Kim and Sudduth 2021; Noble 2020; Lü, Liu, and Li 2020). On the other hand, this also means that institutions may serve the regime in more than just one purpose. They may simultaneously fulfil the function of power-sharing, collecting information and expertise, and coopting regime outsiders, by including delegates from different occupational backgrounds.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, the findings add to our understanding of cooptation through legislatures. Instead of incorporating opposition parties into decision-making, assemblies in closed authoritarian regimes such as China are designed to keep peripheral elites close. Marginalized elites can potentially turn into challengers or act as challengers' allies and thus, keeping them engaged in formal institutions is also a matter of regime stability. In traditional China, for instance, Perry notes that "members of the local elite—linked by education and personal friendships to state agents and institutions—played a central role in the development of anti-state protest" (2002, 69). In fact, the involvement of elites (even if only peripheral ones) often tends to add fuel to the flames of protests, leading to the escalation of popular collective action into major concerns for stability maintenance (Slater 2009). It is thus of vital importance to keep marginalized elites engaged, as Burawoy and von Holt remark: "Games obscure the conditions of their own playing through the very process of securing participation. Just as one cannot play chess and at the same time question its rules" (2012, 189).

Finally, while other studies have primarily focused on institutions' role in either providing policy concessions (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 2007; Gandhi 2008) or material benefits (Truex 2014; Blaydes 2011), I show that institutions can provide diverse cooptation instruments for different actors. Since separate groups of delegates seek different benefits, they demonstrate different behavioral patterns. In this background, the PPCCs are particularly helpful to the regime as they consistently provide peripheral insiders with the incentives to join and opportunities for participation even though the category of peripheral elites also varies and changes. Future research may want to follow this line of argument and empirically establish to what extent policy concessions are in fact provided to peripheral insiders.

**Acknowledgments.** I would like to thank two research assistants whose names shall remain anonymous but who have provided extremely valuable help in collecting data for this study. In addition, I thank Chen Xi, Pierre Landry, Vivian Zhan Jing, Wang Juan, Zheng Ruoting, Yang Kai, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

**Funding Declaration.** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial or not-for profit sectors.

**Conflicts of interests.** The author declares none.

**Supplementary Material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2022.19>

## Notes

1. Although the PPCCs cannot be classified as legislatures in the strict sense of the term—an institution with the authority to make laws—this article follows previous studies that also subsumed them under this category. Previous research has shown that despite the formal differences to legislatures (e.g., no law-making authority, delegate selection mechanisms), the delegates of PPCCs and People’s Congresses, for instance, behave in similar ways (Lü, Liu, and Li 2020) and that the government approaches delegates similarly (e.g., Sun, Zhu, and Wu 2014). Thus, the terms “legislature,” “parliament,” and “assembly” will be used interchangeably in this article.
2. In theory, it may be possible that instead of submitting proposals, delegates may be more engaged in other activities. Practically, however, many of the other activities such as inspections, activities organized by the respective PPCC groups and community visits are a first step in preparing proposals. Others, such as participating in local TV shows or PPCC forums are the result of proposal-writing and give delegates an opportunity to present their work to the broader public. Thus, this paper restricts itself to delegates’ submissions of proposal.
3. See the development of the number of proposals in Provinces 1 and 2 in Table 13 in the Appendix.
4. Professionals here mainly refers to medical professionals and lawyers. However, the category also includes a smaller number of accountants, engineers, and teachers.
5. Province 1 covers the years 2005 to 2019 and Province 2 the period from 2010 to 2020.
6. Although the number of proposals uploaded online is smaller than the number of proposals submitted to the PPCCs as indicated by the annual work report, staff from the administration of the PPCCs confirmed that this is because proposals with very similar suggestions are usually combined with one of them making up the main proposals and others being used as supplementary documents.
7. Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen, General Secretary and Standing Committee.
8. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

## References

- Akirav, Osnat. 2018. “Electoral Rules and Legislators’ Productivity.” *Parliamentary Affairs* 72 (3): 638–663.
- Arel-Bundock, Vincent, and Krzysztof Pelc. 2018. “When Can Multiple Imputation Improve Regression Estimates?” *Political Analysis* 26 (2): 240–245.
- Art, David. 2012. “What Do We Know About Authoritarianism After Ten Years?” *Comparative Politics* 44 (3): 351–373.
- Bakir, Caner, and Darryl S. L. Jarvis. 2017. “Contextualising the Context in Policy Entrepreneurship and Institutional Change.” *Policy & Society* 36 (4): 465–478.
- Becker, Rolf, and Thomas Saalfeld. 2004. “The Life and Times of Bills.” In *Patterns of Parliamentary Behaviour*, edited by Herbert Doring, and Mark Hallerberg, 57–90. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Blaydes, Lisa. 2011. *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burawoy, Michael, and Karl von Holdt. 2012. *Conversations with Bourdieu: The Johannesburg Moment*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Cameron, A. Colin, and Pravin K. Trivedi. 1998. *Regression Analysis of Count Data*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, Chuanmin. 2019. “Getting Their Voices Heard: Strategies of China’s Provincial People’s Congress Deputies to Influence Policies.” *The China Journal* 82: 46–70.
- Chen, Minglu. 2015. “From Economic Elites to Political Elites: Private Entrepreneurs in the People’s Political Consultative Conference.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (94): 613–627.
- Cox, Gary W., and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda—Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Desposato, Scott. 2001. "Legislative Politics in Authoritarian Brazil." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26 (2): 287–317.
- Diamond, Larry J. 2002. "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 21–35.
- Dickson, Bruce J. 2003. *Red Capitalists in China: The Party, Private Entrepreneurs, and Prospects for Political Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gailmard, Sean, and Jeffery A. Jenkins. 2007. "Negative Agenda Control in the Senate and House: Fingerprints of Majority Party Power." *Journal of Politics* 69 (3): 689–700.
- Gandhi, Jennifer. 2008. *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Adam Przeworski. 2006. "Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion under Dictatorships." *Economics & Politics* 18: 1–26.
- . 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (11): 1279–1301.
- Gehlbach, Scott, and Philip Keefer. 2011. "Investment Without Democracy: Ruling-Party Institutionalization and Credible Commitment in Autocracies." *Journal of Comparative Economics* 39: 123–139.
- Groot, Gerry. 2004. *Managing Transitions: the Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony*. New York: Routledge.
- Gueorguiev, Dimitar D., and Paul J. Schuler. 2016. "Keeping Your Head Down: Public Profiles and Promotion under Autocracy." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 16 (1): 87–116.
- Hasson, Victoria. 2010. "Rules and Rituals: The Case of South Africa's New Committee System." *Journal of Legislative Studies* 16 (3): 366–379.
- Heberer, Thomas, and Gunter Schubert. 2019. "Weapons of the Rich: Strategic Behavior and Collective Action of Private Entrepreneurs in China." *Modern China* 45 (5): 471–503.
- Hou, Yue. 2019. *The Private Sector in Public Office: Selective Property Rights in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, Dongya, and Minglu Chen. 2019. "Business Lobbying within the Party-State: Embedding Lobbying and Political Co-optation in China." *The China Journal* 4 (4): 267–291.
- Jaros, Kyle A., and Yeling Tan. 2020. "Provincial Power in a Centralizing China: The Politics of Domestic and International 'Development Space.'" *The China Journal* 83: 79–104.
- Jeffreys, Elaine. 2016. "Political Celebrities and Elite Politics in Contemporary China." *China Information* 30: 58–80.
- Jiang, Junyan. 2018. "Making Bureaucracy Work: Patronage Networks, Performance Incentives, and Economic Development in China." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (4): 982–999.
- Jiang, Junyan, and Muyang Zhang. 2020. "Friends with Benefits: Patronage Networks and Distributive Politics in China." *Journal of Public Economics* 184: 104–1143.
- Kaczmarek, Katarzyna. 2019. "Academic Community and Policymaking in Russia." *Problems of Post-Communism* 66 (4): 240–252.
- Katz, Richard S. 1999. *Representation, the Locus of Democratic Legitimation and the Role of the National Parliaments in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kim, Nam Kyu, and Jun Koga Sudduth. 2021. "Political Institutions and Coups in Dictatorships." *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (9): 1597–1628.
- King, Gary, James Honaker, Anne Joseph, and Kenneth Scheve. 2001. "Analyzing Incomplete Political Science Data: An Alternative Algorithm for Multiple Imputation." *The American Political Science Review* 95: 49–69.
- Krol, Gerrit. 2020. "Parliamentary Initiative in Authoritarian Regimes: Power Sharing in Eurasian Legislatures." *Journal of Legislative Studies* 26 (2): 248–274.
- Li, Tao. 2020. "Declining Legislative Dissent in China: Evidence from National and Provincial Party Congress Elections." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 20 (2): 231–242.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth, and David M. Lampton. 1996. *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth, and Oksenberg, Michael. 1988. *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures, and Processes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Liu, Lawrence J., and Rachel E. Stern. 2020. "State-Adjacent Professionals: How Chinese Lawyers Participate in Political Life." *The China Quarterly* 247: 793–813.

- Lü, Xiaobo, and Pierre F. Landry. 2014. "Show Me the Money: Interjurisdiction Political Competition and Fiscal Extraction in China." *American Political Science Review* **108** (3): 706–722.
- Lü, Xiaobo, Mingxing Liu, and Feiyue Li. 2020. "Policy Coalition Building in an Authoritarian Legislature: Evidence From China's National Assemblies (1983–2007)." *Comparative Political Studies* **53** (9): 1380–1416.
- Lust-Okar, Ellen. 2006. "Elections under authoritarianism: Preliminary lessons from Jordan." *Democratization* **13** (3): 456–471.
- Ma, Xiao. 2016. "Term Limits and Authoritarian Power Sharing: Theory and Evidence from China." *Journal of East Asian Studies* **16**: 61–85.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Malesky, Edmund, Regina Abrami, and Yu Zheng. 2011. "Institutions and Inequality in Single-Party Regimes: A Comparative Analysis of Vietnam and China." *Comparative Politics* **43** (4): 401–419.
- Malesky, Edmund, and Paul Schulz. 2010. "Nodding or Needling: Analyzing Delegate Responsiveness in an Authoritarian Parliament." *American Political Science Review* **104** (3): 482–502.
- Manion, Melanie. 2014. "Authoritarian Parochialism: Local Congressional Representation in China." *The China Quarterly* **218**: 311–338.
- . 2015. *Information for Autocrats: Representation in Chinese Local Congresses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mattingly, Daniel C. 2019. *The Art of Political Control in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mayhew, David R. 2000. *America's Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison Through Newt Gingrich*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mertha, Andrew. 2009. "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0': Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process." *The China Quarterly* **200**: 995–1012.
- Noble, Ben. 2020. "Authoritarian Amendments: Legislative Institutions as Intraexecutive Constraints in Post-Soviet Russia." *Comparative Political Studies* **53** (9): 1417–1454.
- Ong, Elvin. 2015. "Complementary Institutions in Authoritarian Regimes: The Everyday Politics of Constituency Service in Singapore." *Journal of East Asian Studies* **15** (3): 361–390.
- Payne, Daniel P. 2010. "Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?" *Journal of Church & State* **52** (4): 712–727.
- Perry, Elizabeth. 2002. *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China*. London: Routledge.
- Reuter, Ora John, and Graeme B. Robertson. 2015. "Legislatures, Cooptation, and Social Protest in Contemporary Authoritarian Regimes." *The Journal of Politics* **77**: 235–248.
- Sagild, Rebekka Åsnes. 2019. "Informational Inclusion: Reflection Work in China's Local People's Political Consultative Conferences." *Journal of Chinese Governance* **4** (3): 252–266.
- Sagild, Rebekka Åsnes, and Anna L. Ahlers. 2019. "Working for Harmony and Innovation? Political Inclusion of Diversified Elites via the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference." FIW Working Paper, 10. University of Bonn, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11811/8469>.
- Salmond, Rob. 2006. "Proportional Representation and Female Parliamentarians." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* **31** (2): 175–204.
- Schulz, Paul. 2021. *United Front: Projecting Solidarity through Deliberation in Vietnam's Single-Party Legislature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Searing, Donald. 1993. *Westminster's World: Understanding Political Roles*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Simison, Emilia. 2020. "Supporters and Opposition in Authoritarian Legislatures." *Journal of Legislative Studies* **28**: 47–66.
- Slater, Dan. 2009. "Revolutions, Crackdowns, and Quiescence: Communal Elites and Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia." *American Journal of Sociology* **115**: 203–254.
- Sun, Xin, Jiangnan Zhu, and Yiping Wu. 2014. "Organizational Clientelism: An Analysis of Private Entrepreneurs in Chinese Local Legislatures." *Journal of East Asian Studies* **14**: 1–29.
- Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Szakonyi, David. 2017. "New Rules, New Members, Same Results? A Look at the New Russian Duma." *Kenan Cable*, Available at [www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ki\\_170515\\_cable\\_22.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ki_170515_cable_22.pdf).

- Tien, Hung-mao, and Tun-jen Cheng. 1997. "Crafting Democratic Institutions in Taiwan." *The China Journal* 37: 1–27.
- Truex, Rory. 2014. "The Returns to Office in a 'Rubber Stamp' Parliament." *American Political Science Review* 108 (2): 235–251.
- . 2016. *Making Autocracy Work: Representation and Responsiveness in Modern China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wängnerud, Lena. 2009. "Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 51–69.
- Wiebrecht, Felix. 2018. "Cultural Co-Orientation Revisited: The Case of the South China Morning Post." *Global Media and China* 3: 32–50.
- Williamson, Scott, and Beatriz Magaloni. 2020. "Legislatures and Policy Making in Authoritarian Regimes." *Comparative Political Studies* 53 (9): 1525–1543.
- Wu, Yipin. 2020. "Dynamics of Policy Change in Authoritarian Countries: A Multiple-Case Study on China." *Journal of Public Policy* 40 (2): 236–258.
- Xia, Ming. 2008. *The People's Congresses and Governance in China: Toward a network mode of governance*. London: Routledge.
- Yan, Xiaojun. 2011. "Regime Inclusion and the Resilience of Authoritarianism: The Local People's Political Consultative Conference in Post-Mao Chinese Politics." *The China Journal* 66: 53–75.
- Zhu, Xufeng. 2014. "Mandate Versus Championship: Vertical Government Intervention and Diffusion of Innovation in Public Services in Authoritarian China." *Public Management Review* 16: 117–139.
- . 2016. "In the Name of 'Citizens': Civic Activism and Policy Entrepreneurship of Chinese Public Intellectuals in the Hu–Wen Era." *The Journal of Contemporary China* 25 (101): 745–759.

**Felix Wiebrecht** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg. He received his PhD from The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on authoritarian legislatures and elite politics, both globally and sometimes specifically in China. His work has appeared in *Democratization* and *Policy & Politics*.